PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 511

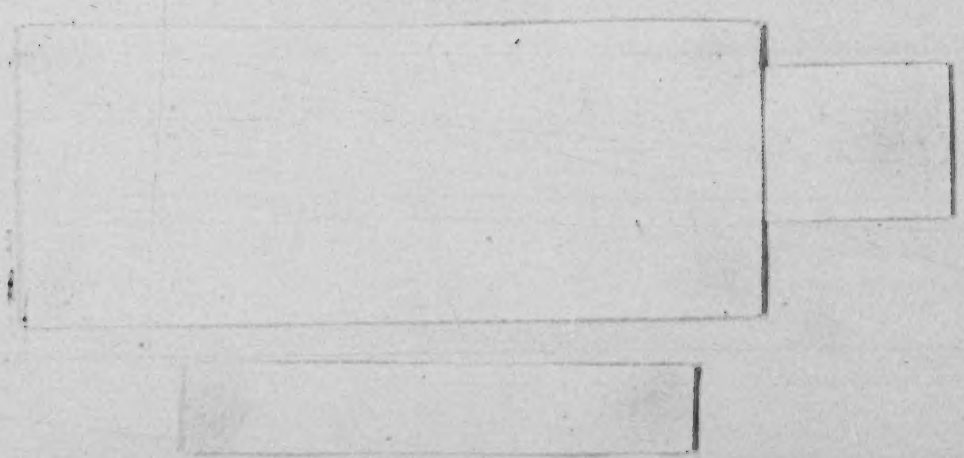
HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2010–2011

COMPRISING PERIOD
7 June 2010—17 June 2010



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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 18 MAY 2010]

FIFTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 511**

SECOND VOLUME OF SESSION 2010-2011

House of Commons

Monday 7 June 2010

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Member Sworn

The following Member took and subscribed the Oath required by law:

Right honourable Stephen Creswell Timms, *for* East Ham

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

The Secretary of State was asked—

Science and Maths Graduates (Teaching)

1. **Tony Baldry** (Banbury) (Con): What plans his Department has to attract more top science and mathematics graduates to be teachers. [000801]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Tim Loughton): There is clearly a problem with a shortage of specialist teachers, as only 47% of mathematics teachers and 58% of combined science teachers have first degrees in the subjects that they teach. We need to do more to encourage pupils to study sciences and maths, and encourage graduates to enter teaching in those subjects. Therefore, we are actively reviewing the routes into teaching and bursaries, along with other incentives offered to well qualified people who want to teach science and maths.

Tony Baldry: It is very good to see my hon. Friend at the Government Dispatch Box. Will he ensure that schools have sufficient powers and funds to offer generous retention bonuses to teachers of shortage subjects, and that schools with retention problems are fully aware of such powers?

Tim Loughton: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments; it has been a long time coming. We are certainly considering how schools can be further encouraged to use the existing recruitment and retention pay flexibilities which are available to address local teacher shortages in maths and other priority subjects. Head teachers already have some scope to do that, but we plan to reform the existing, rigid national pay and conditions so that schools have greater freedoms to attract top science and maths graduates, along with others as they see fit, to be teachers. Such academy-style freedoms are being debated in other place as part of the Academies Bill.

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): On behalf of the whole House, let me welcome my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr Timms) back to his rightful place.

May I warmly welcome the hon. Gentleman to his position as Under-Secretary of State? If he keeps his nose clean and pulls his socks up, he might become a Minister of State, although I think he will have to become a Liberal Democrat for that to happen. May I also welcome the rest of the ministerial team to their posts and wish them all the very best with their responsibilities?

We agree with motivating and encouraging more graduates of science and maths into teaching. On the basis of that encouraging and motivational language, will the hon. Gentleman comment on the remarks made by the Minister for Schools, who is reported to have said:

"I would rather have a physics graduate from Oxbridge without a PGCE teaching in a school than a physics graduate from one of the rubbish universities with a PGCE"?

Would the Under-Secretary like to apologise on behalf of his hon. Friend, or at least provide the House with a list of "rubbish universities", so that graduates from those institutions need not apply for teaching posts under this new Government?

Tim Loughton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his opening comments. I will certainly keep my nose clean and pull my socks up, if that is what he thinks is required. I know the job of opposition too well: the job of opposition is to scrabble around to make trivia newsworthy, and I congratulate him, on his debut on the Opposition Benches, on doing that. I am not going to comment on that trivia, but let me be clear when I say that we have many very talented teachers in schools today. We intend to build on that and ensure that organisations outside the reach of government, such as Teach First, are given the opportunity to expand and that we support them in doing so. I am sure we can all agree that we have great universities in this country. This Government are committed to supporting those universities, as we recognise the importance of all universities, courses and degrees, which, through their rigour, increase the intellectual capability of the nation and its skills base.

Autonomy for Schools

2. **Dr John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): If he will publish each representation his Department has received from (a) head teachers and (b) associations representing head teachers in favour of greater autonomy for schools. [000802]

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove): My Department has received more than 1,100 expressions of interest from schools in relation to my offer to open up the academies programme to all primary, secondary and special schools.

Dr Pugh: I am grateful for that brief answer, but perhaps the Secretary of State will acknowledge, in these days of evidence-led policy, that there is limited evidence of schools demanding freedom from local authorities, as opposed to freedom from central Government tinkering. Also, the majority of schools targeted to become the new academies became "outstanding" schools within the local authority family. Finally, it is rather hard to become better than outstanding.

Michael Gove: Evidence shows that academy freedoms have a key role to play in driving up standards, and that academy schools have improved their academic results at twice the rate of other schools as a result of using those freedoms. Moreover, the specific freedoms that an overwhelming number of head teachers wish to acquire will be used not only to improve the education of children in those schools, but to help other schools which desperately need freedom from local and central bureaucracy in order to drive up standards for all.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I believe that the principle of autonomy will be supported in schools throughout the country, but how would the Secretary of State balance it with the need for fairness in terms of funding and admissions? In particular, what role does he see for local authorities under the new regime?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman was a distinguished Minister for School Standards in the last Government. He will know that academies will have to abide by the admissions code, and that admissions will therefore be fair. He will also know that academies will not enjoy preferential funding, and that we are absolutely committed to ensuring that local authorities continue to play a strong strategic role. I was delighted to be able to write to the Local Government Association to affirm my commitment to working with it in order to achieve that.

Angie Bray (Ealing Central and Acton) (Con): I am sure the Secretary of State will know that there are some excellent schools in my constituency, but there is also a fast-growing need for more school places at both primary and secondary level. Does he agree that Toby Young's excellent and well documented campaign for a new free academy school in Acton deserves the fullest support at all levels?

Michael Gove: Thanks to my hon. Friend's impassioned advocacy, I have been able to visit some of the superb schools in Ealing, and I know that they are currently led by a wonderful team of head teachers. I also know, however, that throughout west and south London there are increasing pressures on pupil numbers, and I therefore welcome expressions of interest from everyone who is dedicated to improving state education and creating new comprehensive school provision.

The gentleman whom my hon. Friend mentioned, Mr Toby Young, is one of the most fluent advocates of opening up the supply of state education. I note that the right hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls) said that he welcomed Mr Young's proposal, and that he hoped to be present to open the school in due course. I hope to join him then.

Building Schools for the Future

3. **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): What plans he has for the Building Schools for the Future programme. [000803]

5. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with local authorities on plans for the Building Schools for the Future programme. [000805]

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove): My Department is currently reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that we can build schools more effectively and more cost-efficiently in the future.

Bill Esterson: Cancelling Building Schools for the Future would hit two schools in my constituency, Crosby and Chesterfield high schools. Does the Secretary of State agree that it would also damage the recovery by taking much-needed work away from construction workers and small businesses?

Michael Gove: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the House.

I intend to ensure that we prioritise capital spending to ensure that in areas of real need, the taxpayer and teachers are given better value for money. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that under the last Government a significant amount of the cash that was devoted to Building Schools for the Future was spent on consultancy and other costs, which did not contribute directly to raising standards or to employing a single builder or plasterer, or anyone else whom he would no doubt wish to continue to see employed. I therefore hope that he will work with me to ensure that, in Sefton and elsewhere, we do everything possible to ensure that we obtain better value for money from this programme.

Alex Cunningham: The Secretary of State must be aware of the considerable anxiety in communities about the fact that their new secondary school programme remains very much in doubt. Some £5 million has been invested by Stockton borough council and partners, and they are hurtling towards appointing a preferred bidder. Will the Secretary of State please assure the people of my constituency, who have not had a new secondary school for 40 years, that children in our area can still look forward to their new and redeveloped schools?

Michael Gove: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and welcome him to his place.

I know that in Stockton there are real areas of need and deprivation, and I know that the hon. Gentleman will raise his voice on their behalf. I also know that Stockton has reached the outline business case stage of the Building Schools for the Future programme, and that a significant amount has been invested—more, perhaps, than needed to be invested, because of the additional bureaucracy. I intend to ensure in future that the costs faced either by Stockton or by any other local authority are reduced to the absolute minimum, so that we can prioritise front-line funding.

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): Is the Secretary of State aware that Building Schools for the Future did not provide properly for schools that perform well but have buildings in a disgraceful state, such as the Duchess's community high school in Alnwick, and can he offer any hope to schools in that position, whose record of good results impairs their ability to get buildings they desperately need?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point. The aim of Building Schools for the Future was to ensure that funding is prioritised for areas of need, and understandably so, but it is also the case that Building Schools for the Future amounts to less than half the total available schools capital, and there are funds available to repair schools such as the Duchess's high school in Alnwick, which I and the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr Gibb), have visited, and which, having visited, I know are in need of repair. I will look sympathetically on the case my right hon. Friend makes, and I hope that I or one of my ministerial colleagues will have a chance to visit Alnwick soon to see for ourselves how the school is coping.

Ed Balls (Morley and Outwood) (Lab/Co-op): I wrote to the Secretary of State last night to request that, two weeks on from the Treasury announcement, he give this House details of the £670 million of departmental cuts and the £1.2 billion of local government cuts he has announced. Twenty minutes before questions, I received an answer. That answer gives no reassurance at all to the hundreds of schools whose new building plans appear to be in limbo—and I must say that this is no way to make announcements to the House of Commons. In that letter, the right hon. Gentleman does confirm that he is cutting free school meals in primary schools, one-to-one tuition and the gifted and talented programme, but there are no details at all of how cuts to local government budgets will affect children's services, including services for looked-after children and disabled children, youth clubs and action to reduce teenage pregnancy. Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm whether he was advised that by agreeing to smaller central Government savings than his Department's equal share, he has knowingly shifted the burden to bigger and more damaging cuts for essential children's services financed by local governments: yes or no?

Michael Gove: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for avoiding the Labour leadership hustings in Southport and instead making his presence felt here today. I am afraid, however, that the points he made were, perhaps unintentionally, at variance with the facts. We are not stopping anyone who currently receives free school meals receiving free school meals. We are ensuring that funding is in place to cover the areas he mentioned. What we are specifically doing is cutting £359 million from a variety of budget areas that, in our judgment, are not priority and front-line areas. Details are in the letter I sent to the right hon. Gentleman, a copy of which will be available in the Library. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we are not cutting front-line spending on schools, but before the general election he promised to cut 3,000 head teachers or deputy head teachers. Not a single front-line job is lost as a result of the economies the current Government have made. That is the difference between us.

Ed Balls: I showed the House the courtesy of coming to questions rather than going to a GMB conference, and I think the right hon. Gentleman should have shown the House the courtesy of making his cuts announcement in a written ministerial statement or oral statement to this House, in which he made it clear that children across the country in the pilot areas will be losing the free school meals that we announced some weeks ago.

Let me ask the right hon. Gentleman a second question, however, as we got no answer to the first. Last Wednesday, the Prime Minister told the House that the pupil premium will be additional to the education budget. In the formal post-election coalition talks, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws) and Chief Secretary told me that the Conservative party had promised the Liberal Democrats that the pupil premium would be on top of our announced spending plans not for one year but for three years, yet the Secretary of State told the House last week that his budget was protected for only one year. Who is telling the truth on education spending: the Secretary of State or the Chief Secretary to the Treasury?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for revealing what went on in those coalition talks between himself and the Liberal Democrats. Those

talks were clearly a roaring success, and I am surprised that his recollection is so perfect in that area when it is hazy in so many others. Let me reassure him that funding for the pupil premium—so effectively championed by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws), and so effectively carried forward by the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Brent Central (Sarah Teather)—will come from outside existing education spending. As the Prime Minister pointed out at Prime Minister's questions last week, we have not cut front-line spending, but the right hon. Gentleman would have. That is the difference between the Government and the Opposition.

Building Schools for the Future (Nottinghamshire)

4. **Mr Mark Spencer** (Sherwood) (Con): What plans he has for the Building Schools for the Future programme in Nottinghamshire; and if he will make a statement. [000804]

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove): This Department is reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that when we build schools for the future, we do so in a more cost-effective and efficient fashion.

Mr Spencer: Will the Secretary of State take the opportunity at some point to visit Sherwood? There are two schools specifically affected by this programme: Dukeries college in Ollerton, and Joseph Whitaker college in Rainworth. Is the Secretary of State aware that Nottinghamshire county council has spent £5 million on this scheme without a single brick being laid? What we really want is an indication of the time scale, so those schools can make plans for their future.

Michael Gove: I thank my hon. Friend for his question; if he continues asking great questions like that, he will very shortly be my right hon. Friend. I do sympathise with him—both Dukeries college and Joseph Whitaker college do a fantastic job for the young people in their care, and they are very fortunate to have him as an impassioned champion on their behalf. I am actively reviewing how we can ensure that the maximum amount of money goes to schools, and as he rightly points out, it is quite wrong that local authorities should have to spend so much money on bureaucracy before a single brick is laid or a single contractor is engaged. It is quite wrong that a bureaucratic system put in place under the previous Government should prevent money from going where it deserves to go—to the front line, so that all our children can be better educated.

Christopher Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): There is a lot of concern in Nottingham about the right hon. Gentleman's "review" of Building Schools for the Future. Can he get rid of some of that uncertainty by saying specifically by what date that review will be over, particularly of wave 5? Will it be in the next week, in two weeks, in three weeks—can he give us a date?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman is of course a former Minister, and talking of dates, I would love to have a date with him so that we can discuss exactly how poorly Nottinghamshire was being treated by the last Government, and the fact that Nottinghamshire has just reached its outline business case—[Hon. Members: "When?"] I hope to have the opportunity very soon to explain to the hon. Gentleman and others exactly when the review I am conducting is being concluded.

Academies

6. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What progress has been made on the academies programme in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [000806]

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb): There are currently 203 academies open in 83 local authorities. More academies will open in September, with numbers continuing to grow each year now that the programme has been opened up to all schools. For the academies with results in 2008 and 2009, the increase in the proportion of pupils achieving at least five A* to C GCSEs including English and maths is 5 percentage points, an increase on last year's academy improvement rate of 4.3 percentage points, which is double the national average.

Bob Blackman: Progress in opening academies under the last Government was extremely slow. Some 1,100 schools have applied for freedom from local authority interference, and freedom to set their own standards to ensure they demonstrate the highest possible quality. What comfort can the Minister give to ensure that those applications will all be honoured, and that those schools will not be dissatisfied?

Mr Gibb: I hope I can give my hon. Friend the comfort he seeks. Of the 1,100 schools that have applied, 626 are outstanding and we have said that we will provide them with a fast-tracking process. That should give him the comfort he seeks.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): May I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his post and wish him well in it? He shadowed me on a number of occasions, and now I am shadowing him. However, is not the excellent progress made by academies in the past 12 months the result of the involvement in their development of parents and teachers and, as the hon. Member for Southport (Dr Pugh) said, of local authorities? Is placing such power in the hands of the Secretary of State not therefore a huge step backwards and a hugely centralising measure? Why are local decision making on the development of academies, parent power and devolution being replaced by centralisation and the exclusion of parents, local authorities and teachers from that process?

Mr Gibb: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind words; it is nice to be on the Government side of the House, instead of on the other side. However, this is not a centralising but a decentralising measure, beyond the local authority and down to the school level. This is about trusting professionals and having faith in the autonomy of schools. Our advice to schools is that it is important for them to discuss with parents and pupils their intention to convert. Existing legislation for setting up academies does not require such consultation with parents, so even when the hon. Gentleman was the Minister for Schools, there was no requirement for academies to consult parents.

Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): I warmly welcome all the Ministers to their posts. May I ask a question both as a Member of Parliament and as the chair of governors of a Church of England primary school? Could the follow-up to the Secretary of State's letter to outstanding schools such as ours include a letter to the chair of governors setting out the advantages and disadvantages of academy status to schools, and the advantages and disadvantages, if any, to local authorities and to diocesan boards of education?

Mr Gibb: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. Of course the advantages of academy status are very clear: this is about trusting professionals to run their schools without interference from politicians and bureaucrats, either locally or nationally. I am sure that all the people he refers to will be aware of that. In the last set that we have seen—that of 2009—the results of a third of all academies showed an increase of more than 15 percentage points compared with those of the schools they replaced, so the advantages of academy status are very clear.

Special Educational Needs

7. **Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he plans to take to support children with special educational needs. [000807]

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Sarah Teather): We will reform the schools system so that children with special educational needs and disabilities get the best possible support. We will improve diagnostic assessment for schoolchildren, prevent the unnecessary closure of special schools and remove the bias towards inclusion to give parents more choice.

Stella Creasy: Given that one in five children in this country has identified special educational needs, what measures will the new Government take to ensure that they are able to access the same level of funding and services for the provision of their teaching that they enjoyed under the previous Administration? How will any such measure fit into the new free school model that the Government propose, given the role currently played by local authorities in providing those services?

Sarah Teather: Nothing has actually changed in the relationship between local authorities, academies and free schools with regard to special educational needs. Schools will continue to get the funding that they need, and local authorities will continue to have a very important co-ordinating role. We will work very closely with the Local Government Association to ensure that these proposals are implemented in a way that ensures that schools get the funding they need.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): The copy of the coalition agreement, which enjoys pride of place on my bedside table, does indeed say exactly what the Minister said in her reply about ending the bias towards inclusion and preventing the unnecessary closure of special schools. Will she explain to the House in a little more detail how the Government propose to fulfil those praiseworthy pledges?

Sarah Teather: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks about the pride of place in which the coalition document is held, but I suggest that he should get better material to read before he goes to bed. [Hon. Members: "Ooh!"] It is a very good read, but it is not necessarily the most riveting. A number of important reviews have taken place in this area, for example, the Lamb and Balchin reviews. Ofsted is also about to produce a review of special educational needs, and I shall take great note of all those as we consider the way forward.

Diana R. Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I welcome the hon. Lady to her new position, wish her well and compliment her on wearing her new team's colours today.

Mr Speaker, you will recall that earlier this year, at Clarence house and in the presence of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, the Labour Government announced the provision of £500,000 towards the establishment of a stammering centre in the north of England to complement the excellent work of the Michael Palin centre in London. Will the hon. Lady reassure the House that the money for this important work for children with speech and language difficulties in the north of England will still be provided—yes or no?

Sarah Teather: I thank the hon. Lady for her remarks; I must tell her that my dress is just in fashion. I will have to look into the detail of her question and write to her, if that is okay.

Academies

8. **Amber Rudd** (Hastings and Rye) (Con): What assessment he has made of the prospects for progress on the academies programme; and if he will make a statement. [000808]

11. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of progress on the academies programme; and if he will make a statement. [000811]

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove): There are currently 203 academies open in 83 local authorities. Academies with results in 2008 and 2009 showed an increase in the proportion of pupils achieving at least five A to C GCSEs, including English and maths, at 5 percentage points—an increase on last year's academy improvement rate of 4.3 percentage points. That was, of course, double the national increase. Interest from schools in joining the academies programme has been excellent: as I mentioned earlier, more than 1,100 schools have already registered interest with my Department.

Amber Rudd: I know that the Secretary of State is aware that in Hastings we have two new academies scheduled for next year. We are very pleased to have two very important sponsors—Brighton university and BT. May I ask what plans he has, and what steps can be taken, to encourage a high quality of sponsors to participate in the academies?

Michael Gove: I thank my hon. Friend for her impassioned advocacy for improving educational opportunities for children in her constituency. I had a

chance to see just how dedicated she is to supporting them when I visited her constituency during the general election campaign.

Those who wish to sponsor academies have repeatedly said to me, in opposition and in government, that the bureaucratic burdens laid on them by the previous Government acted as an impediment to their doing the work they wanted to do to help children in disadvantaged areas. The Independent Academies Association, under Mike Butler, wrote to a Minister of State in the previous Government and pointed out that the work he was trying to do to help disadvantaged children was directly impeded by the bureaucratic burden imposed on him by the then Secretary of State. I am confident that an increasing number of sponsors, philanthropists, charities and others who want to help our poorest children will find that the changes we are bringing about enable them to do a fantastic job, not just in Hastings but across the country.

John Howell: I congratulate the Secretary of State on his plans to revitalise the academies scheme. A great number of schools are looking forward to embracing the academies freedoms that will come with it, including the European school in Culham in my constituency, which is seeking to use its specialist multi-language curriculum for the benefit of the state sector. What plans does he have to make sure that more children have such excellent language education?

Michael Gove: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for those words. I am also much in accord with him in believing that this Government should have a place at the heart of Europe. That is why I was so disappointed to read in *The Observer* yesterday that the right hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls) wanted to rewrite the treaty of Lisbon and the treaty of Rome.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let me just say to the Secretary of State that I know he is enjoying himself, and I am delighted to see him enjoying himself, but he must not enjoy himself at the expense of people lower down the Order Paper who want to get in and whom I want to accommodate.

Michael Gove: I will do everything possible to ensure that other schools, like the European school, that are committed to increasing our understanding of the rest of the world, prosper.

Hazel Blears (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): I know that the Secretary of State will want to be known as a Minister who keeps his word and who is consistent in his policy. Will he therefore confirm that the brand new academy linked to MediaCity in Salford, which is included in the £135 million Building Schools for the Future programme, will go ahead? Those programmes have got to financial close, and if he were not to proceed with that world-class academy it would give the lie to his party's commitment to progress on the whole of the academies programme across the country.

Michael Gove: It is a pleasure to see the right hon. Lady in her place. If that programme has reached financial close, then I look forward to being able to visit it in due course with her.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Under the Academies Bill, the sole arbiter of applications for academies is the governing body. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the wider community has an interest in this matter? Not only the governing body should be included, but parents, local authorities and the wider community so that it understands the needs of the many and not just the few.

Michael Gove: It is because I am committed to the needs of the many and not just the few that I want to see this programme, which has done so much to raise attainment for disadvantaged children, move forward. I would like to see governors and head teachers working with other schools and other groups within the community to drive up attainment. That is why those who currently lead our schools will, I know, have those conversations. I prefer to give them the freedom to do so rather than to patronise and to busybody by insisting that they do so.

Mr Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): May I ask the Secretary of State whether the academies programme will continue to provide an alternative route to accessing funds for new school buildings? I am thinking in particular of Withernsea high school in my constituency. I wonder whether he or the Minister with responsibility for schools might be able to visit Withernsea, see the school and see how it might benefit from joining the academies programme in future.

Michael Gove: It is always a pleasure to visit my hon. Friend's constituency and my ministerial colleague or I will look forward to doing so in due course.

Primary School Places

9. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): How much funding he plans to allocate to (a) Slough borough council and (b) other local authorities where there are insufficient primary school places in order to increase the number of such places available in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement. [000809]

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb): School capital allocations announced in 2007 for the current spending period include £1.5 billion for new pupil places. Additionally, around £1.9 billion is allocated for primary school modernisation, some of which will fund new places. The capital support for Slough and its schools this year is some £25 million, including nearly £9 million specifically for new primary school places.

Fiona Mactaggart: I am glad to hear that that £9 million is confirmed. It was given by the previous Government to increase the number of our primary places. We still have 60 reception and year 1 children who do not have places for next year and those funds are essential to provide them, but a note from the Library advised me that £32 million of Slough's external finance, which includes a number of grants in relation to education, is at risk. As we have not had a detailed breakdown of what funds to local authorities have been protected by the Government, can the Minister assure me that £1 in £6 going from the Government to Slough borough council will not be cut by the coalition Government?

Mr Gibb: Despite the fact that the Government inherited a public finance deficit of £156 billion, we have been able to say that there will be no cuts in front-line funding for schools, Sure Start or 16-to-19 funding.

Academies

10. **Mr Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the level of participation by primary schools in the academies programme; and if he will make a statement. [000810]

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb): There are currently 23 all-age academies open that include primary provision. The Academies Bill will also open up the academies programme allowing all primary schools to apply to become academies in their own right. There has been a very high level of interest from schools with more than 250 outstanding primary schools already registering with the Department. We expect the first of those schools with an "outstanding" rating from Ofsted to open as academies from September 2010.

Mr Turner: The Minister may recall that in the early years of grant-maintained status, secondary schools were able to opt out, but primary schools had to wait, although subsequently they found that the operation was relatively easy. Will he ensure that, this time, primary schools have the opportunity as quickly as other schools?

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend will be pleased to see in the Academies Bill, which is receiving its Second Reading in another place, that primaries will be able to apply for academy status. Indeed, the 250 outstanding primaries that have registered an interest with the Department will be fast-tracked to that status by, I hope, this September.

School Building

12. **Tony Lloyd** (Manchester Central) (Lab): What his Department's priorities will be in allocating funding for new school building. [000812]

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove): I am currently reviewing the methods by which capital has been allocated to schools, to ensure that we can build schools more effectively and cost-efficiently in the future.

Tony Lloyd: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. During the period of the last Labour Government, many roofs were repaired—when the sun was shining. Can he give an absolute guarantee that schools in a constituency such as mine, which were not part of that programme but still need some catching up, will be rebuilt or properly maintained?

Michael Gove: I know that the hon. Gentleman has a number of great schools in his constituency that have benefited from investment, not least Manchester academy, which is achieving outstanding results. Manchester is approaching the conclusion of its final business case for specific funding under the Building Schools for the Future programme. I want to make sure that before we go any further we strip out any bureaucratic costs with which either Manchester's council tax payers or Manchester's teachers might be saddled to ensure that we get the maximum amount of spending to the front line.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): May I thank my right hon. Friend for his commitment in general to driving up education standards across the country and in particular for his commitment, I hope, to the new academy to be formed by the merger of Central Technology college and Bishops' college in my constituency of Gloucester? As he knows the timing insisted on by his predecessor on the other side of the House was incredibly tight and caused the academy to be formed in late July and to open next term. Parents, staff and pupils are all desperate for further information on progress that I understand depends on my right hon. Friend's Department's confirming absolutely that the academy is going ahead. Could he confirm that his Department will help with announcements—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Michael Gove: I know how keen my hon. Friend is to make progress, as am I, so I shall be giving him an answer very shortly.

Mr Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry North West) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm as soon as possible that two schools in my constituency—President Kennedy and Woodlands, where the buildings go right back to the late 1960s and early 1970s and one of whose buildings is being held up on all four sides by scaffolding—will figure in the programme, and when can he confirm that to them?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that funding under the Building Schools for the Future programme had been allocated on the basis of deprivation, not the state or dilapidation of the building. I will consider the two schools that he mentions and write to him.

Pupil Premium

14. **Mr Rob Wilson** (Reading East) (Con): What plans he has for the operation of the pupil premium. [000814]

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Sarah Teather): The introduction of a pupil premium will target extra funding specifically at deprived pupils to enable them to receive the support that they need to reach their potential. By targeting the funding via a pupil premium, extra funds to support disadvantaged children will be clearly identifiable. We will publish our proposals, with details on how we plan to distribute the pupil premium, in due course.

Mr Wilson: I thank the hon. Lady for that answer and wish her well in her new role. My constituency, Reading East, like those of many hon. Members, has deep pockets of deprivation. Will she therefore confirm today that all disadvantaged children will receive a fair share of funding from the pupil premium, wherever they happen to go to school?

Sarah Teather: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I am aware that he has taken an interest in the pupil premium over a long period. It is an issue that I championed from the Opposition Benches, so I feel passionately about this policy and the opportunity to change young people's lives. It seems a sad indictment of the society in which we live that parental income remains the best predictor of educational attainment. The hon. Gentleman's point about pockets of deprivation is precisely the reason why the pupil premium represents an opportunity to change young people's lives. At the moment, the system for distributing deprivation funding often does not get to the front line, particularly where pockets of deprivation are surrounded by an otherwise relatively wealthy area.

Ed Balls (Morley and Outwood) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Lady and her Liberal Democrat colleagues are clear that the pupil premium must mean rising education spending for the next three years. I confirm to the Secretary of State and the House that the old Chief Secretary and the new Chief Secretary made a commitment to me, Lord Mandelson and Lord Adonis in the coalition talks that there would be additional money, on top of rising spending this year, next year and the year after—a commitment that the Secretary of State could not make today. Does the hon. Lady agree—I will not quote her this time; I will quote the Deputy Prime Minister—that

"without money, that commitment will continue to be meaningless—more spin without substance which will yet again leave thousands of children short-changed."?

Are the Liberal Democrats being short-changed by their Conservative colleagues?

Sarah Teather: The Prime Minister made it clear from the Dispatch Box last week that the pupil premium would involve substantial extra money from outside the education budget. Perhaps I should remind the right hon. Gentleman that one of the sticking points during the coalition talks with the Labour party was that it would not agree to the pupil premium.

Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con): Could the Secretary of State please confirm that the pupil premium will still include an upward adjustment for the children of military families—a matter of utmost importance for thousands of schoolchildren in my constituency, Devizes?

Sarah Teather: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. She makes a very good point, which we are considering at the moment. We will announce further details of our policy on the pupil premium in due course.

Building Schools for the Future

15. **Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with local authorities on the Building Schools for the Future programme. [000815]

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove): As I mentioned earlier, we are currently reviewing the methods by which capital has been allocated.

Heidi Alexander: I thank the Secretary of State for his answers on the BSF programme, but I am afraid that I am still not clear on the detail. As a former director of Lewisham's local education partnership, I should be grateful to him if he confirmed whether the funding commitments that underpin the strategic partnering agreements between local authorities and their private sector partners will be honoured. Lewisham council would be grateful for any reassurance that he could provide.

Michael Gove: I congratulate the hon. Lady on her election, and she is fortunate to have many excellent schools in her constituency, including Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham, which I have had the great pleasure of visiting. Lewisham was one of the first local authorities to enter Building Schools for the Future. A number of schools have been built already under BSF, and because Lewisham is so far advanced, I cannot conceive of any changes to the BSF programme that would be likely to impact on the many projects that she will have shepherded towards a close.

Children's and Youth Services

16. **Julie Hilling** (Bolton West) (Lab): Which grants to local authorities for children's services and youth services will continue to be ring-fenced. [000816]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Tim Loughton): The Department for Communities and Local Government will be writing to local authorities with their revised grant allocations and details of the removal of ring-fences very shortly, including those affecting grants from the Department for Education.

The removal of those ring-fences will give local authorities greater flexibility to reshape their budgets and find the necessary savings that we expect them to make, while maintaining the quality of services to children and young people, which remain a priority of this Department.

Julie Hilling: Does the Minister agree that involving young people in determining youth service projects and the detail of spending on those projects is a good thing? Will he confirm that local authorities are to receive their full funding for this year's youth opportunity fund and youth capital fund?

Tim Loughton: On the first point, I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady that young people's involvement in, engagement with and ownership of youth services is vital, which is why, whenever I visit youth projects, I make a point of speaking to young people and asking them how they are involved in the project, and of promoting such things as youth mayors. In a neighbouring constituency to hers, the Bolton lads and girls club—a most fantastic facility that I have visited twice, and which the Prime Minister has visited as well—serves her constituents and does a fantastic job of engaging young people. I fully support that. It is just the sort of youth facility that we want to see more of.

School Discipline

17. **Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve standards of discipline in schools; and if he will make a statement. [000817]

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb): We will improve standards of discipline in schools by giving heads and teachers the powers they need to deal with violent incidents and remove disruptive pupils or items from the classroom. We will introduce no-notice detentions so that poor behaviour can be dealt with immediately, give teachers wider powers of search and clarify their powers to use force. We will stop heads being overruled on exclusions and will reinforce schools' powers to maintain good standards of behaviour through stronger home-school behaviour contracts.

Mr Baron: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. About 70% of all allegations of physical assault and sexual assault are never proven, yet the figures released clearly show that, despite those accused being exonerated, the records are kept on file and they come up on Criminal Records Bureau checks. What are the Government going to do about that?

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend raises a good point. False accusations against teachers can have a devastating effect on the careers of those teachers. We intend to introduce anonymity for such teachers and will announce more details of that in due course.

Topical Questions

T1. [000826] **Elizabeth Truss** (South West Norfolk) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove): I thank my hon. Friend for her question. I have today placed a letter in the House of Commons Library detailing how the £670 million of spending reductions in my Department will be implemented. There will be reductions of £359 million in a variety of programmes, including the ending of "Who Do We Think We Are?" week, which started under my predecessor. Given his article in *The Observer* yesterday, in which he sought to win his party's leadership by outflanking the leader of the Conservative party on both immigration and Euroscepticism—something not done since Enoch Powell was a Member of the House—I hope that those cuts will be of interest to the House.

I am also today lifting restrictions that have stopped state schools offering the international general certificate of secondary education qualification in key subjects. That means that, from September, state-funded schools will be free to teach a wide range of those respected and valued qualifications, putting them, at last, on a level playing field with independent schools.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry to tell the Secretary of State that his answer was too long, but I know that he will not repeat it at Question Time next month.

Elizabeth Truss: I congratulate the Secretary of State on starting his spending cuts with abolishing the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, which I believe is partly responsible for undermining academic standards in science and maths A-levels and GCSEs. What does he plan to put in its place to ensure that pupils are properly prepared for university and for work?

Michael Gove: I know how committed my hon. Friend is to raising standards in schools. The right hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls) will be aware that Ofqual recently pointed out that some of the changes to the science curriculum had downgraded the importance of rigour, and the right hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend will be aware that the Royal Society of Chemistry said that recent changes to the science curriculum had been a catastrophe. We will make sure that the finest minds in the country of all parties are invited to join us in reshaping the curriculum.

T4. [000829] **Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): The ContactPoint database that was championed by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Barnardo's is to be scrapped. What assessment has been made of the impact that the removal will have on safeguarding children?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Tim Loughton): I congratulate the hon. Lady on her election. Very soon she will hear further details of the demise of ContactPoint, which was not championed by a great many professionals at the front end, who knew that the bureaucracy added to safeguarding over recent years has contributed to some of the dangers to our children, so we would like to replace it with a much better system. She will hear more details shortly.

T2. [000827] **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the Secretary of State agree that whether or not Building Schools for the Future continues in its present form, schools such as Carshalton Girls, Carshalton Boys and Wandle Valley will still need substantial investment—about £70 million—to help them improve buildings and deal with demographic pressures?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I know that in parts of south London, including those that he represents, demographic pressures are a real concern. One of the reasons that we are reviewing the allocation of school capital is to ensure that every pupil who needs it gets a school place. That was not true under the previous Government.

T8. [000833] **Lisa Nandy** (Wigan) (Lab): I am sure the Secretary of State will know of the considerable success that we have had in my constituency, Wigan, in creating apprenticeships, jobs and university places for young people. Can he tell us what measures he will introduce to help young people who are not in education, employment or training?

Michael Gove: We will increase the number of apprenticeships. I am pleased to see that the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), who has responsibility for apprenticeships, is in his place. We will increase the number of apprenticeships by reallocating funding that is currently going on the Train to Gain programme, and we are increasing spending for further education colleges, which—given what happened to the Learning and Skills Council under the previous Government, when building projects were cancelled halfway through and young people who deserved to be in education and training were denied training places—will at last ensure that we give young people the chance that they deserve.

T3. [000828] **Amber Rudd** (Hastings and Rye) (Con): I have received a number of inquiries, as I am sure other Members have, from teachers who would like to get involved in starting up free schools but are concerned about confidentiality issues. Can my right hon. Friend advise where they should go to find out more about how to go about setting up free schools without revealing too much about their personal details?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for asking that question. She will be aware, as I am sure are Members on the Opposition Benches, that some of the finest schools in the world, such as the Knowledge Is Power Program schools in America, were set up by teachers, and those teachers would not have been able to set up schools anything like as good under the regime that prevailed under the previous Government. I recommend that anyone my hon. Friend knows who wants to get involved in improving state education contact the New Schools Network, a not-for-profit charity organisation dedicated to improving state schools.

T9. [000834] **Grahame M. Morris** (Easington) (Lab): What provisions will the Secretary of State make in the Academies Bill to safeguard the interests of parents of children with special educational needs or hard to place and other children with specific and complex needs, such as the children currently supported by EDPIP, the East Durham positive inclusion partnership in Easington in my constituency?

Michael Gove: The interests of all children with special educational needs, particularly those who have the most acute disabilities, are at the heart of my thoughts and those of my ministerial colleagues. That is why we are reviewing the whole provision of special needs education, so that we can ensure that whether children are in academies, voluntary aided schools or other local authority schools, they have the highest possible level of support and nurture so that they can achieve everything possible.

T5. [000830] **Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): The Secretary of State will know that there are some excellent schools in Stroud. He has visited one of them, Amberley school. What provision, guidance or support will there be for schools that want to become academies which are not so good and are struggling, but see a future for themselves as academies?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend has been a fantastic champion of both schools and further education. We will make sure that schools that are in real difficulty are teamed with an education sponsor with a track record of excellence in order to improve circumstances. We will ensure that schools that aspire to become academies but are not yet in a strong enough position are teamed with people who can help them achieve their ambitions for all their children.

T10. [000835] **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): The safeguarding of our children and young people, which is of paramount importance, has received an unprecedented profile in recent times—but for the wrong reasons. What are the Secretary of State's plans for supporting local authorities and social workers in that crucial work, and for ensuring that all our children and young people are protected?

Tim Loughton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that very important subject, on which in opposition we did a lot of work. Despite all the well-intentioned reforms and the dedication of front-line professionals, the safeguarding of children in this country is still not working properly. That is why I should like to inform the House that, as we first announced in opposition in February, we have decided to commission Professor Eileen Munro of the London School of Economics to carry out an independent review leading to recommendations that support good-quality, child-focused front-line safeguarding practice in children's social care; and we will strip away the bureaucracy that has grown up too much around safeguarding in recent years.

T6. [000831] **Mr Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): The Children, Schools and Families Committee report on the national curriculum called for a five-year cycle of review and reform of the curriculum. Will the Secretary of State put in place such a cycle and ensure that the early years foundation stage, the national curriculum and the arrangements for 14 to 19-year-olds are viewed as a continuum? Will he also tell us whether he plans to implement the Rose review in the meantime?

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. Teachers do not welcome perpetual revolution in the curriculum; schools need some stability, and we will shortly make some announcements about the review of the curriculum. Thereafter, it will not be our intention to have five-yearly-cycle reviews.

Regarding the Rose review and the decision by the previous Government to implement a new primary curriculum from September 2011, as both parties in the coalition made clear in opposition, we do not intend to proceed with the proposed new curriculum. We believe that the Rose review's proposed approach was too prescriptive in terms of how schools should teach and diluted the focus of what they should teach—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry but the answer is simply too long.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State agree that the CPD—continuing professional development—of teachers is absolutely essential, particularly in science and maths? Is he aware that the fine centre at the university of York, where teachers can go for CPD, and the nine other centres are being starved of visiting teachers because of the interpretation of the "Rarely Cover" work force agreement? The unions interpret it so strictly that we will not be able to maintain those centres.

Michael Gove: As ever, the former Select Committee Chairman makes a brilliant point. He is quite right: John Holman's work in York is outstanding and we should do everything that we can to support it. I note the split between the enlightened voice of Opposition Back Benchers, challenging what the unions say, and the position of Opposition Front Benchers, who will do everything possible to ingratiate themselves with organisations such as Unite, including indulging in anti-immigration rhetoric.

T7. [000832] **Mr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): Many schools in my constituency find it necessary to implement personal security measures, paid for by parental contributions and budget delegations. How do the coalition Government intend to address the future cost of the capital and revenue for security funding in such schools?

Michael Gove: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend and congratulate him on his election. Both he and his predecessor have been impassioned champions for the interests of the Jewish community and other faith communities in the London borough of Barnet, and I am deeply concerned that parents of Jewish children have to pay out of their own pocket to ensure that their children are safe in school. It seems to me quite wrong that, simply because of the faith or community from which a child comes, their parents should have to pay extra to ensure that they are safe. That is why I have asked for talks with the Community Security Trust and the Board of Deputies of British Jews—to ensure that we can do everything possible to safeguard those children.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): I think that I have discovered why the Secretary of State was so disparaging about the recipe book that the previous Government produced, which as you will recall, Mr Speaker, included recipes for proper English food, such as Lancashire hotpot and cottage pie. The right hon. Gentleman might not have heard of those, because I understand from *The Times* this morning that his favourite meal is something called "scaloppine with parmentier potatoes". I am afraid that we cannot get that in Dudley, so I asked somebody more familiar than myself with the fancy foreign food available in expensive London restaurants, and apparently it is veal. Is that what the pupils of Britain can look forward to eating now that the Notting Hill elite are running the Government?

Michael Gove: I am enormously grateful to the hon. Gentleman for paying such close attention to my wife's column in *The Times*. I should point out that the issue is not about fancy London restaurants; I do not have time to eat in them. The dish is cooked by my wife, and, if he and his wife would like to come round for dinner, scaloppine will be on the menu. I shall make sure that I have some Banks's Mild, as I know that it is his favourite tipple, and we will have an opportunity to discuss together how I can help the black country.

Annette Brooke (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): What plans does the Secretary of State have for the process of revising the funding formula for local authorities? I represent two local authorities, both of which are in the lowest 40 authorities for educational revenue funding.

Michael Gove: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising her concerns on behalf of the F40 local authorities. It is our intention to try to ensure, consistent with making provision for the very poorest children, that all local authorities, including those that have been most disadvantaged, have fairer funding.

Robert Flello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): Stoke-on-Trent was in phase 1 of the Building Schools for the Future programme, and my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Labour Front Bench will know full well the number of times that I have raised this issue. We were within a hair's breadth of securing the BSF programme—there was just the issue of the 20:20 academy to be resolved. May I urge the Secretary of State to look carefully at the situation in Stoke-on-Trent and to try to give us some certainty about ensuring that we get the much-needed and much-deserved BSF programme through?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. His colleague, the newly elected hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt), recently said on Radio 4 that he wanted money available for school buildings to go to Stoke rather than to vanity projects for yummy mummies in west London. I defer to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central when it comes to knowledge about yummy mummies in west London; however, we have been, and are, looking very sympathetically at the case for specific additional spending in Stoke.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Will any attempt be made to revisit the proposed changes to the nursery grant provision system introduced by the previous Government and due to come in this September, which could have a very bad impact on private nursery provision?

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Sarah Teather): We will be going ahead with extending the free child care entitlement for three and four-year-olds for 15 hours a week. However, I am aware of the concerns that the hon. Gentleman mentions, and I am listening to the views of the private voluntary sector. If he has specific concerns arising from his constituency, I would be grateful if he would write to me with the details, as that will help to inform our thinking.

Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister of State, Department for Education, the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr Gibb), has today announced the introduction of no-notice detention. How is that compatible with good child safeguarding procedures, and how will he ensure that children who have caring responsibilities, and who often do not let their schools know that they have them, are not adversely impacted by this retrograde proposal?

Mr Gibb: This is a deregulation matter. It is not a prescriptive matter requiring schools not to give 24 hours' notice for detentions: it merely enables them to do that if they wish. Trusting head teachers and teachers means that they will make these arrangements themselves if schools feel that they are necessary. We are trying to take out of the statute book impediments to maintaining good order and good behaviour in our schools.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend to his post, but may I return to the subject of special educational needs? He will be aware that in a low-spending authority such as Gloucestershire, parents, particularly disadvantaged parents, often struggle to get their children the special educational needs treatment that they need. Can he assure me that there is no place in this country for a postcode lottery for special educational needs and that every child in this country should get equal treatment for their needs?

Sarah Teather: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. This is precisely why we need to consider and carefully review the whole provision of special educational needs to ensure that parents have a real choice about where they send their child—be it to a maintained school, to a specialist unit within a maintained school, or to a special school—and that the support is available to them and to parents.

Mr Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley) (Lab): I am sure that the Secretary of State would like to agree that Sure Start has been a huge success. Can he guarantee not only that the funding will be there for Sure Start but, more importantly, that he will continue to expand the programme on the number of Sure Starts in constituencies?

Michael Gove: Yes.

Debate on the Address

[5TH DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 2 June).

Question again proposed,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Constitution and Home Affairs

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of Ms Harriet Harman. Once moved, that amendment will limit the scope of debate to the issues mentioned in it. Older hands can expect to be called to order by the occupant of the Chair if they go beyond the scope of the amendment. New Members making maiden speeches can expect some customary latitude.

3.34 pm

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): I beg to move an amendment, at the end of the Question to add:

"but, whilst welcoming the progress made by the previous administration to reform and improve the constitutional arrangements of the United Kingdom, respectfully believe that such changes should be made wherever possible on the basis of a strong cross-party consensus; therefore call for active discussions by your Government on proposals for an elected House of Lords, a referendum on the alternative vote, recall of hon. Members, the period of any fixed-term Parliament, party funding, changes to the number of hon. Members, the drawing of electoral boundaries, and individual voter registration; consider as wholly unacceptable and undemocratic proposals to require any special majority to remove a Government and require an early general election, or to alter the number of hon. Members or the boundary rules in an arbitrary and partisan way; strongly endorse the measures which led to an overall reduction in crime of over a third, and of violent crime of 41 per cent., since 1997; oppose any measures to cut the number of police officers and police community support officers, to restrict the use of the DNA database in accordance with the Crime and Security Act 2010, to extend anonymity in rape cases to defendants, or to politicise constabularies through the introduction of elected commissioners; and urge your Government to reconsider the introduction of a pre-determined cap on skilled immigrants and to maintain the flexibility and effectiveness of the current points-based system."

I begin by welcoming the Deputy Prime Minister to the Treasury Bench and to the Government Dispatch Box on what I believe is his speaking debut in that role in the House. He takes over from me wide responsibilities for the Government's constitutional agenda. As my colleagues and I were, he and his ministerial colleagues will be responsible for what is put before the House and the country, but in making his decisions and recommendations he will be blessed, as I was, by having officials of the highest quality, diligence and—certainly with myself—patience. I should like to place on record my thanks to them and to all the officials with whom I worked, and to wish the right hon. Gentleman well in his endeavours.

"Constitutional agenda" is an abstract term that can have the effect of emptying a room quickly, and not just when I am the one making a speech. However abstract, though, it describes something of profound importance to the effective running of any society and its political system, namely the architecture of power—the rules that set down who can make decisions and who can hold in check those who exercise power. In most systems, those rules are enshrined in what the Germans call "black letter law" and are normally subject to special procedures of entrenchment to make it more difficult for those with the power of government to misuse it to change the fundamental rules of the constitution for narrow partisan ends.

We in the United Kingdom do not have a single text, a written constitution or any protective entrenched procedures. Although I believe that over time we should develop a single text, I do not propose or support entrenchment or special procedures for constitutional change. However, the absence of entrenchment places a special responsibility on those in government not to misuse their power, and wherever possible actively to seek and achieve consensus across the House, or to ensure that the final decision is made directly by the people in a referendum.

Of course, the Government must have the power of initiative. When we took office in 1997, there had been no successful proposals for constitutional change for decades. In contrast, the new Labour Administration had a very large agenda: devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; an elected Mayor and assembly for London; data protection; freedom of information; the Human Rights Bill; phased reform of the Lords; independence for national statistics; reform of party funding; and a new system for elections to the European Parliament. All but one of those measures, however controversial they may have been at the beginning of their legislative journeys, were in the end either approved by consensus across the House or endorsed by the people in a referendum, and they are all the better for that.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is right that a great deal of constitutional change has occurred over the past 13 years, but I am not clear why he does not want to go an extra step now and have a written constitution—a Bill of Rights. Surely that would be an important way of entrenching and making absolutely clear the rights of our citizens.

Mr Straw: As I said a moment ago, I believe that there is a case for bringing together our constitutional arrangements in a single text, and we were working on achieving exactly that. However, the process will take a long time. Entrenchment—in other words, the sovereignty of this House being modified by some super-legislative procedure and by a constitutional court overseeing that—is a bridge too far for me and I do not support it. However, I do not believe that the two have to go hand in hand, and the case for a single text is strong.

However controversial the proposals that we introduced may have been at the beginning—I think particularly of the Human Rights Bill and the Freedom of Information Bill—in the end, we were able to achieve consensus across the House. That may have been a subject of regret later for the Conservative Opposition, but consensus was achieved. There was one exception, which I regret and, in a sense, it makes the point that I am putting to the House—the closed list system for European elections.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Straw: I welcome the hon. Lady to the Chamber—I am glad to see her return to the House, albeit, through no fault of hers, a little late. I shall give way in a second.

The European elections system was very controversial. It was subject, unusually, to the Parliament Acts. In my view, it is not a good system and will almost certainly have to be changed in due course. However, no one could have said—no one did say—that it was introduced for partisan advantage. Such advantage has palpably not happened.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): The amendment tabled by the Leader of the Opposition mentions the special majority that is required to dissolve Parliament and hold a general election. Having failed to get any sort of answer out of the Government, does my right hon. Friend have any theory about why they arrived at the figure of 55%?

Mr Straw: I do, but I invite my hon. Friend to stay in the Chamber a little longer—

Sir Menzies Campbell (North East Fife) (LD): It is one way of keeping him.

Mr Straw: Indeed—perhaps it is the only way of keeping him. However, I invite my hon. Friend to stay and I will deal with the point later.

Miss McIntosh: I am delighted to be returned to represent the new constituency of Thirsk and Malton, and I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his comments. He referred to the new electoral system for the European Parliament. Does he accept that, in each European election since the new election procedures were introduced, turnout has dramatically reduced. What would he have proposed had he remained in government to increase the turnout for those elections?

Mr Straw: One suggestion—I might even have made it—was that the new system might increase turnout. Even Homer nodded, and that has not been the case, although I think that turnout has gone up a little recently. I am in favour of either an open list, or what is called the semi-open list, which is one of the proposals for the new, reformed House of Lords. I am happy to discuss that further with the hon. Lady in or outside the House.

I have set out the importance of constitutional change being made, whenever possible, by consensus. I therefore greatly hope that the Deputy Prime Minister will resist calls from his side to use the Government's majority to ram through change for party advantage. That would be wrong—*[Laughter.]* I say to those who are obviously tempted by that that, with one exception, which was never to my party's advantage, we worked hard to achieve cross-party consensus because the constitution should not be a partisan weapon in the hands of any party.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Straw: Let me consider the key elements of the new Government's proposals in turn, and then, of course, I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

First, let us consider the House of Lords. Next year will be the centenary of the first Parliament Act. The preamble of the 1911 Act spells out that it was introduced as a temporary measure, stating that

"it is intended to substitute for the House of Lords as it at present exists a Second Chamber constituted on a popular instead of hereditary basis, but such substitution cannot be immediately brought into operation"

and therefore the Parliament Act was introduced as a poor substitute. It is 99 years since that historic Act and it is probably now time to complete the original proposals of that great Lib-Lab Government in 1911.

Two reforms followed the 1911 Act: the Parliament Act 1949 and the Life Peerages Act 1958, but there was no further change until 1999, when all but 92 hereditary peers were removed and clear conventions about party balance were established. The consequence has been to make the other place a less supine and more assertive Chamber. That is sometimes inconvenient to government, as I witnessed in taking through very many items of legislation, but it was rare indeed for legislation to be amended in the other place but not improved, as I have often put on the record.

I therefore hope that the Deputy Prime Minister will resist the temptation of some on the Government side, as we have read in some newspapers, to pack the other place with up to 200 Conservative and Liberal Democrat Lords to ensure that the previous convention of no one party having a majority, which has worked well, is retained—*[Interruption.]* I am not clear why there is such objection to that. When Labour was in government, it was absolutely fine for one third of its legislation to be subject to amendments in the House of Lords. If the proposition is that when the Conservative party is in power, with support from the Liberal Democrats, it is fine for them to have an absolute majority in the House of Lords, let that be put on the record.

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Ellwood *rose—*

Mr Straw: I promised to give way to the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood).

Mr Ellwood: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. To take him back to his phrase, "ramming through change for political advantage," may I remind the House that Labour rammed through changes to the Lisbon treaty, denying this country an opportunity to vote on it? That is taking political advantage. I hope he now regrets that decision.

Mr Straw: I think the hon. Gentleman protests a little too much on that. He needs to explain, as does the Conservative element of the Government, why the Conservative party abandoned its pledge to withdraw from the Lisbon treaty. Perhaps he would like to have a discussion on that with the Liberal Democrats who support the Government.

Mr Tyrie *rose—*

Mr Straw: I will make a little more progress before giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

For seven years after the 1999 change, the absence of any clear consensus blocked further reform. It will be recalled that in early 2003, this House voted against every single one of seven alternative propositions put before it, ranging from an all-appointed to an all-elected House of Lords. I took over responsibility for Lords reform, in that time-honoured passage from Foreign Secretary to Leader of the House, and duly established a cross-party group. Its key conclusions, which worked very well, were set out in a February 2007 Green Paper.

Thankfully, in March 2007 this House voted emphatically in favour of two consistent propositions—an 80% or 100% elected House of Lords—and against all other choices. That proposition for a wholly or mainly elected House has been the foundation for progress since. The cross-party group re-met for 15 months and did a great deal of detailed work on how an elected Lords might operate, and its conclusions were contained in the July 2008 White Paper.

At the most recent general election—for the first time—all three parties were clearly committed to action to secure an elected House of Lords. Further work to ensure that should be straightforward: a great deal has already been done, including, as the Deputy Prime Minister knows, the drafting of many of the key clauses to form the central part of any Bill. I pledge that my party will work constructively on that with him and his Administration, and with luck, we may be able to mark the centenary of the first Parliament Act with legislation finally to meet its long-term goal.

The proposal for a referendum on voting reform is another long-running issue in British politics. It took the expenses scandal for broad agreement to emerge that at the very least the British people should be given the opportunity to decide whether they wish to continue with the existing first-past-the-post system or to move to the alternative vote system. Legislation for an AV referendum was agreed earlier this year by the House by a very substantial majority of 365 to 187. That would have become law by the general election but for the refusal of the Conservative party to allow it to go through in the so-called wash-up. I am glad that the rather spurious objections that the Conservatives raised then have now dissolved. We shall, of course, support clauses on AV if they are put before the House in a similar form to last time.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that in the course of the competitive negotiations with the Liberal Democrats as to which side was going to form a Government, his party offered the Liberal Democrats a deal whereby AV would be rammed through this House without a referendum?

Mr Straw: The answer is no. I would also say to the hon. Gentleman that a very significant proportion of Labour Members, including myself, would never have accepted such a proposition had it been put forward—let us be absolutely clear about that.

We support proposals for recall, which we proposed before the election, although the detail will have to be carefully thought through.

Many of the other aspects set out in the coalition agreement are non-controversial. I am glad to see the Administration support the proposals of the Wright Committee, and I hope that we will see good progress made on them. I say parenthetically, on a subject that concerned me greatly when I was in government, that I continue to be concerned about how we conduct our Report and Committee stages on the Floor of the House.

There is another unsatisfactory matter, and I hope that the Leader of the House will consider it. Since there is likely to be some element of timetabling, or even if there is not, we need better order when the House is considering legislation clause by clause, not least by allowing the Chair a discretion to set time limits on speeches. One of the most important functions discharged by this House on the Floor of the House is the consideration of legislation. The old system before 1997 led to great frustration, as did the system post-1997. What we have not yet got right is adequate provision to ensure that Back Benchers especially can take part constructively in debates without those debates being undermined either by too hasty Government timetables or, frankly, by some Back Benchers hogging the whole of the time by filibustering.

Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): On the questions of Lords reform and the legislation for a referendum on voting reform, may we have a clarification from Labour that both will be the subject on the Labour Benches of three-line Whips here and in the House of Lords?

Mr Straw: The hon. Gentleman will have to allow me to say that I consult my colleagues about the whipping arrangements that would apply. *[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) is speculating about whether the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes) is worried about something. My advice is for him to worry about how he and his party are going to vote and we will worry about how we vote.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Straw: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, but then I want to make some progress.

Mr Jackson: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I am glad that the sinner is repenting. Does he regret the use of the guillotine on so many important Bills during the last Parliament? In the Housing and Regeneration Bill, for instance, which I was involved in, more than 200 Government clauses were tabled between Second Reading and Report, so Members were not allowed proper analysis and oversight of that important legislation. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Straw: My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) says that there were no guillotines, as they were programme motions—but they come to the same thing.

Let me say to the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) that I regret the use of guillotines full stop, but sometimes they are necessary. However, I sat in the House in opposition for 18 years, and the first

[Mr Straw]

Bill I sat on—the Housing Bill, in early 1980, 30 years ago—was the subject of the most ruthless guillotining, and that on a major measure. There are plenty of other measures of profound importance that were also the subject of guillotining.

My view, both in government and in opposition, has been that the House—certainly over the 30 years in which I have been in it—has not got right the way in which it should deal effectively with legislation on the Floor of the House, and I think that there is a better way. We need to provide for more time, but if we do that, the quid pro quo needs to be limits on speeches, so that people can constructively take part. We also need to look at something that I facilitated on at least one occasion, which is ensuring that when the business is subject to programming or guillotining, some Opposition and Back-Bench amendments can also be the subject of votes. I put those proposals before the House for consideration.

I have set out our view on many of the proposals that are, and will be, the subject of a broad consensus. As I have said, on every proposal that the Deputy Prime Minister brings forward, we shall seek constructively to work with the Government to achieve consensus. However, it seems that consensus was the last thing on the mind of the governing parties, when one turns to some of the elements of the coalition agreement. In his first speech as Deputy Prime Minister, outside the House, the right hon. Gentleman told the nation that he proposed to secure the biggest shake-up of our democracy since the Reform Act of 1832. He described the Reform Act of 1832 as a "landmark", from

"politicians who refused to sit back and do nothing while huge swathes of the population remained helpless against vested interests. Who stood up for the freedom of the many"—

we have heard that phrase before—

"not the privilege of the few."

Well, not quite, Mr Speaker, for the truth is that even after the passage of the Great Reform Act of 1832, huge swathes of the population—92% of the population—remained without a vote, helpless in the face of vested interests. The Reform Act of 1832 gave the vote, a limited franchise, to the property-owning class, of whom there were remarkably few, and deliberately ensured that nobody else had the vote—no women, no working men; just 16% of men, and no women whatever.

Let me also say to the right hon. Gentleman that had the Great Reform Act been the landmark in democracy that he suggested—I do not know where he got that from; certainly not even from Wikipedia—none of the agitation of the Chartist movement that followed would have been necessary. Those of us who know a little bit of history will remember that it was the wholly dashed expectations of 1832 that fired up the great Chartist movement. However, the comparison with 1832, if not appropriate, is certainly heavy with unintended irony, for, however limited the effect, the first Reform Act at least extended the franchise. The programme to which the right hon. Gentleman has signed up will reduce the franchise, as I will explain. Some reform!

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): The former Minister is making an interesting speech about equality, but will he confirm that it was actually a Conservative Government, in 1927, who gave full equality to women and the right for them to vote, and that they did so after a Labour Government, under Ramsay MacDonald, had failed in their promise to do so?

Mr Straw: First, that was quite a long time after 1832. Secondly, as the hon. Gentleman might recall, the vote was originally given to women over 30 in 1918, and then extended to those over 21 in 1928.

Let me come to the partisan heart of the Government's constitutional proposals: the plans to cut parliamentary seats, redraw boundaries and speed up individual registration. If those proposals were implemented, they would disfranchise hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of our citizens, predominantly the young and members of lower-income groups. Seats would be cut and boundaries fundamentally altered by rigid mathematical formulae devised on the basis of the current electoral register.

According to the Electoral Commission, however, some 3.5 million eligible voters are missing from the register, and that is just in England and Wales. Earlier this year, the commission reported

"under-registration is concentrated among specific social groups, with the registration rates being especially low among young people, private renters and those who have recently moved home. The highest concentrations of under-registration are most likely to be found in metropolitan areas, smaller towns and cities with large student populations, and coastal areas with significant population turnover and high levels of social deprivation."

The commission's study established that in Glasgow 100,000 eligible voters might be missing from the register, quite sufficient to raise all Glasgow seats to the electoral average for Great Britain and to provide for one additional constituency.

Cutting seats and redrawing boundaries in that way, without taking account of the missing voters, will produce a profoundly distorted electoral map of Britain. The map will be even further distorted if this boundary review is undertaken, as the Government have proposed, in tandem with the premature roll-out of individual voter registration, because that process will knock many more eligible people off the register—hundreds of thousands of them.

We are in favour of individual registration. Indeed, it was I who, last year, presented proposals for a new law, which received all-party agreement. But as all the parties agreed just nine months ago, to be fair the process will take both time and money.

Mrs Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Straw: I am glad to see the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs Laing) in the Chamber, because she played an important and constructive part in securing individual registration. She also went on record as saying, from the Conservative Front Bench, that any future Conservative Government would never take risks with the democratic process. She agreed that we must wait for the 2012 census. It is unclear whether the Deputy Prime Minister is proposing to do that. She also agreed that there must be ways of testing the accuracy of the system, as our legislation does with the requirement for a report from the Electoral Commission in 2014, and she said in terms that we must ensure that the system was utterly watertight. I hope that she still takes that view.

Mrs Laing: I certainly do still take that view 100%, but the right hon. Gentleman will recall that, when we debated individual voter registration, it was established that the system was intended to increase, not decrease, the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the register. Lessons have been learnt from what happened in Northern Ireland. Under the new system, the register will be more accurate and more comprehensive, and it will be fair to have constituencies that are of equal size, so that every vote has equal value.

Mr Straw: That is the aspiration, and I do not for a second doubt the good faith of the hon. Lady. I am glad to hear her endorse those proposals—now, sadly, from the Back Benches. As she knows, however, because we had detailed and collaborative discussions on the issue, if the process for individual registration is rushed—and the phrase used in the coalition agreement is "speed this up"—the consequence will be not what she and we seek, but what happened in Northern Ireland. As the Electoral Commission spelt out, what happened in Northern Ireland in 2002 was that a sudden change in the system of electoral registration, although there was a centralised system, led to the immediate loss of nearly 120,000 names—nearly 10%—from the register. The commission said:

"The new registration process disproportionately impacted on young people and students, people with learning disabilities, people with disabilities generally and those living in areas of high social deprivation."

Mr David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I am listening to the right hon. Gentleman's speech with great interest, but a lot of what he is saying is pure speculation. Does he think that the current system, with its vast discrepancies in constituency size, is fair? The Government in which he served did nothing to address that, yet it needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Mr Straw: Nobody argues that it is not important to secure electoral equality in England, Scotland and Wales—where different rules have applied, which is a separate issue—but that must also be subject to other rules involving geography and history, as I shall explain. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the data, he will see that nowadays Labour seats in Scotland and Wales are larger than the few Conservative and Liberal Democrat seats in those two nations. In England, our seats are 3% smaller than the electoral average, and those of the Conservatives are 3% larger. There are also some very large Labour seats these days, however, as well as large Conservative seats. We pursued the same rules as previous Administrations, and the reasons for the recent trends is that there has been more rapid depopulation in areas that are typically Labour, mainly inner cities, although that is now changing.

What is crucial is that these changes are done in a fair way, by agreement between the parties, not in a partisan way. Professor Iain McLean, a lecturer at Oxford university and an elections expert, warned last month that

"to move straight to individual registration risks moving straight to mass disenfranchisement of the young, the urban, the mobile and ethnic minority voters"

and that it

"could make Britain in 2011 like Florida in 2000".

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): On the question of city seats, is my right hon. Friend aware that the first casualty could be the Deputy Prime Minister in his Hallam seat in the city of Sheffield—unless, of course, they try to manoeuvre the boundaries so as to try to save his neck, which would test the coalition?

Mr Straw: There is no doubt that the biggest net losers under the current proposals in the so-called coalition agreement would be the Liberal Democrats, for reasons that I shall spell out.

On election night, when the Deputy Prime Minister heard that people had been locked out of the polling stations and prevented from casting their ballots, he said:

"I share the bitter dismay of many of my constituents who were not able to exercise their democratic right to vote in this election...That should never, ever happen again in our democracy."

Yet he now proposes a programme that could have the effect of disfranchising not only some hundreds in his own constituency, but some hundreds of thousands across the United Kingdom. I urge him to think very carefully about what is being proposed.

As for the proposal to cut the number of seats, we need not speculate about the Conservative party's intentions because they are on the record. Just months before the general election, the Conservative Front-Bench team moved the most detailed amendments to cut the number of seats by 10% and to force the redrawing of the boundaries by rules requiring that arithmetical quotas trump all other considerations. I have a copy of one such amendment before me. It says that the electorate

"shall be as near the electoral quota as is practicable"—

only a 3% margin would be allowed—

"and all other special geographical considerations, including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency, shall be subordinate to achieving this aim".

The scheme, therefore, is that arithmetic will trump all, so that history, geography, mountains, rivers, and even communities and the sea, are to be subordinated to arithmetical rules.

The effects would be extraordinary, especially in Scotland. The Orkney and Shetland electorate is 33,000. Under these proposals—official Conservative proposals—Orkney and Shetland would have to be jammed in with Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, which has an electorate of 47,000 in order to make a single seat exactly within the electoral average. The Western Isles, with an electorate of 22,000, is the smallest constituency in the United Kingdom. It would have to be jammed in with a vast swathe of the western highlands—of western Scotland, indeed. In England and Wales, too, long-established patterns of democracy would be destroyed in pursuit of the new Conservative formulae. How such changes, defying history and geography and people's own sense of place, could possibly be said to strengthen our democracy I do not know. Perhaps the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam will be able to tell us whether he is comfortable with this scheme.

Mrs Anne McGuire (Stirling) (Lab): Sometimes when we talk about geography, we do not appreciate the full extent of the situation. My constituency is about the size of Luxembourg and will not meet the 75,000 threshold. The constituency of Caithness, Sutherland and Easter

[Mrs Anne McGuire]

Ross, whose Member is here today, is the size of Cyprus; and the Ross, Skye and Lochaber constituency of the former leader of the Liberal Democrats is the size of the Bahamas. It is not just a matter of numbers but of geographical extent, which makes the proposal for a 75,000 threshold ludicrous.

Mr Straw: My right hon. Friend makes a very important point, but the truth is that under the amendment to which I referred—there is no need to speculate because this is what is proposed—all the considerations that she and the whole House are concerned about, along, I dare say, with voters across the highlands and islands of Scotland and in many other places as well, would be swept aside, "subordinate", as the amendment says, to a simple arithmetical rule.

I have said to the House that we favour a referendum on the alternative vote, but I make it clear that we will not allow that to be used as a Trojan horse for an omnibus Bill that will profoundly harm our democracy. The Liberal Democrats would do well to consider the damage to democracy that will arise from these proposals. If appealing to their sense of democracy is not enough, then I appeal to their sense of self-interest. *[Interruption.]* That is always best with Liberal Democrats. Why do they and the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam think that the Conservatives are now pursuing this idea? It is not out of any principled concern about the size of the House of Commons. The Prime Minister argued passionately against a reduction in the number of Members of Parliament when he was defending the size of his own constituency before the 2003 inquiry into the boundaries in Oxfordshire. The Liberal Democrats have now apparently been pulled along in the wake of this undemocratic proposal to cut seats, yet the Liberal Democrats in Oxfordshire were not then arguing for the status quo of six seats in Oxfordshire—which, at least the Prime Minister was arguing for—but for seven seats, which would have led to a House of Commons of 700.

We need to understand that a 10% reduction in the number of seats and rigid mathematical formulae will change every single boundary in the United Kingdom. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) mentioned, that is where the Liberal Democrats are uniquely vulnerable. Their seats are isolated—tiny dots of orange in seas of red or blue—and they have proportionately twice as many marginal seats as either of the other parties. I hope the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam will accept that this proposal is dangerous—dangerous to his own party, for sure, but to the legitimacy of our democracy, as well. There is to be an argument about reducing the number of seats and the way we conduct boundary reviews, but the better way through, since so many reviews have already been set up, is to have an independent examination of how we conduct boundary reviews. That would be far better than the crude and undemocratic system that is being proposed.

Let me make this last point to the right hon. Gentleman. In the United States—this idea came from there—they have simple, rigid arithmetical rules. As the Electoral Reform Society—no great friend of mine and hard-wired into the Liberal Democrat party—has pointed out, the United States also has the worst gerrymandering in the world.

That brings me to the issue that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) raised: the proposal for a 55% threshold to secure the dissolution of Parliament. That 55% threshold appeared in no party manifesto. It is a partisan measure stitched up by the coalition partners to protect themselves from each other—nobody else—while retaining their ability to go for an early election if they believe it would be advantageous.

Where does the figure of 55% come from? That is an interesting question. *[Interruption.]* Well, I am going to give the answer. It comes from the fact that the Liberals and the Conservatives together have—guess what—57% of the seats in the current Parliament. They would, thus, have the power to dissolve this Parliament if the polls and the signs looked encouraging. The Conservatives, on their own, hold 47% of the seats and the rest of the parties hold 53%, so in the event of a Conservative minority Government it would be impossible to reach the 55% threshold required to force an election. If that is not a political fix, I do not know what is.

The Labour party agrees with fixed-term Parliaments, in principle, and our manifesto included a commitment to legislate. However, given that most Parliaments since the war have lasted four years or less, we favour a four-year term.

Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North) (Con): Before entering this House, I was a Member of the Scottish Parliament. Can the right hon. Gentleman tell me why a 66% threshold was chosen in the Scotland Act 1998 when it went through this House? For what reason was that appropriate then, but not now?

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): Will the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) allow me to deal with that point?

Mr Straw *indicated assent.*

Angus Robertson: On that point, can we—

Mr Speaker: Order. We cannot have an intervention upon an intervention; a few words from Mr Straw before we hear from the hon. Gentleman would be helpful.

Mr Straw: I can give the hon. Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace) an answer, and it is not a bad one. He ought to read carefully both limbs of section 3 of the 1998 Act. If he had bothered to read it and if those negotiating this coalition agreement had done so—I have the Act before me for the sake of greater accuracy—they would know what it states. Under section 3(1)(a), the presiding officer has to require an "extraordinary general election"—an early general election—for the Scottish Parliament if two thirds of the Parliament vote for that. However, the provision contains an "or", not an "and", because section 3(1)(b) states that if there is

> "any period during which the Parliament is required under section 46 to nominate one of its members for appointment as First Minister ends without such a nomination being made",

after 28 days there has to be a general election. That election is triggered by a simple majority, not by a two thirds one. Therefore, we should hear no more rubbish about there being a two thirds lock in the Scottish Parliament, because it is not true.

Angus Robertson: Please can we never again hear this comparison with the situation in the Scottish Parliament on this point, because it is totally spurious? The 66% threshold is required for the immediate dissolution of the Scottish Parliament, but 50% remains the threshold for a confidence vote, as it should remain in this House.

Mr Straw: I should also tell hon. Members that if they were to read section 3 of the 1998 Act, they would find that if, for example, the First Minister is voted out by a simple majority and after 28 days no new First Minister has been voted in, an election has to take place. That is done by a simple majority, so the only effect of this provision is to delay matters by requirements relating to a simple majority and 28 days. There is no parallel, whatsoever, in these arrangements, and the hon. Member for Wyre and Preston North knows it.

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Straw: Of course I will give way to a Liberal Democrat—why not?

Sir Alan Beith: Is the right hon. Gentleman's real view that the Prime Minister's unfettered power to call a general election at a time of his choosing should be retained and that we should not have fixed-term Parliaments, or is he proposing an alternative mechanism, be it the Scottish Parliament's combination of a 66% threshold and a one-month rule or some other mechanism?

Mr Straw: I do not understand. Either this has been done for partisan reasons—[Hon. Members: "Answer the question!"] Of course, I am going to answer the question—I always do—but I am allowed to answer the question in my own way. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Sir Alan Beith) and I have been debating this for long enough. I say to him that either this has been done for the most crude of partisan reasons, or the Government have simply misunderstood how they can establish fixed-term Parliaments and take away the right of the Prime Minister to recommend Dissolution before then. It is very straightforward. We can legislate for fixed-term Parliaments—our view is that we ought to go for four-year, not five-year, Parliaments—and we can also legislate to take away the power of the Prime Minister to recommend Dissolution before then, but what we should not do is legislate to take away the power of the House of Commons to remove a Government. I am afraid that they are doing that on some curious and spurious arithmetic.

In the same speech in which he talked about the 1832 reform Act, about which I have had to correct him, the Deputy Prime Minister also said:

> "We are not taking away Parliament's right to throw out Government; we're taking away Government's right to throw out Parliament."

That is utter nonsense. It is casuistry in the extreme. We are talking about the Government's right to throw out Parliament and we are talking about Parliament's right to throw out the Government.

I remind the House of an excellent article in *The Daily Telegraph*, inserted by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), in which he says that the 55%-majority plan will "taint" the "New Politics" and that to

> "introduce such a measure in this way is simply wrong."

He goes on to say:

> "The requirement for a 55 per cent majority to dissolve parliament, and thereby dismiss a government, dramatically reduces the ability of Parliament to hold the executive to account. It is a major constitutional change, possibly one of the greatest since 1911."

He also draws attention to what would have happened in 1979, which some of us will recall, when the Government of the day lost their majority by one vote. The then Leader of the Labour party and the Government said that there would have to be an election—it followed like night follows day. People talk about having a period of looking at a coalition in such a situation, but what do they think was being done in the days leading up to that vote but searching for a coalition? It was precisely because one was not available that the Government ran out of numbers and the vote was lost. In that situation, when there had been a vote of no confidence in the Government, the Labour Government could have carried on—they might no doubt have wished to—until the following October, because the 55% threshold would not have been achieved. If that had happened, they would have been in the ludicrous and wholly undemocratic position—

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr Mark Harper): You're wrong.

Mr Straw: We are not wrong. It is interesting that whenever Ministers have sought to explain this, they have tied themselves in knots. In the very first Adjournment debate of this Parliament, on the day of the Queen's Speech, the poor benighted Deputy Leader of the House got tied in knots not only by Labour Members but by most of the Conservative Members. I ask the Deputy Prime Minister to spell out how this is going to work and, above all, to withdraw this ludicrous and undemocratic proposal. I say to him, in the full hearing of a packed Front Bench, that the Deputy Leader of the House also put it on record that the Bill would not be guillotined, so that we could forget about programme motions, and that it would be dealt with on the Floor of the House, but it might never come out of the House, such is the controversy behind it.

Constitutional reform is fundamental for any democracy that wants to renew itself and make itself responsive to the needs of an ever-evolving electorate. The Opposition are in favour of reform that will strengthen Parliament and the democratic process, and we will work constructively to achieve measures with that objective in mind. As it stands, this package of proposals contains far too many partisan political fixes, and is not so much new politics as an old-fashioned stitch-up between the two oldest parties in the House. We oppose those changes and I commend my amendment to the House.

4.25 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr Nick Clegg): I thank the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) for opening today's debate, which he did at considerable length—so much so that I am increasingly attracted to the idea of time limits on speeches.

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

The right hon. Gentleman spoke with great knowledge and at times some generosity about our proposed programme. That is no wonder given what we are proposing: a referendum on the alternative vote—a Labour manifesto pledge; the power of recall—a Labour manifesto pledge; moves to reform party funding, fixed-term Parliaments and an elected Second Chamber—all Labour manifesto pledges. In fact, never before will a Government have delivered quite so many of Labour's election promises. Who would have thought it would be a Liberal Democrat-Conservative coalition that finally got around to doing that?

I recognise of course that the right hon. Gentleman has great authority on those matters. His Government, in their early days, had a clear reformist streak—devolution, freedom of information and progress on Lords reform. Unfortunately, that momentum was lost, but after the right hon. Gentleman's speech today perhaps that zeal for political reform, which Labour lost in government, will now be rediscovered in opposition.

I have heard the right hon. Gentleman's concerns, particularly his lengthy concerns about the boundary review, which seem a little coloured by the almost unsettling suspicion that there is a political plot at every turn. I shall seek to address some of his concerns, although I shall leave debate about the merits or otherwise of the 1832 Act to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) and other historians. I shall focus primarily on the constitutional reforms being pursued by the Government, for which I have direct responsibility, although I shall say a few words about some of the issues raised by the Opposition that will be taken forward by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. She will pick up those issues later.

On the constitutional side, yes, of course we will need to work out the precise detail of the reforms we are proposing, but I sincerely hope that their underlying principles will bring both sides of the House together. Despite any differences, we all share a single ambition: to restore people's faith in their politics and their politicians. The Government's plans will do just that, because our programme turns a page on Governments who hoard power, on Parliaments that look inwards rather than outwards, and on widespread disengagement among people who feel locked out of decisions that affect their everyday lives. This is a moment when together we have a real opportunity to change our politics for good.

Christopher Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Stepping off his moral high horse for just a moment, could the right hon. Gentleman take the time to define the word "gerrymander"?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not think anyone in the House, and particularly outside it, would question the value of trying to reduce the cost of Parliament, by making a modest cut in the total numbers. I do not judge the quality of our democracy—nor should the hon. Gentleman—by the simple number of politicians in the House.

Kevin Brennan: Perhaps the Deputy Prime Minister could clarify the issue I put to my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) earlier. Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us with a straight face exactly how he alighted on the figure of 55% rather than 54%, 56% or even 66% in his proposals? What was the logic of 55%—straight-faced?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I shall come to that in greater detail in a minute. Quite simply, the logic is to stop any single party doing what happens at the moment, which is timing the occasion of a general election for pure party self-interest. That is what needs to be removed if we are to have proper fixed-term Parliaments. The hon. Gentleman, if he agrees with his Front-Bench colleagues, supports fixed-term Parliaments, yet he has absolutely no proposals on how to implement them in practice.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: I should like to make progress and then I will give way again.

First, we need to relinquish Executive control. The Government are determined that no Government should be able to play politics with the dates of a general election. *[Interruption.]* I am addressing the point that was made. Parliamentary terms should be fixed for five years.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Let me make some progress, and then I will give way to the hon. Gentleman. Let him hear me out first.

We need a new right for Parliament to request a Dissolution, taking away the Prime Minister's exclusive and traditional right to call an election when he or she wishes. The majority required for early Dissolution—set at 55% in the coalition agreement—has clearly sparked a lot of anguish among the Opposition. It should; it is an important decision that will, of course, be properly considered by the whole House, as the legislation progresses. But the Opposition in their amendment today are wilfully misrepresenting how that safeguard will function. Their amendment deliberately confuses that new right with traditional powers of no confidence, which will remain in place intact.

Let me assure the House that we are already conducting detailed work on the steps that are necessary to remove any theoretical possibility of a limbo in which a Government who could not command the confidence of the House would refuse to dissolve Parliament and give people their say. That would clearly be intolerable. Any new arrangements will need to build on existing conventions, so that a distinction is maintained between no confidence and early Dissolution.

Chris Bryant: The right hon. Gentleman referred earlier to hoarding power. Will he explain the length of time that he is talking about—the five-year term—bearing in mind the fact that, since 1832, the average peacetime Parliament has lasted for considerably less than four years, at three years and eight months. Australia and New Zealand have three-year Parliaments. The countries with five-year Parliaments are Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and France. Which is he measuring against?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman normally talks with some knowledge, but he appears to have forgotten that the Parliament Act 1911 instituted five-year parliamentary terms and that the Labour party has just had a five-year parliamentary term. It is difficult for him to see the coalition Government introduce all the changes that he used to talk about and failed to deliver. You had 13 years finally to do something and introduce political reform. We are finally going to go on and do it.

Kevin Brennan: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise for interrupting the Deputy Prime Minister, but could you remind him not to ape the Prime Minister in every respect by referring to the Opposition as "you" in the House?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Hugh Bayley): I think that the Deputy Prime Minister knows the form of address for the House.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Yes; I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for, once again, really picking out the important things in the debate today.

We are also committed to strengthening Parliament by introducing the Wright Committee's proposals, starting with the proposed committee for the management of Back-Bench business before the subsequent introduction of a House business committee to consider Government business.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I should like to make a bit of progress if I may.

We also plan to strengthen the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, too, by implementing recommendations from the Calman commission's final report. Equally, Wales will get a referendum on further devolution—a decision that will be taken by the Welsh people.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman says that there will be a referendum in Wales on the All Wales Convention's proposals. Does he support a yes vote in that referendum, and do the Government support a yes vote in that referendum?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Yes, the Government do support a yes vote in that referendum. As for the referendum's timing, as the hon. Gentleman may know, the Secretary of State for Wales and the First Minister are meeting today, with a view to identifying a date—most likely, in the first few months of next year—to hold that referendum.

Here in London, as we strengthen Parliament, we must of course ensure that we have cleaned it up, too. Radical steps have already been taken to put in place a new expenses regime. Although the way that the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority is working in its early days may be controversial to some hon. Members on both sides of the House, I am sure that everyone agrees that public confidence in how MPs are paid is absolutely crucial. Our personal arrangements should never be so grossly out of step with those of our constituents, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is already talking to IPSA about how we can move away from the generous final salary pension scheme enjoyed by Members of the House.

Expenses were only ever the tip of the iceberg. The influence of big money runs much deeper. It is time to finish what was started three years ago in the cross-party talks on party funding. Every party has had its own problems, but we all now have an opportunity to draw a line under them, so we will seize that opportunity. We will pursue a detailed agreement on limiting donations and reforming party funding to remove big money from politics for good.

Equally, we all remember the outrage felt in all parts of the House at the lobbying scandals that unfolded just a few months ago, before the general election. Much lobbying activity is perfectly legitimate. Much of it serves an important function, allowing different organisations and charities to make representations to Parliament, but it is a process—I am sure everyone agrees on this—that must be made completely transparent. We are committed to ensuring that transparency and we will introduce a statutory register of lobbyists.

Finally, if, once all those reforms are in place, there are individual parliamentarians who still break the rules, we will also guarantee that the House of Commons is not a safe house. We will introduce legislation to ensure that, where it has been proven that a Member has been engaged in serious wrongdoing, their constituents will have the right to organise a petition to force a by-election.

When people have been let down by their MP in that way, they must not be made to wait until the next election to cast their judgment, but I also want to be clear: recall will not collapse into some tit-for-tat game between party political rivals, with parties seeking to oust each other through those petitions. When MPs are accused of doing something seriously wrong, they are entitled—everyone is entitled in the House—to expect a fair and due process to determine their innocence or guilt. That is why I certainly would not be content for a body composed only of MPs, as the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges was, to be the sole route by which we decide an MP's culpability. That is why we are looking into exactly what would be the fairest, most appropriate and most robust trigger. I shall outline those plans very soon.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): May I take the Deputy Prime Minister back from recall of MPs to the issue of recall of Governments? I am still not entirely sure that he answered the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan). I understand the point that the Deputy Prime Minister is making about there needing to be a 50 per cent. majority vote of no confidence. The issue under debate is how that would trigger a general election. Will he explain why the Government appear to have hit on a figure that bears a dramatic resemblance to their own figures and their own strength, rather than the general party balance in Parliament? Why that figure?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have already explained, and the hon. Gentleman must accept, that, clearly, there needs to be a different figure for the motion of no confidence, which stands, and the figure for dissolution—a new right for Parliament.

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

I have also explained that, when we table the legislation, we will of course ensure that no Government can fall between those two things—a motion of no confidence and a vote of dissolution. We will, as is the case in many other parliamentary systems, set out how we can avoid a limbo in which a Government do not enjoy the confidence of the House yet a vote has not taken place, or cannot take place, to dissolve Government. That is what we will do. Instead of constantly seeking to see plots around every single corner, driven by a touch of party paranoia, I ask the hon. Gentleman to relax and wait until he has seen the legislation. Then we can have the debate.

Mr Straw: Frankly, if these proposals are formed already, the Deputy Prime Minister needs, if I may say so, better to spell out how they would operate. Will he please, for the benefit of the House, explain what would happen following a vote of no confidence? Let us take as an example what happened in '79—the vote of no confidence. Everybody knew that that would trigger a general election. If there had been a 55% threshold, there could not have been a general election; there would have been limbo. What is his proposal for filling that gap?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Government are three weeks old. The right hon. Gentleman has rightly pointed out that these are very important matters. We want to get them right. I have indicated today, quite clearly, that this is not just a matter of the vote of no confidence and a threshold for a vote for dissolution, and that we need to fill in the details of the legislation to prevent what I think he is rightly concerned about, which is a Government not enjoying the confidence of the House, yet a vote of dissolution—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: I should like to make progress. I have said as much as I can and wish to say at this stage on that issue.

The power of recall is just one of a range of reforms intended to shift power directly to the British people.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): The Deputy Prime Minister knows that I approve of and support the power of recall, but I have talked to him about the scope for individual injustice in a scheme that is triggered by something that is not judicial. In his remarks about the power of recall, is he telling us that the triggering procedure, which would currently be the Privileges Committee, would become more quasi-judicial than it is now?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I can confirm that I believe it would be wrong for a Committee that, as constituted previously, is composed only of other politicians, to act as judge and jury for something as important as the trigger that would lead to a by-election and a Member losing their seat. Exactly how we could provide a fairer form of due process so that MPs are not unfairly ensnared in the mechanism of recall is the subject of reflection now. If the right hon. Gentleman or any other Member has any ideas about how we should do this, I should be grateful to hear from them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: I shall give way one more time, then I shall make progress.

Mr Tom Harris (Glasgow South) (Lab): I am grateful to the Deputy Prime Minister, who is being very generous. I do not expect that he will be able to represent the whole of the Conservative party in terms of policy, but if the Conservative party is committed to fixed-term Parliaments, can he explain why, during the general election, the Prime Minister committed his party to holding a general election within six months if the Prime Minister was removed? That is hardly compatible with a commitment to a fixed term.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The coalition agreement, which binds the Government as a whole, is very clear that we want to see fixed-term Parliaments. We will table legislation for a fixed-term Parliament. We will table a motion before the legislation is introduced to make sure that the political commitment to a fixed-term Parliament is made completely clear. There is consensus across the whole House on the virtues of fixed-term Parliaments. This is another issue on which the hon. Gentleman and so many others on the Opposition Benches, having failed to introduce this change for the past 13 years, are coming up with a series of synthetic reasons why they should oppose something that they themselves used to propose.

We also want—*[Interruption.]* I shall make progress. We want people to be able to initiate debates here in the Commons through public petitions, we want a new public reading stage for Bills, we want people to be able to instigate local referendums on issues that matter to their neighbourhoods, and we want people to decide directly if they want to change the system by which they elect their MPs, which is why there will be a referendum on the alternative vote. I will announce the date of that referendum in due course.

Electoral reform should, the Government believe, also include—

Dr Julian Lewis: I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for giving way. He will have heard the answer that the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) gave when I asked him whether it had been the case that the outgoing Labour Prime Minister had offered, during the coalition negotiations, to ram through the alternative vote without a referendum. I am not giving away any trade secrets when I say that Conservative MPs were told that that was the case. The Deputy Prime Minister is in a position to know. Were the Liberal Democrats offered by the Labour party the alternative vote without a referendum? Can he set the matter to rest?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The answer is no. The right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) was right. That was not offered by the Labour party in those discussions. The hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) is right—I should know whether it was offered or not.

Emily Thornberry: Does the right hon. Gentleman intend to address the issue of low voter registration? He may well know that on 23 February 2006 in Islington

town hall there was an attempt to increase voter registration by the Labour group, which was voted down by the Liberals. After the proposal was voted down, the leader of the Liberal council shouted across the chamber, "That's how we win elections."

The Deputy Prime Minister: We believe, as did the previous Government, that we need to introduce individual voter registration. I agree with the right hon. Member for Blackburn that that should be pursued, particularly if it is accelerated, with great care. It is a resource-intensive thing to do. We need to get it right.

The current legislation, which the right hon. Gentleman and others introduced, allows for voluntary individual voter registration to start now, with a view to moving towards a compulsory system by 2015, if I am correct. There is now an issue about whether we want to accelerate that process, but we can all agree that if we do so it must be properly resourced and organised.

I should now like to address the issue that the right hon. Gentleman raised at quite some length: the redrawing of Britain's unfair electoral boundaries. I completely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that that must be done with care, but he must agree with me that the need for care is not a reason not to act at all. The most recent boundary review in England began in 2000 and took six years to report. By the time the new constituencies were used in the general election last month, the population of one in five constituencies in England was more than 10% above or below that review's target figure of 69,900. In the most extreme case, we have one constituency that is five times the size of another. That is simply not right. It is the ultimate postcode lottery, whereby the weight of one's vote depends on where one lives, so I ask the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues to engage fully with the process as, over the coming months, Parliament has its say on an overall but modest reduction in the number of House of Commons seats.

Mr Straw: The right hon. Gentleman refers to the contrast between the Western Isles, with 22,000 people, and the Isle of Wight, with more than 100,000. I do not argue that the Isle of Wight be represented by only one Member, but does he suggest that the separate considerations that have been made for island communities, including separate seats for the Western Isles, for Orkney and for Shetland, be abandoned in favour of a strict electoral quota, as the Conservatives proposed before the election?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am not saying that there will be a rigid, arithmetical formula which—*[Interruption.]* No, there will be—*[Interruption.]* Let me finish. There will be a consistent approach towards the equalisation of constituencies throughout the nation, but of course that approach will need to accommodate some of the specific characteristics and features of the nations and regions of this country. We are now working on how we do that, and of course we will come forward with proposals.

However, I again ask the right hon. Gentleman whether he seriously thinks it acceptable that one fifth of constituencies in England are now 10% above or below the target population figure that was set when those boundaries were last reviewed? Surely he must accept that that issue requires another look, and that it is not wrong to aspire to such a House of Commons, which, in terms of the total number of MPs, is already far, far larger than was originally envisaged.

Mr Straw *rose—*

Alun Michael (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: I give way first to the right hon. Member for Blackburn.

Mr Straw: First, on the size of the House, the right hon. Gentleman will know that the number of MPs has gone down a little since 2005, and that, although the size of the House has increased by 3% in the past 50 years, the electorate for which we are responsible has increased by 25% and our work load has shot up dramatically. I regard as completely spurious his argument that there would be some net saving by reducing the total number of MPs, unless our constituents are to receive a far less good service than they receive at the moment.

Secondly, of course we will examine proposals for ensuring that the system can be speeded up, but does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, if future reviews are to be sensible and fair—*[Interruption.]* If future reviews are to be sensible and fair, they must take account of not only registered electors, but the 3.5 million people who, the Electoral Commission says, are eligible to vote but not on the register.

The Deputy Prime Minister: That is a problem, and that is exactly why the acceleration of the individual voter registration system must be done in a way that successfully addresses that problem, rather than exacerbates it.

The right hon. Gentleman and all his colleagues basically have a choice about the issue of a referendum on the alternative vote and the linked issue of a boundary review. Either he tries to see the issue—slightly neurotically—through the prism of pure party interest, whereby all he wants to do is to adopt a defensive position to protect his own party's arithmetical standing in this House, or he and his colleagues should in my view be prepared to engage with the serious issue at hand, which is that constituencies are unequal, the weight of people's votes is unequal and that that is simply not an acceptable position at a time when we have this great opportunity to renew our democracy from top to toe. That is a choice that he should make.

On everything from this matter to the 55% threshold, I would say two things. First, it is a political choice for Labour Members as to whether they want to leap straight from government, having failed to move on all these things, to outright oppositionism driven by the slightly paranoid sense that everything is targeted at them and no one else, or engage seriously in what I believe is a promising moment in our political history to reform things, and reform things for good.

Alun Michael *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: I will take one more intervention, and then make some progress.

Alun Michael: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the basic democratic right is the right to vote and that nobody can exercise that right without being registered to vote? Therefore, dealing with the 3.5 million or so individuals who are not registered to vote is not just something that comes after the sort of changes that he is seeking—it needs to be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Urgency? The right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues had 13 years to do this. How often are they going constantly to ask us to do things urgently when we have had only three weeks and they had 13 years? Of course we need to find the 3.5 million people who are not on the register, alongside the progress towards individual voter registration, but I say this to him: please do not sit there all high and mighty and pretend that we are somehow responsible for a problem that he and his colleagues in government created over the past decade.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD) *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: I will take one more intervention, and then I am genuinely going to try to make some progress.

John Thurso: I am delighted to hear that my right hon. Friend is not bound by any strict and rigid arithmetical formula, and I applaud his commitment to more equality. Within that, does he accept that the quality of service that one can give with a constituency of 3,400 square miles is dependent on the time available, which is greater in metropolitan constituencies where travel is not such an issue? Will he ensure that that aspect of rurality is taken into account in any plans that the Government have?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Clearly the job of being an MP in sparsely populated and very large rural constituencies is a great challenge, which my hon. Friend knows more about than most. That is exactly the kind of thing that we will need to take into consideration as we progress with this measure.

I should like to turn to reform of the other place, which we all agree must now happen. It should be up to the British people to elect their second Chamber—a second Chamber that must be much more representative of them, their communities and their neighbourhoods. To that end, I should like to announce the following measures. First, I have set up a committee, which I will chair, to take forward this reform, composed of Members from all three major political parties, as well as from both Houses. Secondly, the committee will be explicitly charged with producing a draft Bill by no later than the end of this year—the first time that legislation for an elected second Chamber will ever have been published. Thirdly, the draft Bill will then be subject to pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee of both Houses during which there will of course be ample opportunity for all voices to be heard.

Make no mistake: we are not starting this process from scratch. There is already significant shared ground between the parties that will be taken as our starting point. I am not going to hide my impatience for reforms that are more than 100 years overdue. Subject to the legitimate scrutiny that the Bill will deserve, this Government are determined to push through the necessary reforms to the other place. People have been talking about Lords reform for more than a century. The time for talk is over. People must be allowed to elect those who make the laws of the land. Change must begin now.

Mr Straw *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: Let me just confirm that the committee will hold its first meeting as early as next week, and that its members will be the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), who is the Minister with responsibility for political and constitutional reform; the Leader of the House of Lords; the Deputy Leader of the Lords; the shadow Leader of the Lords, the Leader of the House of Commons; the Deputy Leader of the Commons; the shadow Leader of the Commons; and, of course, the shadow Justice Secretary, to whom I give way.

Mr Straw: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for what he has said, and we will work constructively with him and his colleagues.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman.

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, I should like to make progress now.

I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Blackburn for his support, and there is something else that he can help me with. He may have heard that as part of our plans to rebalance the relationship between citizen and state, we are inviting people to tell us which unnecessary laws they believe should be repealed. The right hon. Gentleman is well placed to advise us on where to start, given that he held so many high offices of state in various Departments over many years at a time when the statute book groaned with the addition of countless new laws, regulations and offences. The process of identifying unnecessary laws is part of a broader programme to end the unjustified intrusion of the state into ordinary people's lives. Legislation has already been introduced to scrap ID cards and cancel the national identity register.

Dr McCrea: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I will not, because many other Members wish to speak in the debate and I have been very generous in giving way. I now want to allow others to have their say.

Action will follow on proper regulation of CCTV, on preventing schools from taking children's fingerprints without their parents' consent and on restoring rights to non-violent protest.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Deputy Prime Minister has just announced a major new committee

to look into the second Chamber of this Parliament, without any consultation with most of the parties in the House. He has announced that it will involve the three main London parties without any participation by or consultation with the smaller parties in the House. Is it in order for him to so brightly exclude the minority parties in the House in such a despicable way?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that his views have been heard by the House, but that is a matter for debate, not a matter of order for the Chair.

Chris Bryant: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. It has been customary in the House for the appointment of Committees to be subject to votes in the House, so it is not for the Deputy Prime Minister to announce the creation of a Committee of this House or of another place.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It is for the Government to decide what the membership of a Government committee should be, so that is a matter for debate.

Dr McCrea: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have listened carefully to your ruling that that is a point for debate, but the problem is that the Deputy Prime Minister will seemingly not be willing to debate it with those Members who are not from the three major parties.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I noted that the hon. Gentleman was seeking to intervene. Perhaps he will be able to catch Mr Speaker's eye at some later point during today's debate.

The Deputy Prime Minister: May I first remind Opposition Members that what was customary over the past 13 years was that an announcement such as this would have been made in the press before it was made in the House? At least I have come to the House. Secondly, it is totally legitimate for us to create a committee composed of the three UK-wide parties, all of which were united in having manifesto commitments at the general election to reforming the other place. As I have announced today, the draft Bill that we will publish before the end of the year—the first one on the subject in the past century or so—will be followed by proper pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee of both Houses.

Dr McCrea: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, I wish to conclude my remarks so that others can have their say.

Dr McCrea *rose—*

Lorely Burt (Solihull) (LD) *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: I feel that I have answered the hon. Member for South Antrim (Dr McCrea), so I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Lorely Burt).

Lorely Burt: I am grateful. Before my right hon. Friend concludes, may I raise a matter that has been of concern to Members in all parts of the House, which is that of extending anonymity to defendants in rape cases? Will he make a few remarks on how he sees the Government being able to incorporate the views of all Members in taking the matter forward?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Deputy Leader of the House tells me that there is an Adjournment debate about the matter tonight. It is a difficult and sensitive issue, which my hon. Friend is right to raise. It has been raised many times and I read some articles in the press about it again this morning. Everybody is united in wanting the conviction rates for rape to increase. Everybody wants more support to be provided to victims of rape so that they come forward in the first place, while also wanting to minimise the stigma attached to those who might be falsely accused. However, I want to make it clear that, although the Government have proposed the idea, we want to listen to everybody who has a stake or expertise in or insight into the matter. If our idea does not withstand sincere scrutiny, we will of course be prepared to change it.

Today is only the start of many hours of lively debate on the issues that I have mentioned, and I welcome that. We have a hugely ambitious programme to transform our constitutional and political landscape so that we achieve a better balance between Parliament and the Executive, clean, transparent politics and power handed back to people. Given the scope of that package, we will inevitably disagree about some of the detail. However, let us not lose sight of the things about which we agree. Let us not forget the scale of the damage that this Parliament needs to repair, and not take for granted the chance that our constituents have given us finally to get it right.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. An exceptionally large number of Members is trying to catch the Speaker's eye in the debate. I remind hon. Members that Mr Speaker has imposed a seven-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

5.1 pm

Alun Michael (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Given the limited time, I will concentrate on crime reduction, the work of the police and community cohesion.

The slaughter in Cumbria last week showed how difficult it is to anticipate and prevent every event, but so far politicians of every hue have wisely resisted the temptation to produce instant solutions or demand legislation. The only instant comment that I have seen was a suggestion about merging police forces. I hope that Ministers in the new Government will treat that favourite Whitehall recipe with deep suspicion. The previous Conservative police Minister, whom I shadowed in the mid-1990s, was David Maclean and he resisted an over-centralised approach. I commend his approach to the new Ministers present. The larger the force, the more remote its leaders from the community that they police. Although there is tension between dealing with terrorism and major incidents and policing local communities, good management and co-operation are the answer rather than structural change.

We had a good example of that in Cardiff on Saturday. The bigots of the English Defence League came to our city to spread hatred and division. The police had to

[Alun Michael]

handle them and those of us who marched to oppose them. They had to do that on a day when the South Africans were playing Wales at rugby, the West Indians were in town for a cricket match and the Stereophonics were performing in concert. Hundreds of police were ready for problems and I commend all the forces who sent officers to help South Wales police maintain order. I also commend the good sense and good humour with which South Wales police managed the day. In the end, a couple of dozen English Defence League members came and went, while 1,000 people of all colours and religions marched under the banner of Unite Against Fascism in a quiet, peaceful demonstration that had real authority and truly reflected Cardiff's nature as a multiracial city that is determined to maintain harmony. We want to celebrate difference and value each other's strengths instead of looking for division. The police lead showed that they get that point.

My second home truth from Cardiff is the success of our violence reduction project. It is not led by police or politicians, but by a medic, Professor Jonathan Shepherd, an A and E specialist, who brought his skills as a scientist to an analysis of violence. Basically, he asked why the number and seriousness of injuries in car accidents were decreasing while injuries from violence were increasing. Over more than a decade, painstaking analysis has revealed a lot about violence in our city—things about which we thought we knew, but did not. Joint work by the NHS, the police and other agencies through the local crime reduction partnership has worked—measured not by police statistics or arrests, but by a drop of more than 40% in the number of victims coming to A and E for treatment. That is a real drop.

We need such a scientific approach to crime and policing, and I commend to Ministers the report on justice reinvestment that was published by the Select Committee on Justice a few months ago. Good work is being done by the police, Crown prosecutors and prison officers, but our report showed the need for better co-ordination and greater co-operation across agencies, both inside and outside the criminal justice system.

Too great a focus on agency priorities and targets blurs the clarity of purpose to which all parts of the criminal justice system ought to contribute. In particular, the Sentencing Guidelines Council needs clearly to focus on the extent and gravity of reoffending. I hope that Ministers in the new Government will require great clarity of purpose from that body, which is dominated by judges. I am not sure that that is a good thing, because as Victim Support told the Committee very clearly in its evidence, other than not to have been victims in the first place, victims want confidence that they will not become victims again in future. That must be our purpose in this House.

I am proud to have played a part in drawing up the Gangmasters (Licensing) Act 2004. That measure made life hard for the bad guys and avoided burdening the good guys with bureaucracy, and it has worked, so I commend to Ministers the idea of extending its remit beyond agriculture and food packaging to industries such as construction and catering. The temptation for Ministers—and indeed for Members of Parliament—is to legislate when we see a problem, but that is not always the right answer. The challenge is to design legislation that works. As Gibbon warns in "The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire", laws rarely prevent what they forbid.

I urge Ministers to heed that warning in relation to the growing issue of internet-related crime. There is a consensus that teamwork is the answer, with the Government working with industry, MPs of all parties and civil society to design out internet-related crime. The United Kingdom has led the world on internet governance. If that term puts people off, may I point out that the governance of banks seemed boring and esoteric before everything went pear-shaped? Governance matters. A partnership approach is vital, because the internet is so fast-changing, chameleon-like and universal that traditional legislative approaches will not work. There is not the time.

Let us promote a co-operative approach to internet safety as well as to the more mundane aspects of criminal activity in our local communities. What counts is what works—what counts is what reduces crime and the number of people who are made victims. The partnership approach works, and I commend it to Ministers and the House as the right approach.

5.8 pm

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): With only seven minutes, I must be brief on the issues I want to raise.

The Deputy Prime Minister will not be surprised that I am a strong supporter of much of his great repeal Bill which, after all, is the natural conclusion of the great battle over freedom that has taken place in the past five years. I hope that that Bill represents a step change not only in the law, but in attitudes in the Government, so that they will not think that in order to catch the guilty, we must punish the innocent, or that to prevent terrorism and crime, we must treat the whole country as suspects. If that step change happens, it will augur well for the future.

It is a paradox that the new politics is ushering in a return to some ancient rights. The reform of the libel laws re-establishes freedom of speech; the reform of freedom of information re-establishes open government; and reform of the DNA database re-establishes the presumption of innocence. In addition, the prevention of unnecessary intercepts, along with measures against the retention of data and the proposals on CCTV, re-establishes privacy. All those are worth while, and by themselves would justify the existence of the coalition if nothing else did.

Of the three pillars of our national traditions—liberty, justice and democracy—those proposals support the first two, so I offer two cheers for the great repeal Bill, not three. The reason for two rather than three cheers is that some things are missing from it. There is nothing on those great blots on our judicial landscape, by which I mean, first, the use of secret trials in which suspects—usually, but not always, terrorist suspects—are tried without knowing the allegations or the evidence against them, which is completely inimical to British law. That was introduced by the previous Government and I hope that this Government will remove it.

There is nothing yet on control orders—another measure inimical to British traditions, using house arrest and effective internal exile for suspects rather than for the

convicted. There is still nothing yet—I hope we will see it and I hope that the Home Secretary will respond to the point when she concludes the debate—on reduction of the 28-day period for which prisoners can be held without charge. We fought over 42 and 90 days, but 28 is still too many, and I hope that the Government will take that on board. I trust that these are deferrals, not oversights, by the Government.

Another issue for the Government to think about in connection with the great repeal Bill is the need to revisit the Digital Economy Act 2010. It was passed in the final stages of the previous Parliament, and it was an error for us to allow it through, as we did in the wash-up.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Davis: I think I have only a minute left, so I ask the hon. Gentleman please to be quick.

Mark Lazarowicz: Like the right hon. Gentleman, I voted against the Digital Economy Bill on Third Reading, before Dissolution. Given that the Liberal Democrats also voted against that Bill being given a Third Reading and given that the Secretary of State now responsible for that measure is indeed a Liberal Democrat—the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable)—would it not be particularly appropriate for the Liberal Democrats now to act on this issue in the way that both the right hon. Gentleman and I would like?

Mr Davis: The hon. Gentleman restates my wish for the Government to take that issue on board. I hope that they do, and that they do so in the great repeal Bill as part of a process that the Deputy Prime Minister quite rightly laid out—a process in which the Government were listening for proposals on things to be repealed.

The trouble with the Queen's Speech from my point of view rather coincides, I am afraid, with some of the comments made by the shadow Lord Chancellor, particularly when he quoted from an article that I wrote for the newspapers about the 55% proposal. Indeed, I have problems with three elements of the proposed Bill. One element is the alternative vote, which is no surprise; one is the issue of recall, which I believe the Deputy Prime Minister has gone some way to meeting. However, the 55% requirement is undoubtedly a significant constitutional change. We cannot sidestep that fact. It was not in a manifesto, so the proposal is, by definition, likely to be ill thought through and to require greater consideration by the House.

The issue has been represented as one that is a necessity for fixed-term Parliaments. I am in favour of fixed-term Parliaments and I have absolutely no problem with the Prime Minister giving up his right to call an election at any point in time. He can do that and I am happy that he has done so; it is entirely proper. By contrast, altering the circumstances under which Parliament can dismiss a failing Government is a massive constitutional change, which goes to the heart of Parliament's ability to hold Government to account. One of the leitmotifs of this Government, I hope, will be giving Parliament more powers, not fewer. Such a major change would normally involve prior consultation, a prior manifesto commitment, a White Paper and ideally both the acquiescence of the Opposition and a referendum. That is the sort of pattern that should precede a major change in the constitution.

Let us think about what the proposal entails and whether we can give it the sort of scrutiny and reform that it needs. For a start, it has not been very clearly explained and it may have changed to some extent in the course of negotiations, but it is basically in two component parts. One part—and I do not think that the shadow Lord Chancellor understood this—is that a vote of confidence will still exist at 50% plus one. What usually happens now under such circumstances is that the royal prerogative is exercised to judge whether to have a Dissolution thereafter or to allow a reforming of some other Government. That is the current situation. What is being proposed, I think, is replacing that system with a Scottish-type situation under which if, 28 days after a vote of confidence, no Government can be formed, Dissolution will then automatically occur. That is my understanding of the proposal as it now stands, and it is based on what happens in the Scottish Parliament. However, I have to say—and the Scottish nats will have to forgive me—that the Scottish Parliament does not represent an independent state. For the Scottish First Minister not to exist, or to be a lame duck or retired and not replaced for 28 days, would be a problem for Scotland, but it would not be a disaster internationally.

The nature of confidence votes is that they happen only four times a century. That is the first point. Secondly, confidence votes almost always happen under circumstances of crisis—wars, depressions, breakdowns in society. Under such circumstances, for us not to have an effective Prime Minister for 28 days seems untenable. Let me say to the Deputy Prime Minister that I hope those on the Front Bench will take that point on board, because as it stands, what is proposed is not a zombie Government, but at least a zombified country for 28 days, and possibly at a difficult time.

What is the other part—the 55%—for? It is for dissolving the House without the embarrassment of a vote of confidence and for the Executive, effectively, to use their power—their whipping capability—to dissolve the House. That does not seem to be a proper thing for us to do as a Government. It is not the sort of approach that I would expect from the new politics, frankly. That is why I have some sympathy for the suspicious view that says, "Why 55% and not 66%?", when the Government have 56 or 57% of the vote. That approach diminishes the proposals and it diminishes the Bills that the Government are bringing before the House. In truth, I would like to see my Government—because that is how I see them: as very much representing my views—putting that aside and recognising that it is something that the House will not take.

5.16 pm

Hazel Blears (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): I am a little worried that the new politics might be encapsulated by the fact that I find myself in agreement with the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), and particularly on the 55% rule. Perhaps that is a sign of how we will go forward.

I am a little worried by the debate today, because there has been no mention of what is supposed to be one of the coalition Government's fundamental propositions:

[Hazel Blears]

the ideas that have been set out about the big society. The issues that have been discussed today—high-level constitutional reform, reform of the second Chamber, boundary changes, the right to look at alternative voting systems—will merit discussion, and I have no doubt that, in endless sittings in this Parliament, as has happened previously, we will go over that ground. I hope that we will resolve some of those issues in the next period. However, unless those high-level constitutional changes are underpinned by empowered citizens who really feel connected with their political system, we will end up talking to ourselves, and we have done that for far too long in previous Parliaments.

I sought guidance from Mr Speaker about when I could raise issues to do with the big society. In five days of debate on the Queen's Speech, there has been no appropriate point at which those issues could be properly debated. That worries me enormously, because those issues are not easy to solve, but they should be permeating every Department, and they should become cross-departmental. I want to say a few words about how important it is to reconnect ordinary people with the political process at local and central Government level.

The issues that will be important for us fall into three categories. In the time that I have this evening, I want to set out three big tests for the Government. If they are really serious about the big society and about how reconnecting people with politics is about establishing trust and establishing a new relationship between politicians and the people in this country, they will have to make that real, because otherwise the whole agenda will be rhetorical. It might be full of great slogans and great ideas, but unless there are three things in place, it will simply not work.

The first test for the Government that I would like to set out is on funding. It is all very well to talk about involving people in decision making, or about having a new big society bank, as I think it is called, and community organisers active in every part of the country, but how much money will be in the big society bank, for instance? Nobody is telling us where the funds will be available. Why do the 5,000 new community organisers have to raise their own salaries and their own funding? We have genuine concerns, in that if the idea of connecting people to politics, sharing power, devolving power and involving citizens is to be made real, the funding has to be put in place. However, I am very sceptical indeed that the Government will prioritise the funding to enable that to happen in the current financial climate. I therefore seek some reassurance from the Government on that point.

The second serious test is whether there is a proper framework for setting out the ideas around the big society. Are the Government going to say to local government in particular that it has a responsibility to devolve power to citizens and neighbourhood organisations, to people who want to take over assets and run services in their communities? That will be a big political test. Are the Government prepared to create not just a national framework, but a local framework that works?

The third test concerns fairness. There is a massive gap between the capacity of people in better-off, more affluent areas and people in poorer areas to step forward and take positions of responsibility. I do not think for a moment that that disparity should be used in a patronising way—that it should be suggested that poorer people cannot do that—but our Government must give an absolute commitment to providing the capacity building, the funds, the support and the organisation that will enable people from those communities to take advantage of some of the devolutionary powers that will be created.

The issues involved in those three tests—funding, a proper framework, and fairness—are the issues on which the Government's real commitment to devolution and involving people in their communities ought to be judged.

I want to be a constructive critic of this agenda. It is something in which I have believed throughout the 30 years that I have been involved in politics, but I know from engagement in my own community that it is not easy. We cannot simply shout the slogans about community engagement and hope that people will step up to the plate. We must back them up. We must say that ours is a long-term commitment, and that we will not move the goalposts halfway through the process when people have given their own time, commitment and, in many instances, their own resources and money to make projects work in their communities.

I think that this issue, just as much as the big, high-level constitutional issues, will be the test of whether we are really serious about new politics. New politics is about trust, but at the moment hundreds of thousands of people in the country feel utterly excluded from the political process. They do not know where the levers are, or what they should press to make things work. How can they ensure that the projects that are important to them come to fruition?

We miss a huge opportunity if we simply talk to ourselves about how we will rearrange the constitution. The way in which we run our democracy is hugely important, but unless it is underpinned by people who are genuinely empowered and feel that they can make a difference, that the Government are taking them seriously, and that local government is prepared to support them with money and practical help so that they can turn their projects into reality, we shall break that trust.

There is nothing worse than setting people up to fail. This whole area has been littered with the shattered dreams of people who have stepped forward and been prepared to put their families and communities on the line. They have not been given backing, and their projects have foundered. I do not want ever to see that happen again. We need a real commitment to building a big society in which citizens have more power and influence over things that matter to their lives. This will be an incredibly important test of the Government's commitment to ensuring that they really mean what they say—that it is not just words, slogans and rhetoric—and that they really mean to make a difference.

5.23 pm

Mrs Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak after the right hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Hazel Blears). I am sure that she means what she says; I am sure that she wants to see the changes of which she spoke, in her constituency and throughout the country. It is just a great pity that the Government of whom she was a member for 13 years spent all the money. She says that we have ideas for the big society, but the money is not there to do it. She is right. The

money is not there because of the mismanagement of her colleagues for the past decade and a bit, and the country must remember that.

I want to make three brief points about constitutional reform. The first concerns the electoral system itself. As the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw)—I am so used to calling him the Lord Chancellor—rightly said, some good and worthwhile changes are already in the pipeline. Individual voter registration is a very important change, because it will improve the integrity and the comprehensiveness of the electoral register. It will also improve the accuracy of the ballot. However, other matters also need to be dealt with.

We need a total overhaul of the electoral system, as we discovered during the debacle about the timing of counts at general elections. I am glad to say that once again the right hon. Gentleman and I are in complete agreement on that: I tried, and he succeeded, in changing the law on it just before the general election. We discovered that there is no clear line of accountability for returning officers. That is wrong. We also discovered at the general election the disgrace of people being denied the vote as the polls closed at 10 pm. That occurred partly because many returning officers think they are a law unto themselves. Under the current system, it is impossible to ensure consistency. This matter requires attention, and when the Government bring forward proposals on it—as I am sure they will—they will have support from both sides of the House.

Mr Straw: I rise just to put it on record that, yes, it was I who legislated for early counts wherever possible, but that that was on the basis of amendments that the hon. Lady had moved and it would not have happened without them. I entirely accept what she says about the lack of accountability of electoral registration officers and returning officers and the need for change, but does she accept that ring-fencing of the funding for electoral administration would inevitably go with that—that is a conclusion that I reluctantly came to—and that whatever other arguments there might be about ring-fencing, we have to see this as part of a national system?

Mrs Laing: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point, and it gives me great pleasure to be able to say for the first time in a long time what I actually personally think, because as a Back Bencher I am bound by no collective responsibility. I agree with him entirely. I personally believe that those funds will have to be ring-fenced and not simply put into the local government pot, because some local authorities, such as Epping Forest district council, handle these matters extremely well, whereas others do not do so quite so well. I therefore agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the funds will have to be ring-fenced, and also that that review of the electoral system must be undertaken as a matter of urgency.

The issue of a fair electoral system is also important. There has been much talk this afternoon about the alternative vote or AV, but there is a far more glaring anomaly, because as the right hon. Gentleman mentioned in his remarks—I think I mean my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, although that is also quite difficult to say—constituencies should, of course, be of the same size. Every vote cast in a general election should be of equal weight and value. Some Opposition Members talked about the size of certain constituencies in terms of square miles, yet we are elected to represent not pieces of land but people. What matters is the number of people in a constituency, not its geographical size. Every vote should be of equal value, but the argument over the alternative vote is a red herring—

Chris Bryant: A yellow herring.

Mrs Laing: Yes, I will accept that. AV would not create fairness; it would be even less proportional than first past the post. I ask the House to consider this: why should someone who supports a minority party effectively get two votes in an election, whereas someone who votes for a mainstream party have only one vote? More importantly, although I understand why my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench have agreed to a referendum on AV, the facts have not changed since we debated this matter only a few weeks ago, as the right hon. Member for Blackburn said. A referendum will cost in the region of £80 million. How many special needs teachers, how many cancer nurses, could we employ for £80 million? How many serious matters could be dealt with in this country for £80 million—matters of far greater importance in the current economic climate than arguing about how people are elected? The fact is that the British people do not care about or want a referendum on AV. If they did, they would have voted for it. Far more people said at the general election "I don't agree with Nick" than said that they do.

The third point concerns the principle of fixed-term Parliaments, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) dealt with extremely well. The general election has changed the political picture, but it has not changed the constitutional principle. I cannot speak here today from the Government Back Benches and say something fundamentally different from what I said at the Opposition Dispatch Box only a few weeks ago. My principles have not changed and I do not believe that the constitutional principles of this House should change. I am very concerned about the proposed imposition of a 55% threshold, which takes power away from Parliament and gives it to the Government. Perhaps I will be persuaded in due course, but principle does matter. It is the duty of elected Members of this House to do not what is popular but what is right.

5.32 pm

Mrs Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech today. It is a delight to follow the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs Laing).

I should like to begin with a few words about a young woman, Ashleigh Hall, who lived in my constituency. Ashleigh was 17 years old and lived in the ward that I represented on Darlington borough council—I was lead member for children's services—when she made one fatal error in her life. She was groomed on Facebook by Peter Chapman, who, it transpired, was a 33-year-old registered sex offender from Merseyside.

Peter Chapman, I later discovered through the trial, had absconded from his home in Merseyside, and it appears that Merseyside police were aware of this. I also learned that there was no obligation on Peter Chapman to register his credentials and his identity online, and that any breach of an obligation to do that would be met with no action whatsoever. I wrote to my

[Mrs Jenny Chapman]

right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) about this at the time, and I commend his efforts to get the law changed. I hope that the Government will continue those efforts and will ensure that registered sex offenders are obliged to register who they are online, and that any such breaches will be taken as seriously as those involving their hanging around outside school gates.

I want also to say a few words about my predecessor, Mr Alan Milburn. Alan was elected to Parliament for the first time in 1992, bucking the national trend by taking Darlington for Labour from the Conservative, the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Michael Fallon), as he now is. Alan was a fierce campaigner for Darlington and the north-east, speaking in his maiden speech about the need for investment in skills, education and support for business in our region. Alan spoke powerfully against the proposed Tory cuts of the day in training for young people. It is hard not to make similar comments today regarding cuts to the future jobs fund.

Alan served the Darlington constituency for 18 years. His achievements include campaigning for the repeal of the unjust "year and a day" rule in murder cases, and working to bring a new university centre to Darlington. Alan also served the country as Secretary of State for Health where, using his understanding of the practicalities of modern life, he introduced NHS Direct, devolved power to localities through primary care trusts and ended the disgrace of deaths among people who had spent 18 months or more on waiting lists for heart operations. Above all else in his political life, Alan worked to make sure that we are rewarded according to who we are, not what we are. Alan believes in social mobility, fair access to the professions and encouraging access to higher education for everyone, regardless of their background. It is, therefore, no coincidence that Darlington is to be home to a new university centre, which is to be run by Teesside university, this year's university of the year.

Innovation, entrepreneurship and ingenuity are no strangers to Darlington. My constituency is the birthplace of the railways and home of the first national newspaper, *The Northern Echo*. Darlington is where the world's first black professional footballer, Arthur Wharton, got his break and where a local entrepreneur is campaigning to build a statue in his honour. Darlington people are single-minded; they voted "no" to Tesco, no to an elected mayor and no, this time, to Tory cuts to our school-building programme, the police, health and jobs.

I have helped young people in Darlington to establish a new charity to organise live music events. Now in its third year, Newblood Live regularly attracts more than 200 young people a fortnight. Beauty and the Bike is an international, Darlington-based initiative that encourages young women to take up cycling. First Stop works with some of the most disadvantaged people in our town—people who are homeless and often suffer from problems with alcohol and drug abuse. The Darlington rape crisis centre works quietly with women who have suffered violence and abuse. Resident-led community partnerships work in many areas, and our local council for voluntary service, eVOLution, is there to help third sector groups and volunteers to improve. Our citizens advice bureau and newly formed credit union work to provide affordable credit and debt advice to those who need it. I agree with the Government that the voluntary and community sectors have a great deal to offer in delivering services and regenerating communities, but the Government need to understand that it is worklessness, above all other causes, that leads to the exhaustion, isolation and loss of hope in our communities.

The story of the north-east is not over. Our proud industrial heritage strengthens our potential for future success, and new technologies are thriving in the north-east. Thanks in no small part to support from our regional development agency, One NorthEast, we have grasped opportunities to compete globally in new energy production, green manufacturing and digital technology, thus bringing new jobs and skills to my region. That has happened not by chance, but thanks to the ability of our businesses, councils, colleges and universities to work together.

Darlington companies such as AMEC, Cummins, Marchday and Northgate all show what a great place the north-east is to do business, but to stay ahead we need, above all else, to keep on improving the skills of our people. Darlington is fortunate to have two outstanding colleges and its schools have some of the fastest-improving results in the country. Those have been achieved despite the fact that three of our secondary school buildings are in a serious state of disrepair: Branksome, Longfield and Hurworth schools have lost days of education because of heating failures, gas leaks and floods. I am delighted that they have been successful in getting to the heart of the Building Schools for the Future programme, and I encourage this coalition Government to stick to the agreement that we made with the community in Darlington to rebuild those schools.

5.38 pm

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech to the House, and I am delighted to be the first to congratulate the hon. Member for Darlington (Mrs Chapman) on her maiden speech.

I wish to start by paying tribute to my predecessor, Lynda Waltho, who was a conscientious constituency MP and a powerful advocate for our area's many voluntary and charitable organisations, more of which later. She was a teacher by profession and she used her knowledge of that profession, and of children, to champion the causes of education and the needs of children, particularly those from our most deprived communities. She also served as a member of the Select Committee on Children, Schools and Families.

My constituency lies on the border of north Worcestershire and the old industrial black country. For many years, people have argued about where exactly the black country lies, and I am pleased that, thanks to our local Black Country chamber of commerce and others, we finally have the black country delineated on the Ordnance Survey map. I am very proud to represent the old black country towns of Lye, Quarry Bank and Cradley, as well as the townships that make up modern-day Stourbridge.

Lye, Quarry Bank and Cradley have a very proud industrial past of forging, nail-making and chain-making, but it is really the glass industry for which Stourbridge is best known. I was delighted to be invited to 10 Downing street a few weeks ago for drinks. It was my first visit

and I was proud to see all the glass, candelabra and chandeliers on display, many of which would have been made in Stourbridge. I gather that there is also some fine work on display in Buckingham palace and the Mansion House that was made by the famous Stourbridge firms, Stourbridge Glass, Webb Corbett and Stuart Crystal.

The people of Stourbridge are proud not just of our wealth creation, but our long tradition of philanthropy. I would like to pick out one individual who inspired me as a relative newcomer to Stourbridge. He is buried in the church of St Mary's in Old Swinford, near where I like to walk my dog. Ernest Stevens died in the year I was born, aged 100. He was the son of a miner, and tragedy struck him when he lost his young wife in childbirth. He created a vast fortune through hard work and ingenuity in the manufacture of pots, pans, baths and kettles. He responded to his wife's death by acting in the interests of the town, donating vast sums of money, land and civic buildings. We have our Mary Stevens hospice and many parks and areas of natural beauty thanks to him and that philanthropy. The strength of our voluntary and charitable sector is a testimony to that philanthropy, and we have many such organisations. I should like to speak up for Age Concern in Stourbridge, where many thousands of older people go, 364 days a year. It is absolutely remarkable what that organisation achieves.

Social change has been paramount in Stourbridge. The Muslim community arrived from Pakistan in the 1950s. I have done much work with that community and others, and I am very proud to represent the community in Lye with all that it represents to us.

We are very proud, in Stourbridge, of our industrial history, and there is sometimes a tinge of regret at what many see as its passing, but of course it has not all passed. Many firms and manufacturing and engineering companies are still doing wonderful work in our constituency, but many people have suffered in the transition, and there are now families in which no one works and generations of people live on state benefits. That cannot go on. There is a rising sense of injustice among people who work—many for low pay—and those who have worked their whole lives and are now on state pensions. The Prime Minister is saying today that there is much pain on the way. I feel very strongly that the people of Stourbridge will face up to the very difficult decisions that the Government and local authorities are going to have to take in coming years. The people of the black country and Stourbridge hold on to certain basic truths that are not just old-fashioned notions that can simply be cast aside—for example, that one should never borrow what one cannot pay back, that we should not foster a culture in which people are led to expect something for nothing, and that, in the more elegant prose of Abraham Lincoln:

> "You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves."

Finally, as a Christian country, and indeed a country of many faiths, we should always look after those who cannot look after themselves. During my time of service in the House, I will work to reflect those enduring values for my constituents in Stourbridge. I am so proud to represent Stourbridge, and I am deeply grateful to my constituents for giving me this opportunity.

5.45 pm

Paul Murphy (Torfaen) (Lab): May I say how much I enjoyed the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Margot James)? She was extremely generous to her Labour predecessor. Her speech was compassionate and I am sure we shall hear a great deal from her in the months and years ahead. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mrs Chapman) on the things she said about her predecessor, my old colleague Alan Milburn. Both hon. Ladies have a tremendous career before them.

I am not quite so sure about the third maiden speech I heard this afternoon—the one made by the Deputy Prime Minister from the Treasury Bench. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw), I agreed with some of the right hon. Gentleman's remarks. The Deputy Prime Minister seemed pretty convinced about the alternative vote, but the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs Laing) probably represents the true feeling of the Conservative party. Anybody who heard what Liberal Democrat spokespeople said about our proposals for a referendum on the alternative vote some months ago would hardly have found them encouraging. Only the Labour manifesto proposed the alternative vote, so this conversion is very welcome.

The Deputy Prime Minister was a bit ungenerous about what the Labour Government did on constitutional reform over 13 years. After all, we brought in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Human Rights Act 1998. We almost completely abolished hereditary peers in the other place. By the way, I believe that the minority parties should be involved in discussions about the House of Lords. My name is not on any ballot paper this week, but I agree with what has been said on that issue.

We brought devolution to Scotland and London and, in my own field of ministerial responsibility, there was devolution for a Welsh Assembly and the establishment of the Assembly in Northern Ireland. Those huge constitutional changes were brought about by the last Government, so the Deputy Prime Minister's references to 1832 are a bit daft and do not accurately reflect the history of the last 150 to 200 years.

A million years ago, I was taught by Michael Brock, who wrote the best book on the Great Reform Act of 1832. He wrote about the Bill's passage through Parliament and how the then Whig—Liberal—Government wanted to stuff the House of Lords with extra peers to get their way. They tried to do the same thing in 1911, probably for the best reasons. However, the Deputy Prime Minister simply did not answer the points made to him today about the number of people he and his friend the Prime Minister intend to put into the House of Lords. That is a huge issue that we must all address in the days to come.

My right hon. Friend the shadow Justice Secretary rightly referred to the fact that for all those 13 years Labour could have packed the House of Lords, but did not. That was right. Only in 2005 did Labour have the biggest vote, although not the majority, in the House of Lords. Our Government were defeated in the other place 528 times between 1997 and 2010. No Government should have an overall majority in the House of Lords. They could be the biggest party, but not with an overall majority. That issue, together with how this House

[Paul Murphy]

decides on a vote of confidence, is something that the House of Lords in its capacity as guardian of the constitution should examine in huge detail in the months ahead. I was not convinced by the arguments for 55%. I do not think that people outside—whether academics, political people or the ordinary man in the street—believe it either. I am told that at least 8,000 people on Facebook have already said that they disagree with the 55% proposal for a vote of confidence.

As for boundaries, the proposal for equal electoral districts is okay, so far as it goes, but it would be impossible to have absolute, rigid electoral districts. In Wales, for example, that would produce huge—mostly Liberal, by the way—constituencies in our rural areas that Members of Parliament would find it impossible to manage. Similarly, in south Wales, people can look at a map and draw lines, but those maps ignore the valleys, the mountains and the geography. The Government have made no attempt, so far as I know, to talk to the Welsh Assembly or the Welsh Assembly Government about these changes. The reality is that changing the boundaries and composition of parliamentary constituencies has a direct effect on how the Welsh Assembly is elected, as indeed it does in Scotland.

The necessity for wide-ranging reforms is a case that cannot, could not and should not be ignored, but the way that the Government have done it is a bit clumsy and calculated. They have a big job of work ahead of them to convince the people of our country that these proposals are not about rigging, gerrymandering or fiddling the rules to keep themselves in office. This is not new politics, but bad politics of the oldest kind.

5.51 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker for inviting me to make my maiden speech. I congratulate the hon. Member for Darlington (Mrs Chapman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Margot James) on their impassioned speeches on behalf of their constituents. Having spent some 24 years in local government and made three previous attempts to join the House, I think that I have served my apprenticeship, but little did I think that it would take me 25 years to make this speech. I hope that it will be worth waiting for.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Tony McNulty, who served the House for 13 years as a diligent Member for Harrow East and 11 years prior to that as a councillor in the area. He rose through the Labour party's ranks to government and high office and eventually to become the Minister for London, and I am glad to say that that is one of the positions that we have abolished in this new Administration. I have served as a local councillor in coalitions, Mr Mayor—Mr Deputy Speaker; a Freudian slip—and I have spent the past four years in coalition with the Liberal Democrats. That demonstrates that going from one place to another is not such a big step after all.

I speak on behalf of my constituents and pay tribute to my constituency, from the great beauty of Old Redding in the north to the deprivation of Wealdstone in the south, from the opportunity areas of Edgware in the east to the tradition and history of Harrow Weald in the west. Harrow West abuts the constituency. Harrow East is the most diverse constituency in the country. We have 22 churches—not only of the Anglican and Catholic faith, but the Greek Orthodox church as well, to the south of the constituency. We have two Hindu temples, two synagogues, an Islamic centre and, indeed, the first Hindu state-sponsored primary school in the country. Some 35,000 residents stem from the state of Gujarat in India. There is a broad swathe of Muslim population, some 15,000 Jewish people and a range of people who come from every country on the planet, including some 5,000 European Union citizens who have come from the new emerging states.

This Government will do one thing of vital importance for all those people: restore civil liberties in this country. The threat of identity cards, the threat of being detained for 28 days without charge, and the huge amounts of data on individual people who are innocent of any crime kept on police DNA databases—the police state that has started to grow in this country—will be swept away. I believe that that is something for which people who are relatively new to this country will feel immensely grateful. Indeed, right across my constituency, there is a demand for better policing, better law and order and a more consistent approach to that whole process. There is also great demand in the constituency for more schools, and better schools as well. I look forward to them being set up under this Administration.

I intend very firmly to hold the new Government to account on the promises made before the election to ensure that the Royal National Orthopaedic hospital in the north of my constituency is rebuilt to the standards that everyone expects. That hospital is a national treasure, with people doing brilliant work in sub-standard conditions—standards that should not be accepted in the modern world. I look forward to that rebuilding starting in 2012. I also look forward to the opportunity of safeguarding Northwick Park hospital, which, of course, has been under threat, with the potential closures in north-west London under the previous Administration.

I am very proud and privileged to represent the people of Harrow East, and I have set out my course of action over this Parliament to be their representative here, speaking up for them at every opportunity, not to be the House's representative in Harrow. I intend to make sure that those people who depend on me will have a stern, very fierce advocate on their behalf.

5.56 pm

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): It is a great privilege to be called in this important debate to make my maiden speech and to be the first to congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) on his wonderful maiden speech, his description of the multicultural Mecca of Harrow and his generous comments about his predecessor, Tony McNulty, which many Labour Members share. Let me pay my tribute to my esteemed predecessor, Mark Fisher, who sat in the House for 27 years and conscientiously, effectively and passionately represented the interests of Stoke-on-Trent Central.

Mark's connections to the Potteries began, improbably enough, when he was writing film scripts in Staffordshire Moorlands—an ambitious venture at the best of times in California, even more so in the Roaches of north Staffordshire. He then stood for Staffordshire Moorlands

and was selected to succeed Bob Cant in Stoke-on-Trent—all the while as an old Etonian son of a Tory MP. People in the Potteries are, as I have discovered, enormously forgiving of one's past.

Mark's maiden speech to the House in 1983 was a heartfelt lament at the state of the national health service in north Staffordshire owing to sustained underfunding. He spoke of old buildings, outdated operating theatres, waiting lists for general and orthopaedic surgery of more than 12 months. Now, after 13 years of good Labour Government, that decline has been reversed and Stoke-on-Trent has a brand new £370 million university teaching hospital, springing up around the old City General—it is the first new hospital for 130 years. In addition, we have new GP surgeries, walk-in centres and marked improvements in public health.

Mark was also highly active in the House, working closely with Tony Wright on reforms to the workings of Parliament, the all-party parliamentary history group, which, in a different incarnation, I once had the pleasure to address and was mildly surprised at the intimate knowledge of the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) of dialectical materialism and the life of Friedrich Engels.

Mark also made a contribution to the management of the art collection in the palace. He was, indeed, an Arts Minister in 1997 and formed part of the heroic team in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport that delivered a great Labour pledge of free entry to Britain's museums for the people of Britain. As his successor, I will be watching closely the incoming Administration's commitment to honour that pledge. It is now my great privilege to take up his place in Parliament.

In an excellent maiden speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Chris Williamson) made an ambitious play for his city being the birthplace of the industrial revolution. While I am a deep admirer of the Derby silk mill and the Derby arboretum, and even the Derwent valley, we all know that the historic, earth-shattering event—the dawn of modernity, the dawn of industrialisation—began in my constituency with the opening of Josiah Wedgwood's factory in Etruria, near Shelton, in 1769. Since the 1770s, Stoke-on-Trent has become the premier global brand-name for ceramics.

In a recent programme of his excellent series "A History of the World in 100 Objects", British Museum director Neil MacGregor described the fact that

> "human history is told and written in pots... more than in anything else."

He went on to quote Robert Browning:

> "Time's wheel runs back or stops; potter and clay endure."

At the heart of the English enlightenment, and indeed global civilisation, Stoke-on-Trent makes its place in history, but out of the six towns has emerged more than just pottery—from the rise of primitive Methodism to the works of Arnold Bennett, from the football of Stanley Matthews to the lyricism of Robbie Williams and the social justice politics of Jack Ashley.

The area has also faced profound challenges, and to be frank, globalisation has knocked the north Staffs economy sideways. Cheap labour in east Asia sparked a freefall in ceramics employment, the steel industry could not compete with China or India, and Michael Heseltine did for the last of our coal mines.

This process of economic dislocation—when "All That Is Solid Melts Into Air"—has by no means ended, but there are signs of hope. A vibrant university quarter is springing up around Staffordshire university. Onshoring is seeing the return of ceramics jobs to Stoke-on-Trent, while a new generation of designer-makers, led by the likes of Emma Bridgewater, are creating high-value, high-design, locally rooted companies. The Portmeirion business, which produces the iconic Spode designs, is successfully growing from its Stoke base, exporting to Europe, America and South Korea.

However, we have much to do in rebuilding our engineering supply chain, raising skills levels across the constituency and exploiting the human capital of Stoke-on-Trent. While we welcome the Government's commitment to rebalancing the British economy, perhaps the best way to do that is not to begin by cutting the regional development agency funds or the Building Schools for the Future programme.

My seat is an old if not ancient one. It has a proud pedigree. Born of the Great Reform Act of 1832, of which the Deputy Prime Minister is now such a student, it was first represented in this place by Josiah Wedgwood, the son of the potter. Wedgwood was a liberal—in the proper sense of the word. Like his father, he was committed to the abolitionist cause and was a stalwart of the anti-slavery movement. It was a great pleasure to have seen that spirit reawaken in the general election this year as my constituents sent the racist, reactionary and frequently criminal British National party packing.

However, Stoke-on-Trent also knows that change has to be matched with continuity, and my constituents share a deep apprehension over the Government's ill-thought-out plans for constitutional reform. They want to know that when a Government fail to win a vote of confidence, Parliament can be dissolved by 50% plus one vote, rather than the absurdity of the 55% self-protecting ordinance.

Then we come to the five-year Parliament—again, a retrospective, constitutional fix to get this Government through some muddy waters, and that is before we get on to flooding of the House of Lords with new Members, redrawing the boundaries, leaving 3.2 million voters off the register and underfunding the individual registration scheme. However, my hon. Friends and I will come back to those issues in the coming weeks. In the meantime, I simply thank the House for the indulgence of this, my maiden speech, on the Gracious Speech.

6.4 pm

Mr Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me at this point in the debate. I beg the patience of the House in making my maiden speech, and pay tribute to and commend the maiden speeches made by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

For new Members such as me, this is a humbling experience. For me, it is especially daunting, as my predecessor, Ian Taylor, did such a good job over the past 23 years that when he announced his retirement last year, *The Times* described the constituency as

> "the closest thing to paradise in the UK".

Ian set the bar high. He promoted our diverse local enterprise. He fought for our community hospitals, which are cherished in Walton, Molesey and Cobham,

[Mr Dominic Raab]

and he promoted local charities, from the inspiring philanthropic legacy at Whiteley retirement village to more modest but no less vital groups such as Lower Green Community Association—the "little platoons" that define our local civic spirit, which we must revive and empower across Britain today.

Ian Taylor's contribution to national life was no less important, particularly as Science and Technology Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry from 1994 to 1997. He pioneered free trade, leading a business delegation to Cuba in 1994. He was the first British Minister to visit Cuba in 20 years—the only one to return with cigars from El Presidente. Ian's immense contribution to science and technology will be sorely missed as we seek to diversify and reinvigorate our economic base.

The history of Esher and Walton counsels against taking anything for granted. The constituency was once home to the Diggers—agrarian communists during the civil war—but later to US President Herbert Hoover, the intellectual architect of "rugged individualism", which inspired the economic liberalism of Thatcher and Reagan, but also the aspirations of a certain Derek Trotter from the TV series "Only Fools and Horses". When Rodney asks where the tenants will live if all the council homes in Peckham are sold off, Derek shrugs and, unblinking, replies, "Esher, or somewhere like that."

My constituency is an aspirational place, and generally my constituents enjoy a high quality of life—generally, but not uniformly. Last year, the "Hidden Surrey" report for Surrey Community Foundation found that child poverty in Walton Ambleside was double the national average, and that poverty among the elderly in Walton North was two thirds above the national average.

No county pays more to the Treasury than Surrey's taxpayers, yet we get back just one third of the national average level of funding for local services, resulting in the neglect that I have mentioned. The "Hidden Surrey" report concludes that the previous Government had choked money for local services in the area because there was "no electoral cost". I hope that in the forthcoming spending reviews we can ensure that the funding formula reflects a truly objective, and less political, assessment of local needs.

Turning to the national picture, there is much to cheer in the coalition Government's programme, and in particular the commitment to defend our freedoms by scrapping identity cards and by enacting a freedom Bill to restore our proud tradition of liberty in this country—eroded after 13 years of legislative hyperactivity and government by press release.

In particular, the coalition programme pledges to defend trial by jury—that ancient bulwark of British justice, dating back to Magna Carta. Steeped in our history, it was a jury that acquitted William Cobbett when he was prosecuted for campaigning for social and political reforms in the 1830s. But that is also relevant today, and not just to whistleblowers and political activists. Take the vindictive prosecution of Janet Devers, the east end market trader prosecuted for selling vegetables in pounds and ounces. She was convicted in the magistrates court of a string of petty offences, but the additional prosecution in the Crown court collapsed on day one when faced with the prospect of trying to convince a jury.

Juries are the reality check on bad law and abuse of state power. Lord Devlin famously described trial by jury as

"the lamp that shows that freedom lives".

That light has flickered of late. In 2003, the previous Government tried to remove juries from complex fraud cases, and in 2008 an attempt was made to remove juries from coroners' inquests—both with scant justification. Parliament defeated or diluted both those attempts, but a third attempt landed a more telling blow.

The Government enacted part 7 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, allowing for removal of juries where there is a risk of or actual tampering with a jury. In January, we had under those provisions the first criminal trial in 400 years to dispense with a jury. Four men stood charged with armed robbery of a Heathrow warehouse. Three previous trials had collapsed, at a cost of £22 million to the taxpayer, with evidence of jury tampering. The High Court refused on application to dispense with the jury, but was overturned on appeal. The four men were found guilty in March, and in the process we junked a fundamental safeguard of fair trial in this country. Immediately after that case, prosecutors lodged a string of applications to dispense with juries in further cases.

A dangerous precedent has been set. A slippery slope beckons. So I wish to put the question why, for the first time in our history, are we now uniquely incapable of protecting the integrity of our justice system? Why, after the billions invested and the enormous legal powers bestowed on our police are they today, in 2010, incapable of shielding juries in criminal trials? Let no one be in any doubt. This development is no sign of strength in law enforcement, but rather the most feeble weakness, and it is not a resource issue, given the huge amounts squandered on the previous trials that collapsed.

British justice should be firm but fair, two sides of the same coin. So I urge Ministers to review and consider the case for repeal of part 7 of the 2003 Act, in the forthcoming freedom Bill. The light that shows that freedom lives is flickering, but we have an opportunity to restore it. I hope we can take it.

6.11 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab) on his maiden speech. It is always daunting for Members in all parts of the House to make their first contribution to Parliament, but I wish him well in his time on the Conservative Benches. I also congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) and for Darlington (Mrs Chapman) on their maiden speeches. In all maiden speeches and the coverage of their constituencies, it is important for hon. Members to remember that, whatever happens in the House, they are first and foremost constituency MPs. If anything weakens that link, it would be a sad day for British democracy.

I shall touch on three topics in the debate. First, in relation to the constitution and political reform, I understand that the coalition programme for government contains an agreement which states:

"Lords appointments will be made with the objective of creating a second chamber that is reflective of the share of the vote . . . in the last general election."

We have already heard today that there are plans to reduce the size of the House of Commons and redraw constituency boundaries to equalise constituency sizes.

To achieve the first objective would require the creation of more than 172 new peers. That would be an increase in Tory peers from 186 to 263 and in Liberal Democrat peers from 72 to 167. I question the size of the second Chamber. The House of Lords is already one of the largest parliamentary Chambers in the world. At present, it has 734 Members, and 56 new peers were created in the dissolution honours, taking the total to 790. It is extremely unusual to have a second Chamber larger than the first. Indeed, now that Burkina Faso has abolished its upper house, there is no other country in the world with a second chamber larger than the first.

Mr Tyrie: I entirely agree with the right hon. Lady. She may be interested to know—I have checked—that the other place is the largest democratic Chamber in the world, except for the national people's congress in China. We can all make up our own minds about the level of democracy available there. Does she agree that the only way we can deal with the issue is to dispense with a House of patronage and appointment, and get to a point where we can have a democratically elected second Chamber?

Caroline Flint: I absolutely agree. In previous votes, I voted to abolish the second Chamber. I do not think that is going to happen, but in the discussion about changes in the House of Commons, we must also discuss changes in the House of Lords, as well as the purpose of the two Houses, the purpose of constituency MPs and whom the other place represents.

Mark Lazarowicz: Does my right hon. Friend think it possible that those appointed to the House of Lords by the Government in such a generous spirit would find once they got there that they were not so keen on democratic elections as they might have been previously? Perhaps we should insist that any appointment of extra peers comes after we have changed the democratic basis of the House of Lords, not before.

Caroline Flint: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I have heard rumours of grandfather clauses, which is rather frightening. It suggests that whatever system we end up with, and whatever voting might take place in future for a second Chamber, those who are currently there could continue until they die. I have many friends in the other place, but this is not the right way to talk about what we are here to do in both Houses of Parliament.

The second chamber that comes nearest to the House of Lords in size is the French Senate. This year it will have 346 members, half the size of the House of Lords. We know that the United States Senate has 104 members, and internationally the average size of a second chamber is 82. It is a matter not just of size, but of cost. We have heard that one of the reasons for reducing the number of seats in this place is cost. In 2007-08, the House of Lords cost £121.5 million, which works out at £168,000 per Member. If the House of Lords were reduced in size to, say, 100, it would save more than £115 million a year—much more than the savings projected by reductions in the size of the House of Commons by 10%, yet the coalition is planning on creating nearly 200 additional peers, at a cost of more than £20 million a year, while at the same time cutting the number of MPs.

I object to the idea of reducing the Commons arbitrarily by 10% when, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) said from the Front Bench, the workload of MPs is growing, not decreasing. In addition, we have the proposal for a new super-majority of 55% of the Commons. What we see in the coalition's reform package is a manipulation of our democracy, not an extension of it. It is not new politics to pack the Lords and rig the Commons.

The second topic that I shall touch on is the DNA database. The coalition proposal is to remove people not convicted of a crime from the DNA database. The database exists to provide justice for victims and their families. Having one's DNA profile held on the database is not a punishment. It is intended to assist in the prevention and detection of future crimes, to help eliminate the innocent from inquiries, and to deal with past crimes. Many cold cases have been solved because of the DNA database. Without the database, thousands of crimes would go unsolved and many serious and dangerous criminals would be walking our streets.

Between March 1998 and March 2009, DNA evidence helped to solve over 304,000 crimes. In 2008-09, there were 252 homicides and 580 rapes with a DNA scene-subject match. In 2008-09, 79 rape, murder or manslaughter charges in England and Wales were matched to the DNA database from DNA profiles that belonged to individuals who had been arrested but not convicted of any crime. The only civil liberties being extended by the proposal from the coalition Government are those of rapists, murderers and other serious criminals to walk the streets for longer to commit crimes because a DNA record has been deleted.

The evidence shows that there is a justification for retaining the DNA of people who have been arrested but not convicted, because their risk of offending, as measured by the risk of re-arrest, is higher than that of the general population. Analysis suggests that this risk is higher than that of the general population for six years following the arrest.

We should also not forget the potential deterrent effect of DNA. People are less likely to commit crime if they know there is a good chance that they could get caught. So if people know that DNA could play a significant role in securing convictions, they will be less likely to commit the crime in the first place. I shall save my contribution on the proposal to give anonymity to defendants in rape trials for my Adjournment debate at the end of the evening.

My final point is on police accountability. We all agree that there should be police accountability, and perhaps we need to look at police authorities and how they could be made more accountable. I am worried about the proposal to introduce elected police commissioners. We must recognise that some of the policing at force level and between forces concerns serious crimes involving organised criminals and organised networks. It is about counter-terrorism. Those are always the issues raised by my constituents on the doorstep. We need to make sure that in relation to accountability, we do not allow the work of the police to be distorted by what is most popular in our communities. I understand that there are other sorts of crime that have to be dealt with.

We have Safer Neighbourhoods teams in Doncaster and elsewhere around the country because the Labour Government decided that local policing is important.

[Caroline Flint]

The Conservatives opposed them when we introduced them. We now have local police teams dedicated to one particular area who will not be moved to another part of town and who spend their time out on patrol working with police community support officers and setting their priorities with local people. At the regular monthly meetings with the public, residents can demand action on gangs hanging around near an off-licence, on speeding cars or on motorbike nuisance. The mixture of local intelligence and public pressure provides real and practical accountability. What worries me about the hype surrounding elected police commissioners is that we will lose not only the plot on local accountability, but the commitment and funds to ensure that it continues to grow, not decline and wither on the vine. At the same time, we need effective policing to ensure that the public are protected from increasingly complicated crime.

On all those issues, there are many questions that the coalition Government have to answer in the days, the weeks and, it would seem, the years ahead.

6.20 pm

Ian Swales (Redcar) (LD): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my first speech to the House. I congratulate all those who have also made their first speeches today. I am very struck, and a bit awestruck, by the erudition that they have all displayed. As the Member for Redcar, I am proud to be the first Liberal to represent the area since 1923 and also very pleased to hear this afternoon's debate about potential voting system changes, which might do something to add to the House the 100 Liberal Democrats who ought to be Members but, due to our current voting system, are not.

My constituency comprises the north-east corner of the historic north riding of Yorkshire, flanked by the River Tees to the north, the North sea to the east and the Cleveland hills to the south. The coast boasts miles of golden beach, the site of the recent British kite-surfing championships and is adjacent to Yorkshire's only proper golf links. Redcar is a bustling coastal town, incorporating the formerly separate villages of Coatham and Dormanstown, and it has a race course with one of the few straight, level miles in the country. There was much excitement in 2007 when for a few weeks our sea front became Dunkirk for the shooting of the Oscar-winning film "Atonement".

Local delicacies include chicken parmesans, which we all know as "parmos", and lemon top ice creams—probably not a diet that the Secretary of State for Health would choose, but nevertheless absolutely delicious. Down the coast is the pretty village of Marske, which has history going back to Viking times, and inland we have a port and industrial complex of national importance. Teesport is the second biggest port in the UK, and I am glad that this Government moved quickly to freeze the extra taxes that were imposed on PD Ports, because they put it at a disadvantage to ports in mainland Europe.

The Corus steel site still employs more than 2,000 people in steel processing, but we were all devastated in February when the blast furnace closed, ending 150 years of steel making on the River Tees. We are hopeful that the blast furnace will be sold to a new owner and that steel making can be resumed. My constituency also contains the UK's biggest chemical manufacturing site at Wilton, another powerhouse of the national economy, where I worked for many years.

To the west of the port, steel and chemical complex lies an area that, to the uninformed visitor, looks like a continuous area of housing—casually referred to as Greater Eston by Redcar and Cleveland council. People who live there know that it actually comprises a number of separate places: the historic villages of Normanby, Nunthorpe and Ormesby; the proud former ironstone mining village of Eston; and the struggling industrial settlements of South Bank and Grangetown. They all have their own distinct centres and unique stories.

I must pay tribute to my learned predecessor, Vera Baird, QC. Vera has a tremendous capacity for work and is a formidable campaigner for women's rights in particular, fighting on behalf of women who are the victims of violence and abuse. She was a notable parliamentarian, having won *The Spectator* Back Bencher of the year award in 2004 and then rising to ministerial level as Solicitor-General in the previous Government.

I cannot represent Redcar without mentioning Vera's predecessor, the late Marjorie Mowlam. Had her health remained good, I am sure that she would still be in Parliament today. As well as her towering achievements in government, particularly on the Northern Ireland Good Friday agreement, she was, and still is, much loved in the constituency. She must have had a prodigious ability to consume tea, judging by the number of houses that I canvassed where they all said, "We all loved Mo, and she was always popping in for a cuppa."

The No. 1 issue in my area is jobs. The headline unemployment figure is about 9%, but that does not tell the whole story. There is a lot of hidden unemployment, a lot of people on incapacity benefit and many other people are out of work. A *Financial Times* reporter visited during the general election and had no trouble finding a woman who had just lost out as one of 490 applicants for a job cleaning the local supermarket. I hope that when this Government carry out the much-needed review of benefits policy, they will not unjustly penalise those who desperately want to work but simply cannot find a job.

There have been numerous job losses in our area: 98,000 manufacturing jobs have gone since 1971—particularly under the previous Government, during whose period in office manufacturing declined from 22% of the national economy to just 11%. I am very pleased that the new Government recognise the value of manufacturing and, in particular, want to stimulate the green manufacturing economy. Teesside is a great place to do that.

Before leaving jobs, I must mention Government jobs. After recent remarks by the Prime Minister, people might have got the impression that any cutbacks in the civil service would somehow be in the north-east of England. In fact, of well over 520,000 civil servants, only 36,000 are in the north-east, and of those very few are in the Teesside area. I shall constantly press the case for the Tees valley to be the new location of a Government agency. Indeed, the hon. Member for Stockton South (James Wharton) and I have already written to our Cabinet colleagues, suggesting Teesside as a good location for the administrative centre of the new green investment

bank. I welcome the Government's commitment to localism on planning laws and hope to see more local control over schools, rather than the central diktats that went with the Building Schools for the Future programme. Many of my constituents know how important that is.

It is a fantastic honour and privilege to have been chosen to represent the passionate and proud people of Redcar, and I shall constantly fight for what I feel is in their best interests.

6.27 pm

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech, and I congratulate Members from all parts of the House on their excellent maiden speeches.

It is an immense privilege to have been elected to serve as the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South. I have lived and worked in Sunderland all my life, and I am especially honoured to serve my local area. I should like to thank the party members and voters who put their trust in me, and I sincerely hope that I can repay them. Houghton and Sunderland South is a new constituency that was formed from the former constituencies of Houghton and Washington East and Sunderland South. I therefore intend to pay tribute to the former Members for both constituencies.

Fraser Kemp was elected in 1997 as the Member for Houghton and Washington East but had worked as an organiser for the Labour party since his late teens. He played a pivotal role in making the Labour party electable once again and secured a reputation as a fierce opponent whose success as an organiser and an election strategist was unparalleled. Fraser is a very modest man who never sought accolades or recognition for his achievements, but many of us know the debt that we owe to him. I pay tribute to Fraser not simply because he is my predecessor, but because of his values, integrity and decency. He fought many cases on behalf of vulnerable and desperate constituents whom he always treated with the utmost sensitivity and compassion.

Fraser dedicated his life to the Labour movement, and I wish him every success in his life away from front-line politics. I know that Fraser felt it was a huge privilege to serve his home seat. I very much share that sentiment, and I hope that I can show the same dedication and commitment in fighting for the people of Houghton and Sunderland South.

I also pay tribute to Chris Mullin, who represented Sunderland, South from 1987. He was never afraid to champion unpopular causes and often found himself ostracised in the process. I am sure that there is a lesson there for us all—that we should never be afraid to speak out, even if the cause appears at the time to be an unpopular or a difficult one.

My constituency contains a series of mining villages in the former Durham coalfields, and also areas of the city that were built following the post-war expansion, such as Grindon, Thorney Close and Farringdon. Shiney Row is home to the Penshaw monument. It was erected in tribute to the first Earl of Durham, known locally as Radical Jack because of his support for the extension of the franchise in the Reform Act 1832. There has been much debate today about the Great Reform Act, and I am sure that my constituents will follow developments with great interest. On the issue of voting, I am delighted to note that Sunderland city council once again delivered the first and fastest result in returning me as the Member of Parliament for Houghton and Sunderland South.

In Hetton-le-Hole, George Stephenson, one of the founding fathers of the railway industry, designed a line to serve the colliery before designing the more famous Stockton and Darlington route. I am also proud that the tongue of Big Ben, which we hear every time the bell sounds, was forged in the historic town of Houghton-le-Spring in my constituency.

We have made tremendous progress in Houghton and Sunderland South. Our area has adapted remarkably to significant economic, industrial and social change, much of it not of our choosing during the 1980s and 1990s. We are resilient and faced adversity in the past; I am confident that we can now show the same kind of determination again in meeting new challenges.

I will be unafraid to speak out where I see injustice that will damage the lives and living standards of my constituents, which have improved so greatly in the past 13 years. I will resist any measure that will damage our economy, our families, and the services on which we all rely. I remain committed to tackling inequality in all its forms. We have seen significant advances in my constituency in the past 13 years, not least in terms of the provision and resources in our schools, but it is still all too often the case that children born in my constituency are held back because of their backgrounds and unable to achieve all that they are capable of.

The north-east led the world during the industrial revolution, and I am confident that we can do so again in being at the forefront of developing new green technologies and industries. I was therefore concerned by the Prime Minister's refusal to confirm whether the Government would honour the £20.7 million grant awarded to Nissan to develop the next generation of electric cars. The plant is not in my constituency, but many of my constituents are employed by Nissan or indirectly in supply chain jobs. I will continue to press for answers, not only on the Nissan grant but on the vital, ongoing investment that is necessary to protect the north-east economy. I know that I will have the full support of my local newspaper, the *Sunderland Echo*, in fighting Sunderland's corner and championing local business. It remains of deep and lasting concern to me that unemployment remains higher than is acceptable in my constituency and that there are areas of continuing deprivation. The people of Houghton and Sunderland South need a Government who will support business and enterprise, not tip us into a second recession.

I am particularly grateful to be called to make my maiden speech during the debate on home affairs. Prior to my election, I worked managing a women's refuge based in my constituency for families fleeing domestic violence. It is through my work with victims of sexual violence that I have such deep reservations about proposals to introduce anonymity for defendants in rape cases. I ask the Government to look carefully at prioritising measures that will increase the number of rape convictions instead of deterring vulnerable women from coming forward.

I give my pledge that I will try to speak often in the House to raise the concerns of my constituents. I intend to be a strong and tireless voice here; the people of Houghton and Sunderland South deserve no less.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I do not intend to alter the time limit, as that would be unfair, particularly to those who are waiting to make their maiden speeches, but anyone who can clip a minute or so off their speech will certainly gain the gratitude of some of those we might otherwise find it very difficult to fit in.

6.34 pm

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): Let me begin by saying that that was an outstanding maiden speech by the hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson). It was full of interesting content and probably gives us an idea of where she will concentrate her interests. I was particularly interested in some of the things that she said about the area she represents, because I contested the old seat of Houghton and Washington, as it was then known, in 1992, and I know well many of the places that she mentioned—the Penshaw monument, Shiney Row community college, and much else. I very much take her point about the Nissan plant and the effect that any Government decisions will have on the whole region if things do not go well. I was touched by her commitment to speak up on behalf of the most vulnerable in her constituency. Having got to know it quite well, I know what she is talking about as regards those former mining villages.

It is clear that the two great themes in the Queen's Speech are the economy and the constitution: they loom large, and they are closely connected. Constitutional reform is needed, among other things, to restore confidence in our institutions, particularly Parliament and political parties. Without some progress on that, the coalition Government will struggle to secure legitimacy for the tough economic measures that are now needed. Without some public trust in politicians, leadership on the economy will be impossible. I think that that is what the Prime Minister was trying to make a start with in his speech today.

Despite appearances, there is, on both the constitution and the economy, a great deal of common ground across the House about the overall direction of policy and the importance of acting. However, before I get on to the areas of agreement, let me start with a controversial measure—the attempt to entrench fixed parliamentary terms with a 55% threshold. That certainly will not be a consensus measure; the controversy has been evident today. We have not seen the proposal written down, so it might be premature to judge it, but I have to say that I do not like what I have heard so far. How could I put it? Let me just say that it could be misconstrued as, or as looking very much like, an arbitrary fix to bolster this particular coalition with a constitutional change. After all, why 55%, not 60% or some other number? At least, that is how the other place will see it. Nor does it benefit from any protection under the Salisbury convention, and I therefore expect that their lordships might carve it up. To sugar the pill for them, I have already asked those on my Front Bench to give it pre-legislative scrutiny. If it survives that, their lordships may be more accommodating.

The 55% proposal is so clearly born of the particular circumstances of this coalition that I cannot see why it should remain on the statute book beyond this Parliament, and I therefore ask my Front-Bench colleagues to consider adding a sunset clause. Of course, we have not heard all the arguments on the proposal—as I say, it has not been published—and I am not going to rush to take a view on something that I have not even seen, but my instinct would be to try to entrench fixed terms with something less radical. Better, for example, to legislate a requirement that the Prime Minister can ask the Queen for a Dissolution only if he has been defeated in a vote of no confidence. Of course, he could still manufacture a defeat, but at least the electorate would see that ploy for what it was and could judge it accordingly at the polls.

I said that I would start with some disagreement, but I ought to refer to the large measure of agreement across the House on all sorts of things. The principle of fixed-term Parliaments is pretty much agreed across the House. During the last election, Labour was more supportive of fixed-term Parliaments than the Conservatives; likewise on the idea of a vote on a Dissolution. On the House of Lords, there is now a huge amount of cross-party agreement. All three parties are agreed on the need for a largely or fully elected House of Lords. I have to say, as there are a lot of new Members present, that when I was first elected 13 years ago it seemed to me that in the 21st century only those who have received some sort of democratic mandate should have the right to make our laws. These days, that is the majority view right across the House, and in my party too. I strongly welcome that.

The main opponent of change, of course, will be the biggest vested interest in our constitution, by which I mean the life peers. They are deeply opposed to any meaningful change and may even threaten to wreck the coalition's legislative programme if the elected House were to force the issue. At the moment, with the coalition facing the biggest economic crisis since the second world war, this House may decide that it has other priorities. Much depends on the arithmetic of coalition politics in the Lords and whether a measure could be whipped through the other place, but I am not optimistic. I cannot see the coalition risking a massive row and using the Parliament Act with so much other vital legislation to get through. It would be a bloody battle and a rerun of another Lords-Commons clash exactly a century ago.

In the few seconds remaining to me I add one more crucial matter. We must clean up party funding. The stench in the electorate's nostrils about the apparent purchase of access, influence and honours is serious and knocks into a cocked hat what we have had on expenses. The problem can be solved only if all parties are prepared to bring the big donor culture to an end, whether the source is corporate, institutional, trade union or individual. We must find ways to protect parties that will be adversely affected by that change and ensure that democratic politics can remain fair. We cannot leave things as they are, and I hope very much that the coalition Government will have further talks to try to secure agreement. I find the Queen's Speech very exciting, but there is a lot of work to be done and debate to be had on it.

6.41 pm

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches. They have been very interesting and have paid tribute to the Members who have gone before them.

When I listened to the Deputy Prime Minister's speech, I was very disappointed that he showed a lack of respect for the smaller parties in the House. I suggest to him that he should give minority parties more respect, because he could find himself on the Back Benches shortly. One should never allow power to go to one's head. We will put today's episode down to inexperience, and I look forward to meaningful exchanges with him in the days to come.

Many matters in the Gracious Speech merit our attention, and constitutional issues are vital. It states:

"Measures will be brought forward to introduce fixed term Parliaments of five years."

That would command support from my right hon. and hon. Friends from Northern Ireland and is probably one of the few examples of the coalition making changes that are not designed to improve its own chances in a future election. The governing party—or parties, in this case—has always had the ability to use a snap general election to its own advantage, and the date selected has had much more to do with the political fortunes of the Government than the national interest.

However, there are practical implications to be thought through. In Northern Ireland, we already face an election practically every year, and the dates involved mean that it could be possible to have a general election, an election to the Northern Ireland Assembly and a local government election on the same day. One can imagine what that would mean to the voters. We are not opposed to fixed-term Parliaments and see many benefits to them, but it will be necessary to consider the practical implications and the problems that could arise from attempting to organise up to three elections on one day.

We have major concerns about the introduction of the 55% rule. We wish to put a clear marker down on that, and I do that in the House tonight. We must do nothing that diminishes the authority of Parliament or its right to hold the Government to account. Parliament must have the ability to give the Government a vote of confidence when they are worthy of it, or a vote of no confidence if they have lost the confidence of the country and the House.

The Gracious Speech also states:

"A Bill will be introduced for a referendum on the Alternative Vote system for the House of Commons and to create fewer and more equal sized constituencies."

The problems that have been mentioned today in the case of certain constituencies in the United Kingdom must genuinely be taken into account. Simply to divide the country up and say that every constituency must have the same number of electors would not be to take in the reality of the vast geographical areas of some constituencies. Constituencies need to be given appropriate and proper service. We represent not land but people, who have a right to the most appropriate and best possible representation.

There is to be legislation

"to restore freedoms and civil liberties, through the abolition of Identity Cards and the repeal of unnecessary laws."

I can say on behalf of my colleagues that we support the proposal to abolish identity cards, which were introduced in probably the most ridiculed piece of legislation that the previous Government brought forward. It will be good to see the end of them.

There is to be legislation

"to ensure that in future this Parliament and the British people have their say on any proposed transfer of powers to the European Union."

We must all hope that the promise of a referendum is not another cast-iron guarantee. Perhaps it is cast-iron with only Lisbon-shaped exceptions. The refusal to allow a referendum in the past has always been driven by the fear of the House actually hearing what the people of the United Kingdom have to say on the subject, but hearing the people and acting accordingly is what democracy should be all about. We will see how keen the coalition Government are to listen to the UK's views on the European Union should the opportunity for a referendum on any subject arise during this Parliament.

I have a question for the Government. Will only one referendum be held on any proposal, or will the tactic that was displayed and deployed in the Republic of Ireland be used here in the UK? The people of the Republic of Ireland were asked about the Lisbon treaty and said no to it, and then they were asked again because the Government and the rest of Europe did not get the answer that they wanted. We cannot treat the people with disrespect. It will be interesting to see what the coalition partners do, as they will probably have different views and put different opinions to the general public. My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds) introduced a Bill in the last Parliament in an attempt to ensure that the previous Government would honour their pledge to hold a referendum. People will rightly be sceptical until the Government give a real demonstration that they are willing to listen to the British people's views on the issue. All three major parties will have heard that being emphasised, and I say to them that there are other parties—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

6.48 pm

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to give my maiden speech today, although not quite so grateful to follow the excellent maiden speeches of so many of my colleagues on both sides of the House. They have set the bar almost impossibly high.

Many Members will know my predecessor, Evan Harris, as an energetic and uncompromising Member of this House, and although we often disagreed on points of principle, he was one of the few politicians who never put popularity above principle. I know that he will go on to make a significant contribution elsewhere. Dr Harris was not my only predecessor to make an appearance on the campaign trail. Far too often on the doorstep, constituents would look at me, sigh, and say, "Well of course, I remember Airey Neave", or "Now John Patten, he was a good constituency MP." It is a little too early to work out exactly where I will end up in that illustrious line-up, but I hope that it will be recorded that I did everything in my power to serve the constituents of Oxford West and Abingdon with integrity and commitment, and that I became the dedicated constituency representative that they so deserve.

Let us be honest—there could not really be a better constituency to represent. My home town, Oxford, is surely one of the most beautiful cities in the world and its history of scholars, authors, artists, inventors and Prime Ministers fills library after library. I am particularly

[Nicola Blackwood]

pleased that, even after boundary changes, I still have the opportunity to represent my undergraduate and graduate colleges—St. Anne's and Somerville.

Oxford university and Oxford Brookes have international reputations in field after field. I know that many scholars and students are watching the university fees review with anxiety. I know exactly what it is like to pay tuition fees, having been in one of the first years to do so, and we must ensure that university funding reform is open and fair, properly supports students from more disadvantaged backgrounds, creates an academic environment that supports research, and enables our top universities to remain competitive—and even become more so—on the international stage.

Oxford West and Abingdon's excellence is not confined to education. The NHS in Oxfordshire hosts many centres of excellence and an enormous number of dedicated health professionals—my father for one. I know that they join me in welcoming the coalition Government's commitment to increasing NHS spending and to introducing the revolutionary idea of letting local health professionals set local health priorities.

As we struggle to maintain the recovery, it is ever more important that we support Oxfordshire's vibrant private sector. That includes ventures at every stage of growth, from start-up university spin-offs in biotech and renewables at Begbroke science park to long-standing international publishers such as Oxford University Press and Blackwell.

Beyond the dreaming spires lies Abingdon—a beautiful market town that is one of the oldest continuous settlements in the UK. However, Abingdon's fantastic location on the banks of the Thames and the River Ock has been a thorn in its side, creating difficult traffic problems and allowing terrible floods in 2007. Climate change means that there is an increasing risk of flooding in that area. As research shows, it is incredibly important to maintain our commitment to flood defences, which are far cheaper than the catastrophic results of unmitigated flooding. Those defences are much needed by the residents of Osney, Abingdon and nearby villages such as Kidlington. I look forward to supporting their campaign for them.

However, I have chosen to speak in today's debate because of my commitment to another local campaign. Despite chronic under-reporting, research shows that domestic abuse accounts for 16% of violent crime. It affects one in four women and one in six men. Despite the fact that most people still think of it as a women's issue, a third of victims are men.

The social and economic impact of domestic abuse is becomingly increasingly unsustainable. Domestic abuse claims more repeat victims—that is more police time and more repeat visits to A and E—than any other crime. It leads to the murder of four women and one man a fortnight, and affects four children in every class of 30. All that costs our economy an estimated £23 billion a year, and front-line services bear the brunt. In the current economic climate, that will only get worse. United Nations research has confirmed what common sense has told us for years: unemployment and financial instability exacerbate domestic abuse.

Surely if those on both sides of the Chamber can agree on anything, it is that no one should fear being raped or beaten in their own home, forced into marriage or killed in the name of honour. However, there are still worrying gaps in provision. In theory, the introduction of sexual assault referral centres is a good thing, but the nearest one for us is in Slough—a long way to go for someone who has been brutally raped. To add insult to injury, my local rape crisis centre currently faces a funding crisis. There is also the gender problem. Although roughly a third of victims are male, only 1% of refuge space is available for men. In Oxfordshire, there is no provision for male victims fleeing domestic abuse.

There is also a serious lack of perpetrator programmes. Despite the fact that a quarter of male probationers and 17% of male prisoners are domestic violence perpetrators, there is such a shortage of places on those programmes that, recently, some courts were expressly prohibited from using them as a sentencing option. No perpetrator programmes are available in Oxfordshire.

However, we have one thing to boast about: the champions network. When research revealed that victims can go to as many as 10 agencies before finding the help that they need, the Oxfordshire county domestic abuse service decided to short-circuit the problem and train a network of volunteers in other agencies. They were called champions. They are seen as the lead on domestic abuse issues in their agency and they can advise colleagues on management of individual cases and ensure access to local resources. There are now more than 300 champions in 60 agencies. They are all volunteers, all trained and they all make an enormous impact. As far as I am aware, it is the only network of its kind in the UK. I am proud to be a champion myself, to speak up for that excellent work. I thank the Deputy Speaker for giving me the chance to speak in this debate.

6.55 pm

Fiona O'Donnell (East Lothian) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech in this important debate.

I thank the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood) for an eloquent and elegant contribution. I also single out my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson). It is so good for the House that women with her experience have been elected to serve.

It is customary to pay tribute to one's constituency in a maiden speech. I am pleased to say that I am not in the position of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound), who appeared to have to work hard in 1997 to find something interesting to say about his constituency. However, he managed the story from June 1889, when a giant circus elephant collapsed and died on Castlebar hill. I quote from his maiden speech:

"The great pachyderm, with its last few breaths, bravely staggered forward, and is, to this day, to be found beneath the road—unfortunately, just over the constituency border in Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush."—[*Official Report*, 10 November 1997; Vol. 300, c. 608.]

I am delighted that, for me, the task is entirely easy and pleasurable. East Lothian is, without doubt, a constituency blessed in almost every way imaginable. It positively drips with scenic beauty. Not only is it blessed with breathtaking natural beauty, it has a continuous golden thread of historical significance. Those golden colours are reflected in the wonderful art of local artist John Bellany, who grew up in Port Seton. The constituency's natural beauty ranges from magnificent beaches, through

agricultural farm land to rolling hills, and features everything from Cistercian monks to the resting place of Concorde.

Even with that embarrassment of riches, I have not mentioned its greatest asset: its people. East Lothian is blessed with genuinely close-knit and vibrant communities. It is a part of this country that has a real and thriving sense of self. Its strong sense of identity means that, even in these most difficult times for the newspaper industry, it is served by three local newspapers. The existence of the *East Lothian Courier, East Lothian and Musselburgh News* and the *Evening News* is not a leftover from a past age but the reflection of a community with deep roots and a strong sense of social justice.

The communities of East Lothian range from former mining and fishing villages through to castles and keeps, from the market town of Haddington to the fiercely proud mining-built communities of Prestonpans, Tranent, Wallyford, Macmerry, Ormiston, Elphinstone and Whitecraig. At the east end of the constituency sits Musselburgh—the "honest toun"—which now has one of the top five race courses in the country.

The constituency's people have a long history of not being easily pushed around and not tolerating social injustice. Those battles have not been fought only in this country. The men who left East Lothian to fight against Franco's fascists in the Spanish civil war have their names inscribed on a plaque in Prestonpans.

As well as brave men, East Lothian also has a proud history of brave women. My predecessor, Anne Moffat, was the first woman to represent East Lothian. She began her working life as a nurse and went on to become president of Unison. Becoming the Parliamentary Private Secretary to my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) when he was Secretary of State for Health was a real source of pride to Anne. She cared deeply about the NHS and her first-hand experience of working in the wards equipped her well for that post.

The House will be aware that Anne has suffered poor health in recent months, and I am sure all hon. Members will join me in wishing her good health and happiness. Anne paved the way for other women to represent East Lothian—I am sure that I will not be the last—but she was not the first woman to stand up for working people in my constituency. There is a statue in Tranent, by sculptor David Annand, of Jackie Crookston beating her drum with a small child at her side, to commemorate the massacre of Tranent in 1797. Women from mining communities across the county beat their own drums to protect their communities during the miners' strike of 1984. That dispute and those months of hardship almost tore those communities apart as some men returned to work. Fiona Hunter, then aged only 12, wrote a poem called, "Hang on Dad" for a school project:

"Don't go down the mine Dad
Where some of them have gone
Hang on a little longer Dad
Don't let them think they've won
I know it's hard to feed us Dad
But we've hung on so long
It can't go on much longer Dad
Much better times must come."

It is hard to believe that those are the words of a child of 12.

The common endeavour of the miners, their families and the communities of East Lothian bound them close together, so my constituency is clearly one that does not easily lend itself to dissection, the arbitrary redrawing of boundaries and the random consequence of arid mathematical formulas dreamt up in Conservative central office and breathed into life in Whitehall. The coalition Government cannot take a community such as East Lothian, with its sense of self, its sensible and natural boundaries and institutions, and its hundreds of years of organic community development, and simply apply the chainsaw of narrow party advantage in the way that has been proposed.

As I was campaigning, I was proud to mark Labour's record, and I now want to make a pledge to the people of East Lothian: Her Majesty's loyal Opposition will fight to stop the Government's proposals to weaken democracy and my role in representing you. I thank the House.

7.2 pm

Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I am delighted to have caught your eye to give my maiden speech. May I take this opportunity to congratulate those on both sides of the House who have given their maiden speeches in this debate? It is an honour and privilege for me to have been elected by the people of my home town, Northampton, where I was born and brought up, and to represent the Northampton North constituency.

Northampton has sent some distinguished representatives over the years, both for Northampton North and Northampton South. Sally Keeble, my immediate predecessor, was a fine constituency Member of Parliament who dedicated her 13 years in Parliament to public service. She was a passionate protector of the disadvantaged and a keen supporter of, and advocate for, the poor, as many in the House will have witnessed, particularly in her work on international development. At an election campaign hustings, Sally discreetly mentioned that she was missing her son's 14th birthday party, which is evidence of the dedication and commitment that she gave to representing the constituency. As many in the House will know, Sally's late father was an illustrious ambassador from the Court of St James to the Soviet Union, and no doubt her dedication to public service was fostered from an early age. I wish her and her family all the very best for the future.

As I said, Sally was the most recent in a long line of distinguished Members whom my home town has sent to the House. They have not always been without controversy. In fact, there is a worrying predilection toward deselection—of both Labour and Conservative Members. The first Member sent here in 1974 from the new Northampton North constituency was Maureen Colquhoun, who I understand underwent a rather difficult time for reasons that were not unconnected to her personal life—reasons that nowadays would be a positive attribute to candidacy in the Conservative party. Maureen was followed by Tony Marlow, whose boating blazers are the stuff of legend in this House. He, too, was threatened with deselection, for reasons that were something to do with a place called Maastricht. That would not be a positive attribute for candidacy in the modern Conservative party, so some things do stay the same.

[Michael Ellis]

Sally Keeble actually bucked the trend, because she was not threatened with deselection. Instead, she attempted to deselect the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), the then Prime Minister, in one of the coup attempts against him. I am sure it will be noted by my hon. Friends that I do not intend to follow those traditions—either of deselection or decapitation.

Going back a little further, this House has dealt rather harshly, if I may say, with some Northampton representatives. One was imprisoned in the Clock Tower, another was fined for voting without having sworn the Oath of Allegiance, and one—Spencer Perceval—was assassinated in 1812 while entering the House. I hope there will be less dramatic opportunities for me to make my mark on this place.

Northampton is an historic market town with excellent communications—we are only one hour up the motorway or from Euston on the railway—and we excel on the sporting field. We have the Saints rugby team, the Cobblers football team and the county cricket ground. The town also has an excellent business ethos, and I invite all hon. Members to visit us.

As many will know, the town has an ancient history of boot and shoe making. Many in the House—on both sides—have benefited from shoes made in Northampton, not least my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor. He is often accused of wearing Hush Puppies, but in fact they are brown suede shoes made in Northampton—although I was pleased to see that he did not wear them with the full-bottomed wig when he gave Her Majesty the Gracious Speech in another place.

I thought it would be suitable to make my maiden speech during the part of the Gracious Speech that relates to home affairs, because I have been in practice as a barrister for the past 16 years. In 13 of those years, I have witnessed some rather extraordinary events that reflect the current concern with the criminal justice system in the country at large. Some 3,600 new criminal offences have been created in the past 13 years, a rate of about one every weekday. You will be reassured to hear, Mr Deputy Speaker, that it is now illegal to sell a grey squirrel and to explode a nuclear bomb. Many hundreds of other pieces of legislation have been passed: 404 forms of behaviour are illegal now that were not illegal in 1997. To give one an idea of the progress—or lack thereof—whereas for most of the past 100 years there was about one criminal justice Bill per decade, there were 60 in the past decade.

I am afraid that we have not had the progress that we would like. To give one example of that quickly, within the last several months at court, several barristers were kept waiting while prisoners refused to alight from a bus because they were worried about losing their places in an overcrowded prison system. The prison officers refused to force them off the bus, because doing so would breach their human rights. Many were kept waiting for many hours. One prisoner decided that he needed to use the facilities and was allowed to alight from the bus, go into the cells, use the facilities and go back, voluntarily, and get back on the bus, because to have forced him to do otherwise would have been a breach of his human rights. Meanwhile, many were kept waiting in court.

I hope that my time in the House will help to ameliorate some of those discrepancies and disconnections that now exist in our system.

7.10 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): I start by commending the hon. Member for Northampton North (Michael Ellis) on his excellent and illuminating maiden speech. I am sure we will hear much more from him in the years ahead. I wish well both him and all those who either have already or are about to give their maiden speech.

Since the formation of this Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, we have heard much in the press in Scotland about the fact that there is to be a "respect agenda", with the UK Government improving relations with the devolved Governments and the parties of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is thus with some regret that I noted the Deputy Prime Minister failing even to mention that agenda in his speech; he made an announcement of important constitutional progress on the reform of the House of Lords in respect of which he saw fit to invite Members from only three parties in this House.

The shadow Secretary of State is not in his place, but I ask his colleagues to pass on to him the comments that I am about to make, because I have not been a blushing violet—or even a shrinking violet; I am now blushing, and not for the first time—when it comes to criticising the last Labour Government. During the last Parliament, there was much I needed to criticise the Labour Government on when it came to constitutional matters, but in recent times the previous Government worked hard on issues such as the reform of party and MP finance to include all the parties. Indeed, the then Justice Secretary was exemplary in his relations with the political parties of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is totally unacceptable that we are to see major constitutional reforms in the United Kingdom on the basis of excluding the parties of government from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I was pleased to note that other Members on the Opposition side, not least the right hon. Member for Torfaen (Paul Murphy), recognised that as an important issue.

Moving on to discuss the Queen's Speech, we understand that progress is to be made on further devolution of powers to Scotland. That would mean safer streets and safer communities, which is something that we welcome, as we also welcome the willingness to consider improving the financial powers to be devolved to the Scottish Government and to the Scottish Parliament. This comes at a time when we are hearing growing calls from academics and senior business leaders who want Scottish Ministers to control taxes and social welfare and to have borrowing powers.

The Campaign for Fiscal Responsibility has been triggered in part by the new coalition Government's pledge to raise the income tax threshold to £10,000. Among the leading members of the Scottish business community who are calling for fiscal responsibility in Scotland is Jim McColl, the chairman of business development firm, Clyde Blowers, which is involved in the campaign. He said recently:

"I believe we're at the crossroads of a fantastic opportunity to take more responsibility in Scotland for its economic health... We need to have a financially responsible Parliament where politicians

take full responsibility for raising the money that they spend and for the economy that they manage. We need the levers to stimulate that economy".

That has been underlined by Ben Thomson, the chairman of the think-tank Reform Scotland, who said that there is "surprising" breadth of support for radical change, which was further underlined in *The Times* today by Sir Tom Hunter, who writes:

"Tinkering is not the answer to these challenges—Scotland must take a radical look at itself and change markedly. Scotland needs to control the levers necessary to stimulate growth—and benefit from the receipts that come from that growth."

I very much hope that the coalition Government will take all these voices into account and follow their own advice on the respect agenda and on working constructively with the Scottish Government in pursuing these matters.

In the time remaining, I would like to touch on a number of other constitutional reforms: fixed-term Parliaments, the 55% threshold, democratisation of the House of Lords and reform of the electoral system. We in the Scottish National party have long supported the introduction of fixed terms—experience of which, of course, we have in the Scottish Parliament. To illustrate and underline the point made by colleagues from the Democratic Unionist party earlier, it would be a real mistake to set the date of a fixed Parliament to match exactly the date of elections for the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly. If we are to have fixed terms, why not pick four-year rather than five-year cycles? Experience in the last Scottish Parliament election showed that the more elections one holds on the same day, the more problems can ensue.

Turning to the so-called threshold question, we need only a simple majority to form or bring down a Government in the Scottish Parliament. If no Government can command 50% of support among voting MSPs within 28 days, Parliament is dissolved. The 66% barrier exists only to ensure that there is time to allow a new Government to be formed if an old one collapses. I really hope that the Government listen on this issue. For people who have practical experience of the system as it works in action, the 55% threshold is a gerrymandering effort to hold on to power, as are the boundary reviews, which seem to take no account of the geographic diversity in some parts of the United Kingdom. It is also hard to conclude anything but that this is an effort to target poorer and more rural constituencies. If there is a need to reform the size of constituencies, the Government must take account of manageable size and geography.

On democratising the House of Lords, our party is in favour of a unicameral set-up, but should there be a second chamber, it must be elected. On electoral reform, if we are to have a referendum, we should include more than one option: the alternative vote is not proportional representation.

In conclusion, we heard today from the Deputy Prime Minister in soaring reformist rhetorical tones what was in actual fact his falling at the first fence. Inclusion, debate and participation are all fine and well, but they need to include all—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

7.17 pm

Mr Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech. It is a maiden speech that comes at last to me, having been selected as the candidate for South Swindon some six years ago. That means that in 2005 I was beaten by my predecessor, Anne Snelgrove, to whom I pay warm tribute today. She worked extremely hard for her constituency and for her constituents. It is interesting to note that many of the challenges that she raised in her maiden speech are the challenges that face Swindon today—on jobs, for example. In fact, the unemployment position in Swindon is now twice as bad as it was back in 2005. Town centre regeneration is another challenge; the recession has sadly put paid to many of the fine plans laid out for our town centre.

I do not want to start, however, on an unduly pessimistic note because, like the peal of 10 bells at Christ Church in Swindon, celebrated in the poetry of Sir John Betjeman, there is much to ring the praises about when it comes to the town I represent. This is the part of my speech that is entirely uncontroversial, because it is a known fact that Swindon is a cultural hub. We are the home of the National Trust and the base of English Heritage. We also have the museum of the Great Western railway—God's wonderful railway, in other words—this year celebrating 175 years of its existence by Act of Parliament. We are home to the National Monuments Record office.

We have splendid country parks, including Lydiard park, the former ancestral home of the Bolingbroke family—a political family well known to this House and to the other place. It is now a delightful country park to the west and on the western fringes of my constituency. To the east, we have Coate Water country park, much loved by local residents, home of a miniature railway and, on the edge, home to the museum of the 19th century writer and naturalist, Richard Jefferies.

There is much to commend the constituency that I represent. It is town, suburb and country, lying as it does between the ancient Ridgeway path and its iron-age forts, and the iron road of the railway that meant so much to the development of Swindon in the 19th century. Bisecting my constituency through the middle is that 20th-century innovation, the M4. Make no mistake about it, Mr Deputy Speaker: Swindon is well and truly at the heart of our country.

Swindon's communities, whether they be in the town centre or out in the suburban fringes, are all united by several concerns. One of those concerns is about the need to protect and preserve our green spaces, and to ensure that the development that we know will come to Swindon—it is a town that has grown over the years and reinvented itself to quite brilliant effect—is sustainable. I therefore welcome a change to the planning regime, so that my town can survive, thrive and prosper in the years ahead.

One issue that comes up time and time again with the people I now represent is their concern about the system of criminal justice in our country. It might sound like special pleading—I make no apology for that—but having spent most of my professional life working as a barrister in the criminal justice system, I think that I am allowed to make some observations about the gap between political rhetoric and the sad reality of what is happening in our system today. We have confused legislative hyperactivity with effectiveness. The sausage-factory approach that saw Criminal Justice Act after Criminal Justice Act has not resulted in a better system; in fact, it has made it a great deal worse. The law of unforeseen consequences means that the extra burden placed on the system is causing it to creak at the hinges.

[Mr Robert Buckland]

The words of politicians in this House and other places sound particularly hollow to those at the chalk face trying to grapple with the reality. We have spent too much time concentrating on the consequences of offending, instead of looking at the means of preventing it in the first place. The rhetoric of being tough on crime so loved by a former Prime Minister misses the point. It is time for us to be smart on crime, by looking at the causes of that criminality and dealing with them, lest we reap the whirlwind of social problems and increased expenditure.

When there is no option, we must stop being spellbound by the complexity of things. Prison is there to perform three simple functions: to protect the public, to punish offenders and to offer the hope of rehabilitation. None of those important functions seems to have been properly valued, as the events of recent years bear out. It is a scandal that those who have to pass sentences in the Crown court and other places are influenced by pressures on prison numbers. It is simply unacceptable and literally a denial of justice.

If we are to deal most effectively with criminality in our country, we need to call criminal offences crime, move away from the unproductive and costly antisocial behaviour structure and all the rhetoric surrounding it, and remember that at the root of it all, it is crime prevention and early intervention, particularly in the lives of young people, that we will see reaping real rewards, when we come to look back at our time in office. My plea today is for effective action on crime—for a bit of cleverness, rather than the rhetoric of tabloid newspapers. I look forward to, I hope, playing my part in the debates on crime and other issues that are important to the constituents I represent in the years ahead.

7.24 pm

Margaret Curran (Glasgow East) (Lab): Thank you for the opportunity to deliver my maiden speech in this august Chamber, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am the first woman from Glasgow East to represent the constituency. Indeed, I am delighted that my city of Glasgow has simultaneously provided two women to represent it. We are indeed on the march.

I was intimidated before coming to this Chamber and, having listened to so many wonderful speeches, I am now completely intimidated—even more so than before. I have served in the Scottish Parliament since its inception in 1999. The transfer to these Green Benches has been daunting; indeed, this is a very different parliamentary experience.

I arrive in Westminster at a time of great and momentous challenge, in the tailspin of one of the world's worst financial crises and an unprecedented breakdown in public confidence in the political class. In such a Chamber, we inevitably look to the voices and influences of the past. We must learn from and understand them. In this era of supposedly new politics, I hope that we do not forget the major advances of the past, including those of the preceding Labour Government. Among the most radical acts of that Labour Government was the constitutional arrangements that they introduced, including the advent of devolution, which was perhaps one of the most significant shifts in Government power that any of us is ever likely to witness.

Devolution has played a vital part in the economic and social renewal of Scotland. I have seen the Scottish Parliament become firmly embedded in the body politic of Scotland, with a programme of reform that has a deep and lasting impact in my constituency of Glasgow East. That constituency has many challenges to face. It ranges from the relatively prosperous areas of Mount Vernon and Garrowhill, through to hard-working communities such as those in Craigend and Carmyle, all of which include communities that have paid too high a price for the economic policies of the 1980s. We once had a steelworks that at its peak employed 40,000 workers. Now, United Biscuits, although perhaps the largest employer in the constituency, has 800 workers, making a vital contribution to the local economy.

Work was done by the previous Labour Government to develop the economic base of the east end of Glasgow. In the past 10 years, there has been an increase of businesses of nearly 50%, and increasing every year of that Labour Government. But as I say, Mr Deputy Presiding Officer—forgive me, Mr Deputy Speaker; that was bound to happen—challenges remain. We have an unemployment rate of 7.3%, against a Scottish average of 4.3%. However, it is also incumbent on me to say that there is deep resentment across the east end that its many achievements are overlooked or undermined.

There is much to celebrate in the east end of Glasgow. We have some of the highest-performing state schools, in brand-new buildings. In 2014 we will host the Commonwealth games; and, of course, we are home to one of the world's best football teams, Glasgow Celtic. I know that my speech is meant to be uncontroversial, but I must challenge a Member who spoke previously who claimed paradise was in his constituency. Paradise is, in fact, in the east end of Glasgow. Let me be clear: Glasgow East is a place of significant opportunity, but much more needs to be done; a place of great aspiration, too much of it unfulfilled; and a place of enterprise and effort, not always rewarded as it should be.

I am sure that in tackling that agenda I would receive strong support from my predecessor, Mr John Mason. Although I did not share his nationalist beliefs or those of the Scottish National party, I know that he had a strong dedication to his cause. In an age of spin and public relations, that is very much to be respected. I was in the unusual position of having fought John in two elections. I witnessed first hand what a strong defender of our democratic process he is. I am sure that everyone in the House would wish John Mason well in his future endeavours.

John Mason and I both share an appreciation for the work of our mutual predecessor, David Marshall, who served Glasgow, Shettleston—and subsequently Glasgow East—with great distinction for nearly three decades. In fact, the east end of Glasgow has produced parliamentarians of outstanding character and achievement. Most towering of all was John Wheatley, who combined inspiring politics with practical actions and is best remembered for the Housing Act 1924, which for the first time provided affordable housing for working people in Scotland. His legacy continues in my constituency.

I am well aware that my constituency is well known to many Members, particularly the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, who claims Easterhouse as part of the inspiration for his welfare reform. Easterhouse is an area of genuine warmth and friendliness, and of course

he was welcome. However, I am told that local people were intrigued: they had never seen a Tory before—and after he left, they have not seen one since.

The Secretary of State has made great claims for the changes that he will introduce. He has raised enormous expectations. I should tell the House that I will endeavour with some energy to ensure that he does not dispense that sick old Tory medicine, which is that when times are hard, benefits for the poorest are cut and the better-off are given tax cuts to see them on their way. His argument will be seriously weakened if he tells people that the *only answer is work when there is no work to go to, and* cuts all the supports that help individuals and families to get back on their feet. The effects of Thatcherism seem to have taken him by surprise. I do not know where he was during those years, but he certainly was not in Easterhouse then. I will say this about his reform programme: the people of Easterhouse and Glasgow East will be watching his work very closely indeed.

Mr Deputy Presiding Officer—Mr Deputy Speaker; I do apologise. I have won elections and I have lost elections, and from the recent election I draw the conclusion that no one party received ringing endorsements, and there was a very marked voting pattern throughout the country. I hope that the coalition Government pay close attention to the voting patterns in my constituency, my city and my country, because those people made it very clear that they did not want to return to an agenda of cuts and unemployment. I hope that, in the spirit of the new politics, the Government will pay due attention to that.

7.30 pm

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow East (Margaret Curran) on a tremendous maiden speech. Those of us who know something about Scottish politics are well aware that she has a good reputation—a great reputation—and I am sure that she will continue her work in the House of Commons. She spoke with great passion and commitment, and she joins a number of ladies from Scotland on the Labour Benches who are a tremendous asset to this place.

May I express a little sympathy with the hon. Lady? Having also come to the House of Commons from another Chamber, I spent my maiden speech addressing the assembly as "My Lords". Happily, I was cured of the habit pretty quickly, and I am sure that the hon. Lady will soon find it very easy to address the Chair as "Mr. Speaker" or "Mr. Deputy Speaker".

I intend to talk about House of Lords reform. However, I am tempted first to make a brief comment about boundaries, particularly after hearing the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs Laing) say that absolute numbers were everything. I politely beg to differ. If, indeed, pure mathematics dictates that this Chamber should represent absolutely the votes cast in an election, the answer is extremely simple: it is called the single transferable vote. We all accept, however—I certainly accept—that there is something very special about the link between Member and constituency, which goes beyond simple mathematics.

There are other points to be taken into account. I am very happy with the argument advanced by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister that we should have more equality, for who could be against more equality? But what sort of equality are we to have? I want to ensure that my constituents experience the same equality of quality of service that they can expect from their Member of Parliament. In an average weekend, I spend four, five or six hours in a car in order to see my constituents—because why on earth should they come to me?—as well as the 12 hours that I spend commuting to and from this place. I should not be penalised for that. I must tell my right hon. and hon. Friends that a constituency that stretched from Shetland to Argyll would be utterly unworkable. It must be possible to take account of the differences, and to achieve a proper balance between numbers and size.

Mark Lazarowicz: The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise the importance of maintaining the constituency link, but would not including the option of the AV-plus system proposed by the Jenkins commission in the proposed referendum on the electoral system make it possible to maintain that link while at the same time adopting a fairer voting system? That would give us a real choice, rather than our being limited to an option that neither of the governing parties support.

John Thurso: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point, but I must not become involved in a discussion on the subject. I am looking at the clock, and thinking about House of Lords reform. I can usually bore for Britain about House of Lords reform for hours on end, but I see that I have only four minutes and 48 seconds left. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but perhaps we could discuss it on another occasion.

I want to talk first about the "why" and then about the "how" of House of Lords reform. For me, reforming the House of Lords represents the linchpin of constitutional reform. Without a legitimate upper House, we do not have a legitimate Parliament. It is unacceptable for one half of our Parliament to debate, with quality, and reach a decision, and for that decision to be rejected by the other half, simply because it is not legitimate—and it is not legitimate because it is not elected.

There are many countries in the world where appointment is regarded as legitimate, but in this country—given the way in which the media in particular, but also this place, have discussed the upper House—the other place can be considered legitimate only if it is either wholly or in very large part elected. When that happens, and it has legitimacy, it will become the true check and balance on this place that it ought to be.

I am not the slightest bit worried about this House losing its primacy. A strong House of Lords, properly elected on, I suggest, a different model from this place—a fully proportionate model—and operating in the way in which it should, would complement Parliament. A strong upper House means a strong Parliament. I believe that much of what has happened in the past could have been avoided if Parliament had been strengthened to allow two functioning Houses to hold the Executive to account, each undertaking its separate functions.

That brings me to the "how". First, we must consider the strengths of the House of Lords, of which there are many. The quality of debate is tremendous. The House has no instructions from the Chair, and Report stages and Third Readings proceed in a timeous manner. We could learn from those examples in this place. The quality of the scrutiny given to legislation, and of

[John Thurso]

debates, is very high in the House of Lords, and the lack of a constituency link is essential: we cannot allow a competition with a Member of Parliament representing a constituency. It is traditional for peers to discuss their regions, but they do not become involved in constituency cases. I have long held the view that a House based on large regional constituencies, with one third elected at each election for a longish period with no re-election, would capture the majority of the benefits that currently exist in the upper House. It would become both a smaller and a stronger House.

I want to say a little about what has been called "grandfathering". High principle and low politics are involved. The interesting thing about life peers is that they all go native. It seems that the hereditaries are the only ones who are happy to leave. Life peers are seduced by the glories of the place. I propose that they should all be allowed to stay there, and that we elect the first third, the second third and the third third. We will get there eventually. The grim reaper will take care of quite a lot of them, and I suspect that if—as I suggested on Second Reading of the Bill that became the House of Lords Act 1999 when I was in another place—we make it possible for them to retire, a great many noble Lords who have served for a long time and in an illustrious way will take that opportunity.

There is also a high principle, however. The high principle is that much of what is good about the House of Lords, and is in its DNA, needs to be passed on. If the House of Lords as it is today were changed completely and became wholly elected, that would be lost. As I have said, there is low politics, but there is also that high principle.

As the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) said at the outset, it is nearly 100 years since my party started this process off. Would it not be a fitting tribute if we celebrated the hundredth anniversary by completing it?

7.39 pm

Mr Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): Thus far, today's debate has been elegantly poised between rhetoric and reality. The reality we all face is the economic situation, which has been mentioned, and some Members—even among those of us who are not born-again cynics—might wonder whether some of the rhetoric coming from the coalition Government is intended to mask some of the reality of the pain they are currently proposing. I felt that somewhat when I heard the Deputy Prime Minister's speech, with its silken strangulation of the public sector: "I feel your pain."

Let me turn, however, to some of the specific issues, especially voter registration, electoral reform and equal boundaries. We have heard in contributions from both sides of the House about the disadvantages of sweeping away all consideration of natural and constituency boundaries, and I very much welcome and admire the remarks of the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) about getting the balance right, but we all draw on our own circumstances, and I want to say tonight that behind the rhetoric of individual registration and equal constituencies lies the reality of the existing situation in constituencies such as mine where there is under-registration. There has been talk about the need to have equalised constituencies, but not so much emphasis has been placed on equalised registration. In Blackpool and many other seaside towns, and many urban centres as well, the issues of transience and of areas of higher deprivation are key, too. If we are truly concerned about that process, we need to heed what the Electoral Commission has said about the matter. If we are truly concerned about connecting with people in a practical way in addressing voting reform, we ought to return to the issue of weekend voting, which has gone around this place like a miasma, although nobody has ever actually focused on it.

Despite the elegant attempts of some Liberal Democrat Members to defend the indefensible, I must say that they have been sold a pup. They have been given a referendum on the alternative vote, which the Prime Minister and most of the Conservative party, and, sadly—I say that as a supporter of AV—a significant proportion of my party, will campaign against. Its prospects of getting through in a referendum are therefore relatively small. In return for this, there will be a gerrymandered system that will hit hardest at the Liberal Democrats. The Prime Minister gets the gain, and the Liberal Democrats get all the pain.

There were two interesting quotations when the 55% agreement emerged—I think that is the best way to describe them. The Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Andrew Stunell), was a leading participant in the Liberal Democrat discussions that led to the creation of the coalition, and he said on Radio 4 on 14 May:

> "It was a small matter for us to say we accept"

the Conservative party's "concerns" and agree to this. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, who was serving on the Conservative team, had a different take, however. He said it was a "considered constitutional innovation". Clearly, he had not been in the same early-hours cabal as the Under-Secretary. It has been said that the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills made his reputation by referring to the former Prime Minister as having gone from Stalin to Mr Bean. I say that the hon. Member for Hazel Grove went from Mr Bean to Stalin in an instant.

Whether we have, for good or ill, an unwritten constitution, we have it, and custom, practice and precedent are weighty matters. In that constitution, prerogative issues and the fact that the House cannot bind itself because of parliamentary sovereignty to future things, the fact that the 55% figure would insulate the Executive against Parliament and the unease that the convention of dissolution would be eroded are all significant issues. That is why there has been a chorus of protest and concern in Parliament and outside.

I shall quote a few examples. Peter Hennessy, a leading academic and constitutional expert, has said:

> "It looks as if you are priming the pitch, doctoring it a bit. Not good. It's meant to be a different politics, new politics."

We have heard today of the reservations of the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), and the hon. Members for Croydon South (Richard Ottaway) and for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), and there is a degree of sublime humbug about a Conservative leader who hammered away week after week in a general

election campaign about the effect on markets of the uncertainty of a hung Parliament, but who now as Prime Minister blithely proposes to impose a system that, if it led to a lame-duck Government under the 55% rule, would create weeks of turmoil in the markets.

The Scottish issue has already been discussed in that respect. There is a pattern here in respect of the Prime Minister, of course. He said on 14 May:

"I'm the first Prime Minister in British history to give up the right...for a dissolution of Parliament...Others have talked about it, people have written pamphlets and made speeches...I have made that change."

It is, however, very much the 21st-century equivalent of Louis XIV's "I am the state"—he is, of course, the monarch who was associated with the story of the emperor's new clothes. We should not take forward the innovation-on-the-hoof that this Prime Minister is proposing, and the naivety of the Deputy Prime Minister in that respect in talking about verdict first, trial afterwards, because he had not worked out the details in the debate today, is a telling observation for all of us.

I do not have the time to talk about the broader issues, but they were touched on by my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford and Eccles (Hazel Blears). If we do not look at the broader issues of connecting with people, which would require reforming local government, bringing in the third sector and so forth, we will lose the plot. Substituting the coalition's rhetoric for the hard practice of what connecting with local people actually means is a big issue.

7.46 pm

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): I am grateful for this opportunity to speak in today's debate, and I congratulate the other Members who have made their maiden speeches as they have raised the bar. I also thank the people of Amber Valley for electing me as their Member of Parliament. It is a tremendous honour and privilege to serve them, and I will do my utmost to live up to the trust they have placed in me.

The seat of Amber Valley was created in 1983 and was previously represented by Phillip Oppenheim, whom I am sure some Members will remember, and since 1997 by Judy Mallaber. I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for her work on behalf of the people of Amber Valley. She can be rightly proud of what she achieved, especially on the introduction of the minimum wage, on which she worked before entering the House as well as while she was here. It is a tribute that something that was originally a political controversy has become accepted on both sides of the House. I wish her well in her future endeavours.

Whatever our differences on political issues, we have been in agreement on the need to address the support for the British National party in Amber Valley; it had two councillors elected in 2008. I am sure the whole House will share my relief that we are not joined in this place by any members of that party. I suspect that that concern is part of the reason for the conversion of the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) to thinking the European list system we currently use is a bad idea.

It is, however, incumbent upon all politicians of the mainstream to address constructively the issues that have been taken up the BNP. Immigration was the issue most often raised in my seat, and I am pleased that the Gracious Speech includes our pledge to introduce the annual cap on immigration from outside the EU—and I am a little surprised that, as today's Opposition amendment highlights, they are still concerned about that measure, which, as I have said, had widespread support in my seat.

My predecessor referred in her maiden speech to the importance of putting Amber Valley on the map. I think I can best describe that as a work in progress. This may be the only case that data protection rules allow me to take on from her. The seat is in Derbyshire—not in Wales, as some appear to think—running from the Nottinghamshire border to the edge of the Peak district, and includes the towns of Alfreton, Heanor and Ripley, and many surrounding villages. It is a former mining area, which has developed diverse industries since the closure of the pits in the 1960s.

The seat shares its name with a borough council, although that borough council of about 100,000 electors now has three MPs. Perhaps certain measures in the Gracious Speech will reduce some of that confusion, although I will take care in saying that, as part of the council area is also represented by my Chief Whip, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Mr McLoughlin), and I would hate to be seen to be trying to steal part of his seat.

While some Members might not have been able to place Amber Valley on a map, I am sure they are familiar with some of its businesses. These include Denby pottery—and I disagree with the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) in that I claim it as the producer of by far the best pottery in the country, and I am disappointed that I have not as yet found any of its products in use in the House. They also include Matthew Walker Christmas puddings and Thorntons chocolates. If I indulge in too many of their products I can avail myself of the services of another local business, Slimming World.

Of great concern in my constituency is the need to provide good-quality jobs for local people. A recent sadness has been the final closure of the Butterley plant, in Ripley. My two predecessors referred to the great steel work made there that forms the roof of St Pancras railway station; at least they had the pleasure of the business still being around at the time. Part of the Butterley site has already been replaced by houses, much against the wishes of the local council. I therefore welcome our proposal to change the planning system to allow local people to have far more of a say not only in protecting brownfield sites on which we would like to keep manufacturing businesses, but in preventing houses from being built all over our green belt.

I turn to the issue that prompted me to speak in today's debate. While the tragic events in Cumbria were unfolding last Wednesday, there was also a tragic event in the peaceful village of Holbrook, in my constituency, where a young woman and her two-year-old child were stabbed to death by her estranged partner. My thoughts are with the family and friends of the victims at this difficult time. This case is made more difficult by the fact that the alleged perpetrator of these offences had been arrested twice by the police the week before, following accusations of domestic violence, and had also been receiving treatment for mental illness. I therefore welcome Derbyshire police's calling in the Independent Police Complaints Commission to review their actions. I in no

[Nigel Mills]

way wish to pre-judge the outcome of that review—it is easy to do so with the benefit of hindsight—but I hope that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will closely follow the progress of this case. If any lessons need to be learned, I hope they can be learned to ensure that the risk of such tragic events happening again is as low as possible.

It is at times like these that we come to appreciate the difficulty of the job carried out by our police, and I would like to pay tribute to the courage of the officers who broke into the house to try to stop those tragic events. I wish them all the best as they come to terms with the awful situation that they found.

We know that the size of the budget deficit run up by the previous Government means that difficult decisions need to be taken, and Derbyshire police will have to take their share of that pain. I note that the amendment that bears the name of the right hon. Member for Blackburn contains a request that the cuts do not damage the number of police officers. I point out to the Minister that the police funding review carried out some six years ago noted that Derbyshire police needed a significant increase in funding, of approximately £5 million a year. However, that funding has still not been provided to this day, due to the damping mechanism. I urge the Government to have a full review of the allocation of funds for police forces, to ensure that Derbyshire police—who are currently being deprived of the 100 officers whom those funds could be used to provide—get the fair funding they are entitled to for the level of crime in Derbyshire. Only by ensuring a fair allocation of funding can we make sure that we have police services that are both effective and efficient.

7.53 pm

Mr Michael McCann (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) on an excellent maiden speech. It is with some trepidation that I rise to address the House to make my maiden speech, conscious as I am of the esteem and veneration in which it is held in all corners of the civilised world, of the very high standards set by previous maiden speakers in this debate, and of the very great honour that is mine in representing the people of East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow.

Before I tell the House a little more about my constituency, let me pay a warm tribute to my predecessor and friend, the right hon. Adam Ingram. Adam was a trade union official and local councillor before he was first elected to this House in 1987. His talents were soon recognised by Labour Front Benchers, and he served in various positions in opposition, working hard with others for the election of a Labour Government. It was in 1997, when Labour finally took office, that Adam took his first ministerial position under Tony Blair, as Northern Ireland security Minister.

Some Members may have seen the award winning Channel 4 drama "Mo" at the end of January, in which Adam was portrayed by the actor Gary Lewis. Adam explained to me that had Gary Lewis not landed the part, both Brad Pitt and Sylvester Stallone were keen to play the role.

On a serious note, it is easy to forget what has been achieved in Northern Ireland, because nothing is more certain in politics than that, once a commitment is delivered, it is human nature to look forward, not back. None the less, Northern Ireland is a safer, more peaceful place thanks to many people, and Adam Ingram is one of them.

After his time in the Northern Ireland Office, Adam was moved by Tony Blair to the Ministry of Defence. He became the UK's longest serving defence Minister in modern times, dealing with many complex and difficult problems on the global stage. In total, Adam served for 23 years as the MP for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow and its predecessor constituencies, including 10 years as a Minister. During those 23 years, he never forgot who put him in Parliament, and he always put the interests of his constituents first. I pay tribute to Adam Ingram's service to my constituency and to our country.

My constituency is a mix of rural and urban. Its most densely populated area is East Kilbride, Scotland's most successful new town, where I have lived man and boy. Equally important is our rural area, an eclectic mix of villages, each one retaining its distinctive features. Other Members have asked me, "Which constituency do you represent?" They have been rather baffled by the triple-barrelled title of East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow; alternatively, they have had no idea what I am actually saying. However, they should be grateful for the brevity of the title, because many of my constituents remain upset that it does not include their areas of Auldhouse, Blackwood, Brockets Brae, Chapelton, Drumclog, Gilmourton, Glassford, Jackton, Kirkmuirhill, Sandford, Stonehouse and Thorntonhall. I suspect that after hearing that list, Members will be grateful that the constituency name was shortened.

My constituency has a history of providing jobs in both new and established industries, and my constituents do not fear hard work—in fact, they relish it. For the last 13 years, the constituency has had both private and public sector investment. Public sector investment has led to the building of a new hospital, six new high schools, 10 new primary schools, new care homes for the elderly and vulnerable, and new houses. However, that investment is now under threat, both from decisions that will be made in this House and in the devolved Parliament in Edinburgh. We have lost manufacturing jobs in the semiconductor sector and other parts of the economy, but the people of my constituency are resilient. If they are given the opportunities—and their fair share of Government support—they will succeed.

I turn now to the constitution. I learned at an early age in the trade union movement, from my former wise leader, Mr Barry Reamsbottom, that those who seek to amend constitutions rarely do so with the best intentions. That is why I listened intently to the Prime Minister on the day of the Queen's Speech. I have to say that I was disappointed. In attempting to justify the proposal to move to a 55% majority in order to dissolve this House, the Prime Minister used the example of the devolved Administration in Scotland to suggest that the proposal was constitutionally sound. In doing so, he revealed a profound misunderstanding of the devolved settlement.

The devolved Administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales were created by legislation in this House. Under the principle of subsidiarity, decisions

previously taken in this place were devolved to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This House of Commons retains its overarching authority over the devolved Administrations because this is the sovereign Parliament of the United Kingdom. For the Prime Minister to pray in aid rules governing the dissolution of a devolved structure to justify a change in the rules of this House demonstrates an alarming lack of respect for the status of the United Kingdom. The argument of the tail wagging the dog does not stand up even to light scrutiny. My constituents have been steadfast in their support of this democratic Chamber, which is rightly revered around the world. Do not let us diminish its authority based on the result of one election.

This House comprises people of many different backgrounds and talents—business people, lawyers, economists, doctors and academics—but for this place to be truly representative we need diversity. It is therefore right that this House should also include trade unionists, plumbers, electricians and people who have worked in the voluntary sector. My late father, Charles McCann, was a boiler maker/plater, and my mother, Bridget, was a housewife who brought up five children, three of whom were born profoundly deaf. I have been a civil servant, a trade union official and an elected councillor; my parents taught me the values that have made me the person I am today. I am proud to have been elected on 6 May, and I will strain every sinew to represent to the best of my ability the people of East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow in my role as their new Member of Parliament.

7.59 pm

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to thank the people of the Hexham constituency for allowing me to represent them in the House of Commons. I will never forget that they are the people who put me here. I follow on from Peter Atkinson, and I must say that one could not meet a kinder, gentler man. He served Hexham for 18 years with great distinction and I pay tribute to the work that he did. I will do well to copy his calm and effective representation.

The Hexham constituency is the second biggest in England, stretching from the outskirts of Newcastle to the Scottish border, and down to the far reaches of south and west Northumberland. The town of Hexham, with its famous abbey, may be the centre of the constituency, but it is surrounded by hundreds of beautiful villages and towns. Hadrian's wall, the Pennine way, Kielder forest and reservoir, and Northumberland national park. While I am on the subject of tourism, I should mention that we are showing the way, as our scenery and history are second to none; ours is the land of the Romans, St Oswald, the marcher lords, Harry Hotspur, the border reivers and George Stephenson. Our area is at the heartbeat of history, having survived historical Scottish raids and political Liberal raids—I am pleased to say that both those former enemies are now our friends. I invite any hon. Member who has not visited our area to do so. Its people are second to none, and I shall do everything that I can to promote such a beautiful part of the north-east.

However, this special place also has serious issues that need to be addressed. My area contains hospitals that need to be retained, military barracks full of soldiers who need to be supported and schools that, despite the best efforts of the amazing teaching staff, have been underfunded and poorly supported for years. I should also mention our wealth of small and medium-sized businesses that need assistance to get through tough times. My family has run manufacturing businesses for more than 100 years since coming to this country as immigrants, so I am acutely conscious of the fact that the creation of long-term jobs will be at the heart of my role as the Member for Hexham.

Farmers are struggling, hill farmers particularly so, and they all say that the Government of the past 13 years were totally disinterested in the rural way of life. However, our area's biggest problem is the chronic lack of social and affordable housing, which is having an impact on the local economy and schools. To put it simply, young people cannot afford to buy homes in my area. Some planners call this "Cumbriafication", whereby a community is simply priced out of its birthright as all the families have to move elsewhere to live. If we do not stop this process, we will see the ever greater loss of our vibrant rural communities. But there are answers to this problem, because what is a speech in this great House without hope, aspiration, and an ability to believe that one's reach can exceed one's grasp?

We face a simple choice between supporting either the British farmer or still higher profits for the big supermarkets. We in this House have to make that decision, because the farmer simply will not survive without support in this House. We have a simple choice to make, and we should provide local homes for local people, decided upon by local people. We have a simple choice: do we allow village communities to slip away or will we halt the closure of post offices, shops and pubs? Without such amenities, the rural way of life loses its heart, its soul and so much more.

I have chosen to speak in the home affairs debate because I have spent too long as a criminal and civil barrister watching while Home Secretaries meddle with the criminal justice system to little positive effect. There have been dozens of criminal justice Bills in the past 13 years, very few of which were any good. No one has introduced a prison reform Act since 1952. I, like others, have worked at the criminal Bar, prosecuting and defending in many murder trials, and I have seen enough of the inadequacies of prison life to know that wholesale reform is required. To fail to reform the Prison Service would be a crime, because we are simply not solving the problem of crime and punishment. We have doubled the prison population in the past 18 years, yet reoffending rates remain in excess of 70%. We send more people to prison than anyone else in Europe, yet we are not safer. I will campaign for a better focus on sentencing, rehabilitation, drug testing and simple education in prisons. It is often said that too often Governments consult but do not listen. I want to ensure that the victim has a voice in this House. I am proud of the fact that the previous Labour Government, in their wisdom, gave me two separate national awards, one for my help to victim support and one for my campaign to challenge the state on unlawful hospital closures. I expect no such generosity from my hon. Friends in this Parliament.

People do not expect government to solve everything; in fact, in my experience, people are amazed when government does anything good at all. But we have a fresh chance, after the dark days of economic meltdown

[Guy Opperman]

and a broken political system, to establish a new beginning. I accept that it will not be easy, but I am ambitious for my constituents and for this country. You will probably have noticed that I have fallen in love with the constituency of Hexham and its people, Mr Deputy Speaker—that is easy to do, because it is a very special place. I hope to play my part, however small, in delivering success for all the people of my constituency—that is an ambition worth striving for.

8.6 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): It is probably just as well that this is not a maiden speech, because I would hate to have to compete with the outstanding contributions that we have heard today, not least that of the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman). On the basis of what I have heard, I am sure that he will make a major contribution to this place in the years ahead. This is not a maiden speech, but it is a long time since I have had an opportunity to address the House and I have a new constituency—new Selly Oak—which I am very proud to represent.

Apart from the rather dubious proposals on anonymity for rape defendants and the likely impact on rape victims, we have not heard much in the Queen's Speech about the victims of crime and antisocial behaviour. What plans does the coalition have to ensure that the needs of that group are put at the centre of our criminal justice system? It is the lack of consideration for victims that causes some people to think that the system is broken and many to believe that it is weighted entirely in favour of the offender. I have been working with victims for some time now, the most recent phase of which culminated in an input into Sara Payne's report. I take this opportunity to wish her well. I hope that she makes a full recovery, because she is a remarkable lady.

I have become convinced that we need local charters for victims that all criminal justice and public agencies must sign up to so that everyone knows what is expected of them, and that we must reweight the system by putting the rights and needs of the victim ahead of the demands and desires of the wrongdoer. I ask the Government to examine how to reshape the criminal justice system so that the victim becomes our top priority.

I understand the coalition's desire to abolish identity cards. I do not agree with its view, nor do a great many other people who have worries relating to the contribution that ID cards can make to combating crime and fraud. Will there be any compensation for those who, in good faith, have already purchased ID cards, or are they to become the first uncompensated victims of the coalition? As the databases are dismantled, what will happen to ID cards for foreign nationals? Without that infrastructure, how will we tackle illegal immigration?

I should like to know more about the priorities on police reform. Money is tight, so why, as the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs Laing) might well ask, is it a priority to have elections that nobody wants at a cost of perhaps £50 million per throw? Where will that money come from? Can my constituents in Selly Oak have an assurance that it will not be stripped from their policing budgets? What will happen to the policing pledge under elected police chiefs? Can it simply be ditched? If so, how will the Home Secretary safeguard against massive variations in behaviour and performance across police forces? Is incentivised and common-sense policing still on the agenda? On DNA and reducing the retention period for DNA profiles—not abolishing them as a matter of principle, but reducing the period—is the Home Secretary convinced that her proposals will not result in an avoidable tragedy? How will she sleep at night if a murderer or rapist who could have been caught goes free and does it again?

Finally, what are the Government's intentions in relation to closed circuit television, and what was the purpose of the Deputy Prime Minister's outburst against it? Is he merely trying to rekindle his liberal credentials and using CCTV as an Aunt Sally? Remember all those warm words—"It doesn't have to be like this," "It can be different," and "We can change it"? That was rhetoric with the shelf-life of a TV debate from someone whose ambition is now exposed as being to acquire power and hang on to it by any means possible, no matter how illiberal or anti-democratic. Let me tell him that it will not wash. The people in Selly Oak want CCTV. Of course, they want it to be used responsibly, but they want it, and they will not accept any sham diversions.

I have experience of Lib Dem-Tory coalitions in Birmingham, and I know how poor they are at dealing with crime, antisocial behaviour and victims, and how poor they are at using tools that are regularly available elsewhere. I warn this Government not to make the same mistakes, not to rob us of the very tools that make people feel safe and that assist us in the fight against crime, and, for goodness' sake, not to do that to help to save face for an already tarnished Deputy Prime Minister.

8.12 pm

Mr Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): Parliament has returned to a sea of fresh faces, but unlike you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I recognise hardly any of them. They include my brother-in-law, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke), and my former association chairman, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Jacob Rees-Mogg). The party political landscape is transformed and there is a feeling of refreshed optimism, but if we do not apply a new way of thinking to fixing our nation's problems, the very same old politics will, I fear, return.

I shall unashamedly concentrate my observations on economic matters, in my capacity as the Member for the City of London, and on constitutional reform, which I broadly welcome as a long-time and robust supporter of House of Lords elections. I fear that the spirit of the past couple of years has been uncompromisingly ugly for those of us who instinctively support capitalism, free markets and global trade. There is widespread, almost open, hostility to banks, bankers, big business, the wealthy, private education, private health and at times even to the profit motive. That stands in stark contrast to the last time that the Conservatives came into government 31 years ago, when the case for empowering people, the smaller state and individual responsibility had already been made.

The election is already behind us, but I fear that we have a coalition Government in place that lack any explicit mandate to take the very tough economic decisions that are required as a matter of great urgency to get our

public finances back on track. The key problem that faces the Government is a lack of public support for the urgent reductions in public expenditure that are now absolutely necessary. In large part, that is a result of the reluctance of the entire political class, during the recent election campaign, to level with the British public about the economic crisis that lies ahead. We are yet to strike at the core of the former Government's rhetoric, and their narrative remains too dominant for my liking. Labour will now be able to sit on the sidelines and blame the new Government for everything that it postponed addressing. For example, we acquiesce in levelling higher taxes on the wealthy without making clear the very practical reasons why, in an age of unprecedented global mobility, the brightest and best of our young people will simply leave these shores if their plans to create wealth and promote enterprise are stifled. If the coalition is to be a success—and, more importantly, if our country is to lift itself out of this economic mire—we need first to make the case for a smaller, more efficient state through public spending cuts, and, secondly, to be strong enough to make the case for an internationally attractive and competitive tax system.

I understand the public's appetite for retribution when it comes to the financial services sector, much of which is housed in my constituency, and the feeling that the banking fraternity should take the lion's share of new taxes. But we must somehow separate sensible measures to curb excess and to share fairly the national burden from very punitive measures that are designed only to twist the knife and that have great potential to drive away the wealth and employment creators of the future.

There has been much talk about revitalising Britain's manufacturing and export-led growth, but this prompts the obvious question, in the current economic climate, of who exactly will be doing the importing. The UK must be eternally grateful that we have stayed out of the eurozone, but the tumultuous events on the continent, which are only starting to play themselves out, will have a massive effect on us, regardless. After all, that struggling eurozone accounts for 60% of our export market. That is very bad news for the UK. Not only will our European trading partners be importing less, but the likely rapid depreciation in the value of the euro will also detrimentally affect our exporters. One of the most worrying aspects of the UK's economic performance, particularly in the past two years, has been our failure to take greater advantage of the significant 20 to 25% devaluation in our currency to expand our export markets. That will augur very badly for us if sterling appreciates against the euro in the months ahead.

On constitutional reform, I must confess to being rather less a Conservative and more a radical in this area. In my very first speech in the House, nine years ago, I made very clear my support for a wholly-elected House of Lords, and a few years ago I suggested a set of proposals that would have helped to tie up the anomalies that had been left by devolution and the incomplete reform of the House of Lords. As a result of this interest, I have found very disquieting the recent press reports that the new coalition proposes—in breach of both election manifestos—to ennoble 200 men and women in order to ensure that the composition of the House of Lords is

"reflective of the share of the vote"

in the recent general election.

Just before the election, I noted that there would be public outrage if a business-as-usual approach to House of Lords appointments was adopted by the political class in the months ahead. In particular, it would be totally unacceptable if any retiring Members of this House who have been reprimanded, been obliged to apologise to the House or had to repay substantial sums following the allowances scandal were now raised to the peerage. The same must apply to the former senior parliamentarians from the Commons who led the absolutely calamitous efforts to prevent the publication of MPs' expenses through the High Court or the inadequate attempts at reform after the entire scandal broke regarding the employment of relatives at the beginning of 2008. That might be the way that things were done in the past, but it cannot be tolerated now.

It would be unwise to underestimate the challenges ahead for our nation and the challenges that we in the coalition have to take on board. The previous Government left not only a dismal economic legacy, but a discredited political system and woefully inadequate attempts at constitutional reform. An extremely tough road lies ahead, and I fear that the early popularity of the coalition will be very fleeting and that the good will towards it will be very temporary in this country. Accepting that, it would be wise for us to apply integrity, common sense and principle to every political decision that we take. That approach is more likely to receive longer-term political support than the pursuit of an agenda set by public opinion and the media. In looking at both the economy and constitutional reform, I believe we need only take the efforts of the past 13 years as our lesson. Short-termist, incomplete and superficially popular measures have a terrible habit of unravelling before our eyes.

8.19 pm

Gemma Doyle (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab/Co-op): I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden speech today. I congratulate all those who have made maiden speeches today, particularly the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), and my hon. Friends the Members for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Mr McCann), for Glasgow East (Margaret Curran) and for East Lothian (Fiona O'Donnell), who spoke with passion and compassion in equal measure, as I have come to expect from them.

Representing the constituency of West Dunbartonshire would be an enormous honour for anyone but it is particularly special for me, because it is my home. It is where I am from, where I was born and raised. The reason I stood for West Dunbartonshire was to represent the people I grew up with, have lived beside and have known all my life. It is an honour to represent them here.

I pay tribute to my predecessor the right hon. John McFall, not from obligation but from true respect. As a Member of this House, John was first and foremost a champion for West Dunbartonshire. I read his maiden speech, and I could easily have used his opening paragraph, although I hasten to add that I did not. He spoke with pride of the honour of representing his home and I know that throughout his parliamentary career that was foremost in his mind.

John was a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office and was there at the time of the devastating Omagh bombing. He is of course best known for his superb

[Gemma Doyle]

chairmanship of the Treasury Committee. It was a privilege to visit the constituency with John in the weeks before the election. Both he and I were welcomed with open arms everywhere we went. Even after all his 23 years of elected office, he was not wearied by the job. It was clear that he would miss his constituents, and this place, immensely.

John was also a Co-op MP and I am delighted to follow in his footsteps in that respect. I look forward to promoting and supporting Co-op policies in the House, as I believe they often provide a better answer to some problems.

Last week, John was elevated to the other place. I confess that I am slightly unnerved that he will be keeping an eye on me, but his counsel is always welcome. He will be a formidable addition to the other Chamber. Having watched him tackle the bank chiefs, I pity those who thought they were rid of him, but John was respected on both sides of the House and many will be glad to see him back in Westminster.

I pay tribute, too, to Tony Worthington, the former MP for Clydebank and Milngavie. Like John, he was a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office and contributed greatly through his work on the Select Committee on International Development.

Although I did not have the good fortune to meet Ian Campbell, who so ably represented Dumbarton before John McFall, I met his wife Mary during the selection process. Living as she does in the quiet rural village of Gartocharn, she was somewhat surprised to see me at her door one night during the selection campaign, as I chased down every last party member for their vote. She was not, however, as surprised as I was when she told me that the postman had not driven up to her house for some months because of the bad weather. At that point, I worried that I might have put my determination to be selected as the Labour candidate above any consideration for the condition of my dad's car, which my partner Gregor had driven up the steep muddy track to Mrs Campbell's house, narrowly avoiding the sheep. I hope the car is not still rattling—if so, I am afraid the game is up. Apologies, Dad.

The constituency of West Dunbartonshire has the best of both worlds. We sit between Glasgow, in my opinion the best city in the world, and Loch Lomond, undisputedly one of the most beautiful places in the world. If Members have never visited the area, I urge them to put it on their wish list now.

I am in the unique position of having a personal connection with virtually every part of my constituency. Having been born in the Vale of Leven, I grew up in Dumbarton and while I am technically a Son of the Rock I am also half Bankie, as my dad is from Clydebank and I have family in with the bricks there. My mum and dad lived in Bowling when they were first married and growing up I often visited friends in Old Kilpatrick, Milton and Duntocher, so there is genuinely no part of my constituency that is unfamiliar to me. I look forward to standing up for all those areas as I promised during my campaign.

There is so much to be proud of in West Dunbartonshire. We have an incredible history and potentially a very bright future. I could speak for a long time about the history of Dumbarton as the ancient capital of Strathclyde and about our rock and castle, which dates back to the Vikings. I could tell the House about the famous Denny's shipyard, the leading innovator of the time in shipbuilding, which put the finishing touches to the Cutty Sark.

I could also talk about the proud industrial past of Clydebank, heralded today by the Titan crane on the site of the former John Brown's shipyard, famous for its liners and battleships, where the QE II was built. If I had time, I would love to expand on formidable red Clydesiders, such as Davie Kirkwood, another of my predecessors. My older constituents still remember singing about him at election time and his spirit lives on today in the vital work of the Clydebank asbestos group. I could talk about the individuality of all the communities that make up the Vale of Leven and the fantastic community-led regeneration in Renton, but I hope the House will permit me to move on to more pressing issues for my constituents.

Some people focus too much on the boundaries that divide West Dunbartonshire, while I see a brilliant area, with fantastic people, potential and ambition. But we are a people who suffered much under the last Tory Government and I fear we have much to lose under the present one. This Government should pay close attention to what is happening in West Dunbartonshire, because they could learn from the mistakes that are being made there right now.

My constituency is, I am sorry to say, ahead of the curve in facing swingeing cuts, for we are at the mercy of a Scottish National council that wishes to raise £2 million from local people. The council has ramped up home care charges for almost every service it provides. It is cutting our education services from all sides. Those cuts and charges are the No. 1 issue raised with me both by local people who use the services and council employees who are struggling to deliver them. Although it may not be parliamentary convention to address such an issue in a maiden speech, I would be letting down my constituents if I did not raise that situation in my first opportunity to speak in this place.

One of my first acts as the MP for West Dunbartonshire will be to establish a jobs taskforce, but while I am planning how to help get people into work, the Government are taking people out of work. My constituents valued Labour's future jobs fund. Nowhere was it needed more than in West Dunbartonshire, because despite Labour's success in tackling the desperately high levels of unemployment left as the Conservative legacy, West Dunbartonshire consistently has one of the highest levels of unemployment in Scotland. I do not accept that it is for ever our fate to be at the wrong end of those statistics, which is why I welcomed Labour's future jobs fund, but that help will now be taken from my constituents, and I urge the Government to reconsider their decision.

I raise the issue not just for its own merit but to illustrate to the Government that many in the Chamber will disagree with their policies. That is normal and healthy in a democracy, but it would not be healthy or democratic to bind the House to an arbitrary and artificial dissolution threshold of 55%.

I am conscious that I may not have made as traditional a maiden speech as is expected, but I am firmly aware of the expectations my constituents have of me and I intend to uphold my promise to them that I will always put them first.

8.26 pm

Mark Reckless (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Gemma Doyle) and Members on both sides of the House on the excellent maiden speeches we have heard today.

I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for recognising me for this maiden speech. It is, after all, five years since my predecessor, Bob Marshall-Andrews, took to the airwaves to concede defeat. Many Members may have heard him admit defeat on that occasion, but not all may have heard him make later what has variously been described as an Al Gore-style retraction or a Lazarus-like recovery.

Bob Marshall-Andrews represented the constituents of Medway for 13 years, highly ably holding the Government to account throughout that period. During that time he faced a pincer attack from my campaign and from his Front Bench. On one occasion, the Labour Whips were so keen to assist my campaign that they leaked the fact that they had given him permission to undertake legal work in Hong Kong for several weeks while Parliament was sitting. Such things are always opaque, but I understand that it was in retaliation for Mr Marshall-Andrews having auctioned a series of Whips' letters to recalcitrant MPs, to raise money for the Campaign group.

Bob Marshall-Andrews had a number of great successes. He defended the right to trial by jury—I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab) took up that cause this evening—and he helped to prevent the extension of detention without trial. He played a major part locally in bringing the campuses of four universities to our constituency.

The counstituency of Rochester and Strood is the successor to the Medway constituency. It contains two of the five Medway towns. Rochester, with its castle and cathedral, was and should again be a city. Strood, its proud neighbour over the River Medway, grew in the patriotic fervour of the Boer war, along with Chatham dockyard, and that is recorded in street names such as Gordon, Kitchener and Cecil.

The constituency contains the historic dockyard of Chatham, which built and served our Navy from before the time of Pepys, to Nelson's HMS Victory, to the Falklands conflict. We are proud of that heritage, but we are also proud that, 25 years on, we have recovered from the closure of that dockyard.

The constituency is two thirds urban, but also a third rural. We have the Hoo peninsula, between the Rivers Medway and Thames, which stretches from Grain to Cliffe, and where we saw off the threat of an airport twice the size of Heathrow. The constituency also contains the north downs villages of Cuxton and Halling.

On the substance of the debate tonight, I should declare an interest: I am a member of the Kent police authority. However, on occasion, turkeys do vote for Christmas, and I should like to welcome the coalition's proposals to abolish police authorities and replace us with directly elected individuals. It must be right that those who exercise the coercive power of the state should be held to account by those whom they serve. That is a progressive cause. It is the cause of centuries of the parish constable against the remote magistracy. It is the cause of London Labour councils and the South Yorkshire police authority through the 1980s. It is the cause of the Levellers and, indeed, the Diggers, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton referred earlier. However, it is a cause today that is represented not by the Opposition, but by the Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron), who represents not just Burford, but democratic ideals of the Levellers who lost their lives there.

I have heard the odd senior police officer oppose those plans, yet there is no suggestion of any intrusion on the chief constable's prerogative. The powers that will be transferred are currently those of police authorities. Surely, the objection is not merely that directly elected individuals will exercise those powers more effectively than police authorities have done to date.

We will also codify operational independence. I would caution that that does not mean that the police should be allowed to get along with things solely as they wish. The Metropolitan police have a tradition of independence because we have had a concern to guard against them becoming the arm of central Government. However, our tripartite system is a compromise between counties, where chief constables would occasionally receive instructions, and boroughs, where oversight was much greater. Indeed, the watch committee of the borough of Preston met twice a day—once in the morning, to give the chief constable his instructions, and once in the early evening, to check that he had carried them out.

Before I close, I should like to draw the House's attention to what I consider the major trend in policing of the past 25 years. It is the movement of power from locally appointed and accountable chief constables to an organisation that is both a private company and a trade union with a closed shop: the Association of Chief Police Officers, which has grown to dominate the field of policing without the sanction of the House. It has its committees and its cabinet, and it issues instructions to us in Kent on how much we should charge for policing the Faversham carnival or the Maidstone water festival. It is right that we should now move and have directly elected police commissioners to rebalance the policing landscape and restore local democracy.

8.33 pm

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochester and Strood (Mark Reckless) on his fine maiden speech. The practical experience that he obviously has of police authorities will stand him in good stead in debates in the House on such matters, even though we may not agree on the contents of what he says. As for his generous tributes to his predecessor, I am sure that the Labour Whips will hope that he is as loyal to the new Government as his predecessor was to the Labour Government.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Gemma Doyle) for her fine speech. She also paid a very generous tribute to her predecessor, John McFall. John McFall is certainly a hard act to follow, but I have no doubt that she has the talent and expertise to be a worthy successor to him. She will shine in the House, although the nice things that I had written down about her speech came to a stop when she reached the part about Glasgow being the finest city in the world. Glasgow is a fine place, but that is going a little too far. I am sure that she will do well, and I wish her well in her parliamentary career.

[Mark Lazarowicz]

I want to say a few things about the issue of the 55% threshold for Dissolution of the House of Commons, which is being proposed by the Government coalition. I do not think that I am the only Member, and not only on this side of the House, who is disappointed at the way that the Deputy Prime Minister—the first Liberal leader since Lloyd George to speak at the Dispatch Box from the Treasury Bench—performed in the Chamber today. I found his refusal to enter into any real debate and answer questions very disappointing. As the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) said from the other side of the Chamber, the proposal for a minimum threshold is a major constitutional change, and it was not even in either of the Government parties' manifestos, so it is quite reasonable to ask questions about the proposal, how it would work and what it would mean in practice. It is not good enough to say, "It is just a few details that we will sort out later."

The Deputy Leader of the House was taken by surprise, or ambushed, in an Adjournment debate last week. He could be forgiven for not having all the answers, but by now I would have hoped that the Government had answers to the questions that they were asked. I hope that we see better from the Deputy Prime Minister in future.

Given that the Deputy Prime Minister would not answer many of the questions that were put to him today, I hope that the Home Secretary, who is always courteous, tries to address in the winding-up speech some of the issues that the Deputy Prime Minister unfortunately failed to address. I congratulate her junior Ministers on their promotion to the Treasury Bench and hope that they will have a word with her about that before the end of the debate.

Those issues are simple and straightforward. First, do the Government accept that if a Government lose a vote of confidence on a simple majority and no alternative majority is formed within a reasonable time, Parliament will then be dissolved and there will be general election? If they say yes and make it clear that that is their position, they will deal with many of the objections held by Members on the Opposition Benches. *[Interruption.]* The Deputy Leader of the House chunters away from a sedentary position, but the fact is that we have not been given clear answers to these questions. If the Government give clear answers, they will allow the debate to move much further forward.

Secondly, we have to challenge the assertion being made by the Government parties that their proposal for a 55% threshold gives away the Government's right to call a general election. A 55% threshold does not give away the Government's right to call an election. As has been pointed out time and again, the Government parties have 57% of the seats—a majority—so nothing has changed. There is no move to a fixed-term Parliament in the measures being proposed, from what we can understand about what they are meant to provide.

If those on the Government side of the House really want to give up the right to be able to call a general election at a time that suits the Government parties, perhaps we should go for a higher threshold for a Government motion to dissolve Parliament. Let us go for the Scottish higher proportion, as some people have suggested. That might be a fair combination: a higher threshold for the Government to be able to move Dissolution, but keeping the right of a simple majority in Parliament to throw the Government out if they no longer have the support of the House. That is the kind of debate—the kind of proposal and the kind of compromise—that we ought to have over time. It is the kind of debate in which we might get a fair degree of consensus across the House.

One lesson of the Scottish example is not simply the numbers—the threshold—required to dissolve the Scottish Parliament, but the approach to politics involved. The Scottish Parliament's arrangements for dissolution and for no-confidence votes have stood the test of time because they were not suddenly announced at the last minute, after an election. Originally, we were told that there would be a binding vote of the House of Commons on the proposals within days of the Government taking office. That idea at least appears to have been dropped. The Scottish Parliament proposals had such broad support because they were discussed over time, and not just in this House. There were weeks, months and years of discussion in the wider political community in Scotland as well. I suggest that that is a lesson that the Government should learn from the Scottish experience.

As the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr Tyrie) pointed out, this is not only a question of getting measures through this place; they have to get through the House of Lords as well. No matter how many former Liberal Democrat councillors, retired Tory MPs or whatever the Government try to stuff into the House of Lords, I predict that, once they are there, they will become attached to the place along the corridor.

If the Government really want to move forward on fundamental constitutional reform, the way to do it is to try to get as much consensus as possible across the Chamber of the House of Commons. If that happens, there will not be the same opportunity for those in the House of Lords who want to stop change to do so.

Let us try to move forward with consensus. I hope that the Deputy Prime Minister's performance today was an aberration caused by his excitement at being the first Liberal leader since Lloyd George to sit on the Treasury Bench. Perhaps some of the wiser heads in the Lib Dem and Conservative parties will advise him to think differently and to approach the issues differently in future.

I am sure that we can get consensus in the House on most of those issues. Let us try to move forward on that basis, rather than force division where no division need exist.

8.39 pm

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD): I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech this evening. It has been a privilege to listen to so many of my colleagues making their maiden speeches. I mention particularly the previous three speeches—from the hon. Member for Rochester and Strood (Mark Reckless), who has deep boots to fill as the successor to Bob Marshall-Andrews; the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Gemma Doyle); and the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr Field), with whose comments about House of Lords reform I find myself agreeing strongly.

There has been much talk over the years about how statistics can be manipulated to suit the wishes of the Government of the day. I am confident that in this era of new politics, as described so elegantly by my right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister, such statistical innovation will not be a feature of the coalition Government—a Government of whom I am a little startled to find myself a Member.

I mention the fact of statistics or, to put it another way, results shifting with the tide, as when I had the honour of being elected at 3.30 am on 7 May by the good voters of Eastbourne and Willingdon I had already been through a 45-minute process where I had been told that I had lost. It appears that both my and my opponent's counting agents had made the same mistake. Better to have thought I had lost only to find out that I had won, one might say—certainly better than when I fought the previous general election in Eastbourne in 2005, where for a similar period of 45 minutes, I was told that I had won, until suddenly another box of ballot papers was discovered, and I had lost. Members will appreciate, I am sure, that I now believe something only after a certain amount of time has elapsed, to allow for any variables. In my case, 45 minutes appears to be the cut-off.

Nevertheless, it is a profound honour to have been elected as the MP for Eastbourne. I am the third Liberal or Liberal Democrat to have represented such a wonderful constituency. The others were my colleague Mr Bellotti, who was elected in the by-election in 1990, and, apparently, another Liberal MP from over 100 years ago. I believe we were in government at the time, so it is a particular pleasure to be in that position again, though I note that it was rather upsetting for the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Mark Lazarowicz). I fervently hope that we do not have to wait another 100 years before we are next in government, though I suspect that some hon. Members present may earnestly desire that.

I would like to make reference to the contribution of two of my other predecessors, Mr Nigel Waterson and the right hon. Ian Gow. Mr Waterson had the privilege of representing Eastbourne for 18 years and I am sure many of his colleagues in the House will join me in wishing him well for the future. I am aware that the tradition in the House is to speak only good of our predecessor, and that is how it should be. However, the recent general election in Eastbourne was a bruising campaign for all concerned, and at the time and since I promised my constituents that, come what may, were I elected I would remain truthful to them, whatever the criteria.

As my constituents know, there was not a great deal of love lost between Mr Waterson and myself, and it would be absurd and dishonest for me to pretend otherwise, but I would like to pay a fulsome tribute to him on two specific issues. First, Mr Waterson played a key leading role in the town's cross-party campaign to stop the closure of maternity services at the Eastbourne district and general hospital. His commitment and dedication to that cause played no small part in its eventual success. I, Eastbourne and the surrounding area thank him for that.

Secondly, let me provide a little context. Having spent over 20 years in business before coming into politics, I had to learn pretty quickly just how brutal a business our profession can be. It seems to be the nature of the beast. In a way, democratic politics across the world is the closest that protagonists come to war without actually killing each other. It is rather odd, but I am sure many more learned scholars than I have posited that, with a system in which there can be only one winner and the stakes are so great, tempers become frayed. As I am sure many Members know from experience, public meetings can become very heated. On those occasions when Mr Waterson was in the firing line, I observed that he was a brave man. He did not crumble or give in, and for that I respect his courage.

I should like to turn to the right hon. Ian Gow. I never had the pleasure of meeting Mr Gow, but I am aware that there remain a number of Members who knew him well. I should like to tell them and the House that he is still remembered with tremendous affection by the voters of Eastbourne and Willingdon, across all party persuasions. He will be my role model of a good constituency MP.

I should also hope that in some small way my election helps to close the circle since the IRA's appalling and disgraceful act of assassinating Mr Gow all those years ago. I am half Northern Irish, and like many from that island my family was affected by the troubles. One of my uncles was a senior police officer who survived an assassination attempt by the IRA, while other members of my family were more supportive of the nationalist cause, and still other members were supportive of the Liberal Democrats' sister party in Northern Ireland, the Alliance party.

Therefore, I know more than most how far Northern Ireland has come over the past 15 years, and for that I pay a sincere and heartfelt tribute to all the political parties in Northern Ireland which have moved so far, and to both the Conservative and, more recently, Labour Governments for enabling the peace process, proving, perhaps, what I said earlier: for all its Sturm und Drang, democratic politics, red in tooth and claw, really is the only sane alternative. Otherwise, as we saw in Northern Ireland during the troubles and still see throughout the world, bloodshed ensues and people—innocent people—lose their lives. Consequently, to represent the same constituency that the right hon. Ian Gow died serving is an honour, and I assure the House that his memory and legacy live on in Eastbourne.

Talking of Eastbourne, I shall give Members a little history. Many in the House will know that it is a splendid town with a fine sea front, wonderful architecture and flanked by the stunning South Downs. Some Members, however, may not know that George Orwell was reputed to have written "Animal Farm" in Eastbourne. Indeed, Friedrich Engels lived for a time in the town and, allegedly, even received the odd holiday visit from Karl Marx. Not perhaps what we would expect—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Hugh Bayley): Order. It is an excellent maiden speech, but I am afraid that I must now call the next speaker.

8.47 pm

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity this evening to address the House for the first time, and it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), whom I congratulate on making such an engaging contribution to this evening's proceedings.

[Dr Eilidh Whiteford]

It is perhaps appropriate that I contribute to this part of the debate on the Gracious Speech, because I am the first Member for Banff and Buchan to make a maiden speech in the Chamber since the significant constitutional changes that brought about devolution and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. Part of my duty this evening is to pay tribute to my predecessor, the right hon. Alex Salmond, the First Minister of Scotland. My right hon. Friend made an inimitable mark on this House. He continues to serve the people of north-east Scotland as MSP for Gordon, and he continues to make his mark on what remains a live and dynamic debate about the constitutional future of these islands. I have no doubt that Alex Salmond will play an instrumental role in shaping the emerging debate, which is now gathering momentum, on new powers for the devolved Administrations. I have no doubt also that, when future generations reflect on the history of Scotland, Alex Salmond's central place in the story of our own times will be assured.

However, some of Alex Salmond's greatest strengths as a Member lay in the diligent service that he gave his constituents in Banff and Buchan. He worked hard to win the respect of his constituents across the political spectrum, and I aim to do likewise. I grew up in the Banffshire port of Macduff, I am now immensely honoured to represent my home area, and I shall seek to emulate the high quality of representation to which the people of Banff and Buchan have grown accustomed over the past 23 years.

Turning to this evening's debate, I am the first to concede that constitutional change can be a dry subject. However, for my constituents, a very great deal is at stake in our constitutional arrangements. Banff and Buchan's local economy depends heavily on agriculture, fisheries and energy and the manufacturing industries associated with them. People do hard physical work to produce tangible goods and services, and, although the oil and gas industry has brought a degree of prosperity to the area over the past 30 years, many people—especially women—still work in low-paid jobs in the processing and manufacturing sectors. Many of our older residents therefore face very frugal retirements, despite having worked hard all their days, and keeping warm in winter is a challenge for many. The constituency has been badly affected by the recession; in fact, we have experienced among the sharpest increases in unemployment anywhere in the UK.

The constitution matters to Banff and Buchan because our key industries are directly affected by decisions made at European level negotiated on our behalf by UK Ministers—too often, I am sad to say, not very effectively. In my view, further constitutional change is a necessary precursor to improving the lives and prospects of the people I represent.

The fishing industry is at the heart of our local economy, and it is the lifeblood of our coastal towns and villages. About two thirds of the UK's fishing industry is based in Scotland, and much of it is centred around Banff and Buchan, where Peterhead remains Europe's premier white fish port and Fraserburgh is Europe's largest shellfish port. The fishing industry also supports thousands of onshore jobs in fish processing, retail and supply. These continue to be exceptionally difficult times for the fishing and processing industries. In the past 10 years, the white fish fleet has halved and many of the current fleet are struggling to stay in business. The underlying problem is the European Union's common fisheries policy, which has been an unmitigated disaster at every level. The CFP is not fit for purpose. It threatens the economic viability of the industry and the social fabric of our communities, and it is causing untold environmental damage. Our fishing industry needs urgent action now to create a sustainable future.

As hon. Members will be aware, management of fisheries is a devolved issue, but the key decisions that set the policy framework are made by EU member states. Scottish fishermen have been repeatedly let down by UK Governments in EU negotiations. Just a few weeks ago, at a time of crisis for the industry, we saw the Scottish Fisheries Minister prevented from attending international talks on the CFP, while an unelected peer attended on behalf of the previous UK Government. Perhaps no issue highlights more acutely the limitations of our current constitutional arrangements. Fishing is far more important to the communities I represent than it will ever be to the UK as a whole. Although I regret that there is no mention of fisheries in the new Government's coalition agreement, I hope that they will take steps to redress the exclusion of the devolved Administrations from fisheries talks and will, in doing so, put some flesh on the bones of their much publicised, and today rather emaciated-looking, respect agenda.

Banff and Buchan's agricultural producers face similar representational challenges in ensuring that decisions made in Brussels reflect their interests and needs. Turriff is the most sizeable of Banff and Buchan's rural towns and is home to one of the UK's largest agricultural shows and a range of industries, including a large meat processing plant that supplies premium produce to supermarkets across the country. Turriff is of course more well known for the famous "Turra Coo", which formed part of a celebrated protest by local farmers against the taxation policies of the Liberal Government back in 1913. Perhaps there is a warning there for the present Government to mind how they treat Scottish farmers.

The realities of physical geography mean that there are distinct issues for farmers in different parts of the UK. Agriculture is also largely a devolved issue, but the practice of recent years has often been for UK Ministers to conduct negotiations with the EU Commission, the presidency and other member states without the presence of devolved Ministers. Once again, I would urge the new Government to bring the democratically elected representatives of the devolved Administrations around the table. As the EU reforms its common agricultural policy, the UK needs to move away from the "one size fits nobody" approach of recent years, which does a grave disservice to those among my constituents who earn their livelihoods from the land.

The other major source of employment in Banff and Buchan is the oil and gas sector, onshore and offshore, most notably at the St Fergus terminal. However, as we look ahead, we have to acknowledge that our future prosperity lies in renewable energy. Banff and Buchan is exceptionally well positioned to take advantage of emerging opportunities in the development of offshore wind, wave and tidal power. We have the location and a skilled workforce experienced in offshore technology. However,

to make the most of these opportunities for green jobs, we need to challenge the current discriminatory transmission charges regime, which disincentivises the production of renewable energy in the very areas of the UK most equipped to produce it. We also need the UK Government to release the fossil fuel levy to enable the investment in the infrastructure that is necessary to realise our potential and to build a prosperous future.

I have no doubt that I will return to these issues in the weeks ahead, and I look forward to bringing the concerns of Banff and Buchan's constituents before the House in future.

8.54 pm

Matthew Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con): It is an honour to be called to speak and to follow the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford), who spoke so passionately about her new constituency. She also spoke about a subject to do with the constitution that I, too, wish to address—the devolution of power to people more locally. That is a thread that binds together all of us on this side of the House. We believe that the constitution has become too centralised and that local people should be given more of a say. That is certainly true in West Suffolk.

West Suffolk has been represented for the past 18 years by Richard Spring, who was well loved in the constituency, worked tirelessly for it and was admired and respected in all parts of the House. I cannot recall the number of times that, during the election campaign, I knocked on a door and the person who answered said, "Oh, you are following Richard Spring. Well, you've got big shoes to fill." If I can manage to fill those shoes and do as good a job for West Suffolk as he did over the past 18 years, I will have done a very good job indeed. I say from the bottom of my heart that that is what I intend to do.

Richard Spring made the decision early on in his time as an MP to, as he put it, "out-liberal the Liberals" in local campaigning. Now that I find myself on the same Benches as that party, perhaps it is appropriate that I have learned a trick or two from the campaigning that he undertook locally to ensure that West Suffolk was well represented in the House. His biggest impact on the constituency was undoubtedly in the town of Haverhill, which is the largest in the constituency. It has a long history and was in the Domesday Book. It is now a town on the up, largely thanks to his work and that of St Edmundsbury borough council. It has companies such as Genzyme that export to China, which is truly where the future of our manufacturing economy will come from.

West Suffolk is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful constituencies in our country. I have heard the claims of others, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman)—I look forward to challenging his claim to have the most beautiful constituency in the country. With villages such as Ixworth, Stanton, Bardwell, Hundon and Wixoe, and the Stour valley village of Thurlow where I now live with my family, all in all there are 42 villages of thatched roofs and pink cottages all through Constable country, which inspired the great artist.

As well as the most beautiful, West Suffolk is one of the largest constituencies in England, and that large area is united by the poor transport links that we find throughout it. The A11, which serves the whole of Norfolk, desperately needs the final nine miles to be dualled to provide better transport and a better economy to the whole east of England. At the most northerly point of the constituency, Brandon is a peaceful market town, but that peace is destroyed as the holiday traffic runs up the high street. Members will not be surprised that as a new MP, I support the fully locally funded proposal to bring a bypass to Brandon. However, they can imagine my horror when, in preparing for this speech, I read the maiden speech of my predecessor 18 years ago and found that he, too, had argued that there was a desperate need for a bypass for Brandon. I hope that it will not take a whole 18 years to bring it about.

Just south of Brandon is Mildenhall, famous for the Roman Mildenhall treasure and now, of course, home to a large United States air force base. Finally, I turn to the town of Newmarket. It is undoubtedly the most famous town in West Suffolk, and its heritage lives and breathes in the 62 studs and racing yards that are woven through the town centre. It is a unique town with a unique character, and it has unique needs. For instance, it was once illegal to blow one's nose on Newmarket high street. That rule was in place for the benefit not of the local people but of the bloodstock that ran up and down the street.

Such attention to local need is unfortunately in marked contrast to the one-size-fits-all, we-know-best attitude that Newmarket has seen over the past 13 years, and it is to that point that I turn in the final moments of my speech. For many years, the constitution has endured a creeping centralism. In particular, in planning, John Prescott's regional spatial strategies have tried to turn every market town into a clone town. The powers of local people to resist have been stripped away, but already the new Government are succeeding in giving power back to the people. The regional spatial strategy was forcing through an inappropriate proposal to build thousands of homes and an industrial park in the middle of Newmarket, which the council found itself powerless to reject—but no more. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has given councils the power to make decisions for themselves once again. The people were given their voice and their democratically elected councillors voted unanimously to reject the proposal.

So there we have it. After less than a month in office, the new Government are already improving our constitution to make it more local, more responsive to the people and less in hock to unelected, unaccountable quangos. A law and a quango cannot solve every ill of this world, but by trusting people and sharing responsibility, we can make a start. That principle binds us together on these Benches. I commend the Queen's Speech to the House.

9 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock) on his maiden speech and hope that he enjoys his time in the House.

It is my first opportunity to make a contribution since the election, and I am pleased to see so many new faces, particularly so many new women Members of Parliament, and so many new young women MPs. I hope that they, too, enjoy their time in the House and change it for the better.

[Siobhain McDonagh]

The election was fascinating in many ways. The pundits have been divided about how we ended up with the result. However, one thing I know—the election was not a referendum on scrapping identity cards or restricting the use of CCTV or DNA. We all know in our hearts, if not in our speeches, that the public did not endorse any party to carry out those policies.

For many years, my constituents have been telling me that their priorities are protecting their communities, and not protecting those who commit crimes and antisocial behaviour, or those who abuse benefits and immigration systems. A few years ago, I invited my constituents to Parliament to tell me how they wanted the Home Office to help in their community. I held two packed meetings in Committee Room 14—the biggest Committee room in Parliament. It was full to overflowing. My constituents believed almost universally that, in helping tackle crime, making antisocial behaviour more difficult and clamping down on immigration abuses and benefit fraud, ID cards would give them more freedom, not take it away. Out of more than 400 people, more than 90% agreed.

In the recent election campaign, people continued to tell me that ID cards, CCTV and DNA could make a difference. They will not necessarily prevent all the bad things that happen, but my constituents believe that they will protect their rights and make life harder for those who would abuse their privileges. If the Government scrap ID cards or the next generation of more secure biometric passports, we are not clear how they would ensure the security of our borders, prevent illegal working or make it harder to defraud the benefit system.

I have spoken about ID cards many times in the House, and many constituents have come to me because their identities have been stolen. Sometimes that has meant their being wrongly fined for the congestion charge, getting the wrong bills and, in more serious cases, being removed from packed planes because somebody had used their name and committed a crime. There was also the devastated family who watched the drugs squad come through their front door because the police were unaware of the identity of the people next door.

There are many simpler cases. The national identity register and biometric passports are essential to ensure the integrity of people's identity. Many people have already obtained ID cards because they are prepared to pay for that protection and want to be able to prove their age in pubs and travel freely around Europe. They are angry that the Government will not support them.

Nobody has ever come to my advice surgery asking for CCTV to be taken away. I suggest that nobody will ever come to other hon. Members' surgeries with such a request. People come to see us because they want more, not less CCTV. People in Gilpin close, Mitcham thought that the only way to resolve the problems of antisocial behaviour, and young people vandalising cars, taking drugs and threatening other residents, was through introducing CCTV. Thanks to the Labour Government and the hard work of their councillors, the people of Gilpin close now have that CCTV. Nationally, we heard in the past few days that the main suspect in the Bradford murder case was arrested after a caretaker found CCTV footage of one of the victims.

The same argument applies to DNA. Would a woman walking home late at night feel safer knowing that a criminal had their freedom because DNA evidence could not be used to convict them? I do not think so. The DNA database provides the police with more than 3,000 matches each month, and my constituents do not want to lose that tool in the fight against violent crime, burglaries and rape.

One of the most notorious crimes in my part of south London in recent years was solved when the killer of poor Sally Anne Bowman, Mark Dixie, was found guilty as a result of DNA evidence. If the Government have their way, DNA profiles will be retained only for those arrested for a serious offence, and for only three years unless a further court extension is granted. My constituents are worried that they will make it harder to catch the Mark Dixies of the future.

I take the use of ID cards, CCTV and DNA seriously, and my constituents share that view. I find it hard to believe that a new Government, with such a broad church, could come up with the Identity Documents Bill. They do not really have an identity of their own, so how can they protect anybody else's?

I also find it hard to comprehend how plans to make it more difficult to use CCTV or DNA evidence could appear in something called a "freedom" Bill. To whose freedom does that refer? We read in the broadsheets and hear grand speeches about individuals, but may I suggest that the freedom of the many—of the community—is based in DNA retention and the use of CCTV, and a Government who are prepared to stand up for ordinary people?

It might be good to make great, eloquent speeches about the individual and their inalienable rights, but it is the right of an elderly lady to have the freedom to live in her own home without people sitting on her front gate and throwing stuff at her windows; the right of a woman to use the tube late at night and walk back to her home; and the right of young black men, who are the main victims of crime, to walk freely in our town centres without fear. CCTV, the DNA database and ID cards would make a strong, positive contribution to allowing those people, who are not necessarily represented in the House, their freedom.

9.7 pm

Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock) in making a maiden speech in this debate. He made a fantastic maiden speech and we all now know to be very careful where we blow our noses in his constituency.

It is a great honour for my family for me to be elected for North East Somerset. My father—or my noble kinsman, Lord Rees-Mogg, as I am now meant to call him—told me that between him, myself and my sister, we have tried seven times with one victory. I fear that if we were a football team, people would be calling for the manager to be removed.

It is also an enormous honour for me to be elected for North East Somerset, which is where I was brought up and where my family have lived for generations. As everybody knows, Somerset is God's own county, and North East Somerset is God's own part of God's own county.

I inherit the seat from two very distinguished gentlemen, one of whom is my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr Foster). I am very glad he is now my hon. Friend,

because I discovered when canvassing that a lot of people who were unaware of boundary changes were still intending to vote for him. When they discovered they could no longer do so, they turned out to be lifelong Conservatives, so I welcome him to the Peelite coalition that we now have.

The main part of my constituency was the old Wansdyke seat, which I have inherited from Mr Dan Norris, a most distinguished Labour Member, and a Parliamentary Private Secretary to the right hon. Member for South Shields (David Miliband). He is probably sorely missed at the moment during the Labour leadership election. He was the model of an assiduous constituency MP. He worked tirelessly both as an Avon county councillor and as an MP and I indeed have large shoes to fill.

North East Somerset, which, as I said, is God's own part of God's own county, has a great place in British history. I am not going to go back at any great length to Bladud, the father of King Lear, who in 683 BC founded Bath—he found some pigs with skin disease in north-east Somerset, and washed them in the waters—because he is a rather peripheral figure.

Alfred the Great is more substantial. Alfred the Great, we must remember, in 878 AD, had just Somerset left, with the Danes all around, as they had begun to take over all of Wessex and already had much of the rest of England. Alfred, however, brought together the people of Somerset, Wiltshire and parts of Hampshire and they crossed over from the Somerset levels through north-east Somerset to Edington, near Chippenham, and there they fought the great battle on which our freedoms depend. They put paid to Danish occupation. Alfred was a great law giver—a man we should think about in this debate particularly, because he did not want to innovate laws; he wanted to codify laws. He wanted to tell people what ancient rights they had and how they ought to have their liberties. He was able to expel the Danes and his grandson became the first King of England on borders we would recognise to this day.

Moving on a little later, the next great figure from North East Somerset is Alphege, Archbishop of Canterbury, born in Weston, a village bordering north-east Somerset and Bath. He is really the first tax martyr. He was called upon to pay the Danegeld, and he took £48,000 to the Danes, then at Greenwich, and handed it over. They said, "Mr Alphege, we would like some more, and if you don't give us more, we are going to hold on to you as a hostage." And Alphege replied: "I will not give you more; I will not put higher taxes on my people; I will not have them suffer this imposition." So they threw ox bones at Alphege until he died. I hope that people will not find it necessary to throw ox bones at me, but as another representative from North East Somerset, I will stand constantly for low taxation.

The final figure I am going to mention in this great pantheon of wonderful figures from God's own part of God's own county is John Locke. Brought up in Belluton—this really is a sop to the Whig coalition that we now have—this philosopher of the Whigs was in many ways the founder of the constitution that we now have, one that has as its essence the fact that power comes from the people up to the legislature, which is there to supervise the Executive. Members will all know that the argument at the time was about the divine right of kings and some may now think that we have another form of divine right of the Executive. Locke made it clear that the duty of the legislature was to check and to stop the Executive exceeding the powers, the rights and the authority that it had from time immemorial.

Let us take these three great Somerset men: Alfred the Great, the first Eurosceptic, who got rid of the Danes and made England independent; Alphege, the low-tax martyr; and John Locke, standing up for the legislature and the people against the Executive. For however long I represent North East Somerset, I will take these three as my great heroes and hope to model my political words on their thoughts.

9.13 pm

Mr Tom Harris (Glasgow South) (Lab): I am not sure I am up to the task of following such an eloquent, entertaining and, frankly, self-assured maiden speech as the one we have just heard from the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Jacob Rees-Mogg). Not since the days of Boris Johnson have we in this Chamber been treated to such a colourful, imaginative and evocative detailing of our history. I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that I have no doubt that he will do extremely well in this Chamber, and on his own Government's Front Bench at some point soon. I am sure that if he holds on to his seat long enough, after the next general election, he will make an excellent addition to the shadow Cabinet.

I was elected to this House precisely nine years ago today, and I made my maiden speech a few weeks after that—coincidentally, on the Queen's Speech debate on the constitution and home affairs. During that speech, I made mention of the fact that a commitment to electoral reform was absent from the Government's agenda that year, and I said that I hoped the absence of electoral reform would be a recurring feature of future Queen's Speeches.

Unfortunately—alas and alack—we now face a Government who are committed to a referendum on electoral reform, and specifically on replacing first past the post with the alternative vote. As for that referendum, I am somewhat bewildered by the fact that in this new age of Aquarius—this new dawn of democracy, the new politics—we are left with a Government, both parties of whom campaigned against a referendum on the alternative vote, but who are now implementing a referendum on the alternative vote. I hope that those of us who use the phrase "the new politics" will henceforth remember to indicate the irony of that phrase by perhaps using air-quotes when they say it.

The Liberals continue to oppose the alternative vote in principle, but they support it in practice, because they see it as a stepping stone to further electoral reform. The Conservatives still oppose the alternative vote in principle, but they support it in practice, because it is the only way that they can keep hold of their ministerial Oyster cards. There is something peculiarly undemocratic about that situation.

Personally, I am looking forward to campaigning for the retention of first past the post in my constituency and throughout the rest of the country. Let me say at the outset that first past the post is not a good system for electing MPs—indeed, it is a rubbish system for electing MPs—but it has the unique value of being slightly less rubbish than all the alternatives. I do not want us to move through further electoral reform to a

[Mr Tom Harris]

situation where the decision of who forms the Government and who becomes Prime Minister is taken from the hands of the electorate and given to a single individual: whoever happens to be the leader of the Liberal Democrats. I do not see anything remotely democratic in that.

Just after the election results were known, a number of my colleagues on the Labour Benches went on television to talk about "our friends" in the Liberal Democrats. Those "friends" are the same people who have supported electoral reform in some form or other over many years because they hold the view that there is a permanent progressive majority in this country that, given the opportunity and the right electoral system, would put in place a permanent anti-Conservative coalition. Leaving aside the dodgy democratic credentials of such a proposal, I would ask my hon. Friends whether they still believe that the Liberal Democrats' centre of gravity is on the left of British politics. I would ask them to look across the Chamber and see the evidence before their own eyes. I do not believe that the Liberal Democrats would be an appropriate partner for the Labour party in a future coalition Government. After all, I do not want to touch them with a bargepole—I know where they have been.

My favourite part of the new politics so far has been watching Liberal Democrats arguing that black is white, that north is south, and that Short money was ever intended for Government parties. However, I have some reassurance for Liberal Democrat Members. If they are genuinely worried about a closing down of a valued and regular source of income—I would totally understand that—I have some words of comfort for them, because although I might be wrong on this, as far as I understand it, they now qualify for Ashcroft money.

I do not want to take up too much time, so let me conclude. There has been a lot of talk about the Government's proposed caps on immigration, including in our considered amendment, but I want to suggest a departure not only from my party's policy, but from that of any other party—I am effectively thinking out loud now, having listened closely and carefully to the views of my constituents during the election campaign. There is a lot of concern about immigration, but we cannot avoid the fact that there is a lot of concern not only about non-EU immigration, but about EU immigration. I wonder whether we have reached a point at which we should at last, like the French citizens until two years ago, offer the people of our country a referendum whenever we decide to enlarge the European Union—whether we should give the people ownership of those decisions, and fight for the arguments in favour of expanding the EU. Those arguments are strong; I think that they are unanswerable. But I also think that if we, the political elite, insist on making such decisions ourselves without consulting the public, we shall reap the whirlwind in terms of disenchantment with the EU and a possible collapse of support to the far right.

9.20 pm

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): I am grateful to you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but not half as grateful as my family and friends in the Public Gallery, who I rather naively suggested should be here at half-past two.

I pay tribute to all who have made their maiden speeches today. There was one common theme: each was better than the last—a pattern that I confidently expect to bring to an early closure.

While I am paying tributes, let me mention my predecessor, Nick Ainger. I do not think that, in the 20-odd years for which I knew him, there was a single issue on which we agreed, but that did not mean that we did not hold him in great regard. I know that he was respected in the House, but he was also respected in our part of west Wales, and we wish him well in whatever he plans to do now.

Let me also say what a pleasure it is to enter the House alongside my hon. Friends the Members for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb), for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns), for Cardiff North (Jonathan Evans), and for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies). We are a little short of the 15 Welsh Members whom we hoped to tally up with a rugby team just before the election, but I hope we now have a broad rural and urban representation that is relevant—and what we may lack in size in the Vale of Glamorgan, we undoubtedly make up for in age in Montgomeryshire.

I love my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire like a brother, but I hope he will not mind my regretting, just slightly, the loss of Mr Lembit Öpik from the House. Lembit was a good friend of many people, and—let's face it—he brought a certain colour to proceedings on both the inside and the outside. He was also pioneering unusual coalitions long before they became a habit in the House.

I fully understand why not many Members have ever been to, or in many cases even heard of, Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire. It is, after all, quite a long way west. Let me, however, take a few seconds to whet Members' appetites. There has been a bit of a competition among the new entry about who can paint the juiciest picture of their constituency. I can tell the House that there is more coastline in my part of the world than anywhere else except the Isle of Wight, and that we have 30 beaches, two estuaries, 12 castles, an oil refinery, a power station under construction, and fantastic farming and tourism industries. If all that is too much for Members, we have our own island monastery and two nudist camps—not co-located, I might add.

Dylan Thomas wrote "Under Milk Wood", while in a sober state, in my constituency, and Gareth Edwards is still as happy catching sea trout and salmon on the River Towy as he ever was scoring tries at the old Arms Park. If the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr Spencer) was worried about where the beach scene in Russell Crowe's recent "Robin Hood" epic was filmed, I can reassure him by saying that it was in Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire—and I regret to tell the House that Dobby dies in the sand dunes on Freshwater West beach in the final film in the Harry Potter series, which comes out next year. *[Laughter.]* I hope that I have not said anything that I should not have said.

It should not be thought that everything is rosy in our particular garden, however. We have the same economic and social problems as any other constituency, which is why today's debate is so crucial. I was encouraged when the Deputy Prime Minister nodded in the direction of rurality in the context of constitutional reform. People who form just 2% of the electorate cannot help thinking from time to time that their votes may not count for

anything at all, and cannot help thinking from time to time that Governments are there to do things to them rather than for them. If we have learned anything at all in rural communities during the election campaign it is that voters have told us that cheaper is not necessarily the same as better in politics, and that quality was raised much more often than cost in our doorstep conversations.

Our voters hope that this new coalition will adopt a less-is-more approach to government and will have at its heart four simple objectives: to keep us safe; to keep us solvent; to keep us healthy; and to keep us free from prejudice and discrimination. Honour and respect for politics and Parliament will be restored only if we apply those simple rules to every single decision we take in this House.

9.25 pm

Alan Johnson (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I hope the House will appreciate my being unable to respond to the contributions of all the old retreads, so to speak, as I want to concentrate on the remarkable standard of debate from those making their maiden speeches, and as there were 22 of them by my count, I shall have to go through them very quickly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mrs Chapman) spoke movingly about the tragic case of Peter Chapman and the lessons to learn from it. The hon. Member for Stourbridge (Margot James) was generous and gracious in her comments about her predecessor, Lynda Waltho, and spoke about the importance of the glass industry to her constituency. The hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) spoke about his predecessor, Tony McNulty, who as a former police Minister will, I guarantee, have been watching this debate on television all afternoon. The hon. Gentleman described him as having been diligent in his work on behalf of his constituency. He also mentioned the Royal National Orthopaedic hospital. As the Minister who approved the extra funding for the rebuild of that hospital, I too hope it goes through under this Government.

Having read the books of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt), it was a delight to listen to his contribution, and I am sure we will listen to many more for many years to come. He spoke about there being the first new hospital in his constituency for 120 years, and gave a eulogy to the six towns. The hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab) spoke about the contribution his predecessor, Ian Taylor, made to science and technology, and spoke well too about his aspirational constituency, but pointed out that there are pockets of deprivation there as well. The hon. Member for Redcar (Ian Swales) spoke about the devastating effects of the closure of the steelworks there and mentioned his predecessor, Vera Baird, whom I guarantee is already campaigning vociferously against the Government's proposals on anonymity for rape defendants.

My hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson) had the distinction of being the very first Member to be elected to this Parliament. She managed it on 6 May. By and large, the rest of us followed on 7 May, and some even later. She spoke of her first-hand experience of working with the victims of sexual violence, once again putting that in the context of her opposition to the proposals on anonymity for rape defendants. The hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood) mentioned her many illustrious predecessors and demonstrated what a suitable successor she will be. She was also the only Member to mention domestic violence, which is an important issue in any home affairs debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Fiona O'Donnell) managed to mention all three of her local newspapers, thus guaranteeing coverage, a good trick for those yet to make their maiden speeches. She also mentioned her predecessor, Anne Moffatt, who was my Parliamentary Private Secretary both at the Department of Health and the Home Office and whom we all wish a speedy recovery following her serious illness.

The hon. Member for Northampton North (Michael Ellis) spoke about his constituency's worrying predilection for reselection, and showed why we all expect him to escape that particular curse. The hon. Member for South Swindon (Mr Buckland) delivered an excellent maiden speech after six years as the candidate; spending a long time waiting might, perhaps, be a good recipe for making such speeches, therefore.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (Margaret Curran) is a formidable campaigner whom I know very well. She is the first woman to be elected to represent Glasgow East and is already displaying the benefits that she will bring to her constituents. I should also note that she made one further constitutional change by referring to you, Mr Speaker, as the presiding officer and to your deputies as the deputy presiding officers. The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) was the only Member until my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Mr Harris) to mention immigration, which he quite rightly said was one of the biggest issues on the doorstep during the general election.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Mr McCann) rightly mentioned Adam Ingram's contribution to the Northern Ireland peace process. The hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) spoke about the need to retain vibrant rural communities and the importance of housing to that objective. He did much for Victim Support before he came to this House, and I am sure he will do even more as a new Member of it.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Gemma Doyle), in a funny speech, spoke about her pride at representing the constituency in which she was born and raised. She also mentioned the importance of the co-operative movement, which she will see has been grasped by the Government—at least for the time being. The hon. Member for Rochester and Strood (Mark Reckless) gave us an insight into the dark world of the Government Whips when he spoke about his predecessor, and he made an elegant argument on the importance of elected police commissioners—every word of which I disagreed with.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd) had the unique experience of being told he had won when he had lost and lost when he had won. I think the Whips may avoid him as a teller on any future vote we have. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford) spoke impressively about how constitutional issues can be of immense importance to the more prosaic, day-to-day issues that affect our constituents. The hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock)

[Alan Johnson]

spoke of the beauty of his constituency and of the work of Richard Spring, which many of us in this House admired, despite his obvious failure to secure a bypass for Brandon.

The Member for Tory—*[Interruption.]* I meant the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Jacob Rees-Mogg); I do like to remind myself which party they are from. He made a particularly entertaining speech. It was a little anti-Danish, but on the form he was on tonight, he will avoid having ox bones thrown at him during his time in this House.

Finally, the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) need not have worried—he maintained that very high standard to the last. He spoke about his sympathy for his family and friends, who have been here since 2.30 pm. I very much sympathise with that—I know how they feel. Given that he gave away the ending of the latest Harry Potter film, I think the Hansard people are having their arms stretched up their backs to make sure it is not in tomorrow's *Hansard*.

For the benefit of the Deputy Prime Minister, I will mention just three of the contributions from retreads. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and the hon. Members for Epping Forest (Mrs Laing) and for Chichester (Mr Tyrie) made perhaps three of the most eloquent speeches against the proposed 55% rule. Government Members ought to listen to that argument. I was also pleased that the Deputy Prime Minister made his maiden speech at the Dispatch Box. We were very interested to hear that he has given Her Majesty's Government's support to a yes vote in the Welsh referendum on further devolution in Wales. I think we all took that as being a step forward.

Ian Lucas: Was my right hon. Friend concerned to read on the BBC News website this evening that officials in the Deputy Prime Minister's Department have described his categorical assurance to me today that the Government do support a yes vote in the referendum as a "slip of the tongue"? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is a great discourtesy to the House, and has he had any indication from the Deputy Prime Minister that he wishes to correct the record or perhaps find out what Government policy is before he makes pronouncements?

Alan Johnson: I just do not accept what my hon. Friend has said: this is the new politics, and what is said from the Government Dispatch Box will be carried out. I have every faith in the Deputy Prime Minister and that he will ensure that he sticks by his word on this issue.

May I welcome the Home Secretary,—

The Deputy Prime Minister *rose*—

Alan Johnson: Ah! I give way to the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Let me clarify this by saying that it was indeed a slip of the tongue. The Government avidly support a referendum in Wales, but of course we will leave it to the people of Wales to decide for themselves how they respond to that opportunity to determine their own future.

Alan Johnson: I am not sure whether that can be recorded as a slip of the tongue; I think that the right hon. Gentleman has made the first U-turn. I believe he also thought that the basic state pension was £33 a week—that was probably a basic slip of the tongue too. This is not a good start for the Deputy Prime Minister, because Labour Members were behind him in his stated preference for the Government to support a referendum on devolving power in Wales. We shall see what happens, but my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) was right in what he said.

I welcome the Home Secretary to the Dispatch Box. Labour Members like to think that we smoothed her path to this position as Home Secretary by helping to remove the former shadow Home Secretary, the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), before he could do any significant damage. Among his many gaffes was a propensity to be disingenuous about crime statistics, which led to his having his knuckles severely rapped by the UK Statistics Authority. He is now in the political equivalent of a Siberian salt mine, locked away somewhere in the Department for Work and Pensions and condemned to work with a Lib Dem, the hon. Member for Thornbury and Yate (Steve Webb), about whom the Deputy Prime Minister once said the following—this may also have been a slip of the tongue:

"Webb must go...He's a problem. I can't stand the man. We need a new spokesman. We have to move him. But...As a backbencher, he'd be a pain in the".

A word beginning with "a" follows, but if I said it, Mr Speaker, you would be off yours to call me to order. It seems to me that the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister managed to sort out both their little problems at the expense of the DWP.

I am confident that the new Home Secretary will not repeat the mistakes of her predecessor as shadow Home Secretary and that she will confirm, in her reply, that crime has reduced substantially since her party left office in 1997. On violent crime, she will be able to correct the mistake made on page 55 of the Conservative manifesto, which said that

"violent crime...has risen sharply under Labour".

It should, of course, have said "reduced" instead of "risen". There are three measures of violent crime: the British crime survey's figures, which show a decline of 41%; the recorded crime figures, which, since the 2003 changes in the formulation, have shown a 13% reduction; and the figures from accident and emergency departments collated by Cardiff university, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Alun Michael) drew attention, that show a reduction of 15% since they commenced in 2001. The murder rate is at its lowest for 20 years and the murder rate in London is at its lowest since 1978. No incoming Home Secretary in living memory has inherited such a consistent fall in crime and no incoming Government could have done more to undermine that position in their first few weeks.

On 19 May, in her speech to the Police Federation, the Home Secretary said

"make no mistake: I will be tough on crime."

But she could give no commitment to retain the record number of police and police community support officers who are vital to that objective. How is it that under this Conservative-led Government the funding for international

development can be guaranteed but the funding for fighting crime cannot? Labour would have protected them both. Do her Government consider international development a greater priority? How is it that while front-line services in health and education can be safeguarded, police numbers cannot? Will she stand up for her Department against such warped priorities? When will she ensure that, similar to what happens in health and education, the savings made within constabularies are reinvested in front-line policing? How will she be tough on crime while restricting the police's ability to catch criminals?

The Government talk of adopting the safeguards of the Scottish system in respect of DNA retention, but they do not explain whether those are safeguards for the victims or the perpetrators of crime. The Scottish system retains the DNA of those arrested but not convicted, but only if they are arrested for a serious crime. That would be logical only if there was evidence to suggest that it was people in that category who had a higher propensity to be re-arrested, but the best available evidence indicates that the type of offence a person is first arrested for is not an indicator of the seriousness of the offence he or she might subsequently be arrested or convicted for in future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) have made these points, but let me remind the House that, each year, in about 800 cases of rape, murder and manslaughter, DNA is central to police inquiries. In about 10% of those cases, matches are made to people who have been arrested but not convicted, of which a quarter involve people who have been arrested but not convicted of non-serious offences. That is one reason why in 2008-09, the England and Wales DNA database had a 13% higher success rate than Scotland's.

On the period of retention, there is no evidence to support the Scottish period of three years, which was plucked from the air. The best evidence available shows that the so-called hazard curve—the propensity for those who have been arrested but not convicted to be re-arrested—remains higher than that for the rest of the population for six years following first arrest. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition said in the debate last week, the Government should

"give the benefit of the doubt to the victim."—[*Official Report*, 25 May 2010; Vol. 510, c. 43.]

The retention period of six years should remain in force until 2012, when we will have, for the first time, six years' worth of statistics upon which to make a further judgment. Why pull that information off the DNA database and then find in 2012 that we should have kept it?

The Home Secretary intends to be tough on crime while failing to protect police numbers and restricting their ability to catch criminals, and she intends to do that while embroiling them in the operational upheaval of having elected commissioners. Aside from the fact that that will lead to years of internal turmoil and cost about £50 million for each police authority area, that idea's time has gone. The debate on accountability has moved on. It is now focused on making neighbourhood police teams answerable to the public they serve, on doing more to ensure that police authorities have a higher profile and more expertise, and, crucially, on enhancing and increasing the role and responsibilities of local government. Notwithstanding the comments of the hon. Member for Rochester and Strood (Mark Reckless), local authority leaders from all three main parties oppose this measure, as do the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Police Federation. I have yet to meet a single police officer or local councillor who supports it. The measure is, as ACPO says, driven purely by dogma, and I urge the Home Secretary to think again before taking it further.

In the time available to me, I cannot deal with every issue that has been raised, but I should like to make a final point. We will discuss identity cards on Wednesday on Second Reading of the Identity Documents Bill, but the Deputy Prime Minister has, in a hyperbolic speech that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) has already pointed out was historically inaccurate, promised the end of the "culture of spying" on British citizens, praying in aid ID cards, the national identity register and CCTV.

We are told that CCTV is part of the evil infringement of our rights and that it must therefore be "properly regulated", to use the Deputy Prime Minister's words. Will the Home Secretary tell us what that means, and will she say if she has ever been approached by a constituent who wants fewer CCTV cameras? That is important, because, apparently, as part of the big society, which is what most of us thought we would get if we failed to tackle obesity, the Deputy Prime Minister promises to ask the public which laws to repeal. We stand on the side of the Home Secretary's constituents. An article in the Maidenhead Advertiser, entitled "CCTV will help stop crime in Furze Platt", which is in her constituency, says:

"Almost every resident of Bridle Road, Bridle Close and Calder Close has signed a petition asking the council to put"

CCTV cameras in "as a deterrent." We are on the side of Furze Platt. Indeed, the term could be used as cockney rhyming slang, as in, the Deputy Prime Minister must be a right Furze Platt if he thinks people want fewer CCTV cameras.

The Conservative-led Administration will either recognise the need for control orders, second-generation biometric passports, the detention of families and the DNA database, or they will endanger our national security, weaken our controls on immigration, reduce our ability to return failed asylum seekers and restrict the police's ability to catch dangerous criminals. The Gracious Speech gave no indication that they recognise those basic facts.

9.45 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): It is a great pleasure to close this debate, which, as the shadow Home Secretary has just said, was marked by a significant number of maiden speeches, 22 in all. The debate was opened by a rather uncharacteristically rambling speech from the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw). He loitered somewhat over the reforms of 1832, but his history lesson was bettered only by the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Jacob Rees-Mogg) who gave everybody in the Chamber a rather more eloquent and distinguished historical lesson. I am sure we shall hear more from him, as was said earlier.

[Mrs Theresa May]

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson), who has just closed for the Opposition, gave an amusing speech. He ran through the contributions of every Member who made a maiden speech today. I do not intend to comment on every one of those speeches, but I want to tell all 22 new Members who spoke today that making a maiden speech is a daunting experience for anybody, yet they all rose to the challenge with a remarkable degree of eloquence. Many of the speeches were extremely amusing. I am not sure what the problem of blowing one's nose is in West Suffolk, but I dare say we shall find out at some stage. We heard delightful, enticing descriptions of constituencies such as the one from my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart), although of course it will now only be known as the site of Dobby's demise.

I particularly want to mention the maiden speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Stourbridge (Margot James) and for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), and the hon. Members for West Dunbartonshire (Gemma Doyle), for Darlington (Mrs Chapman), for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford), for East Lothian (Fiona O'Donnell), for Glasgow East (Margaret Curran) and for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson). They all have one thing in common, which is that they are women. I welcome the new intake of women Members to the House of Commons, which I am particularly pleased to see.

I am especially pleased to welcome my hon. Friends the Members for Stourbridge and for Oxford West and Abingdon, whom I have worked with over the years. They represent very well the change that has taken place in the Conservative party and in the make-up of its Members of Parliament.

I want to mention two characteristics relating to the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton North (Michael Ellis). The first was that his speech referred to the all-important topic of shoes, although I was disappointed that my hon. Friend talked about the shoes of my right hon. and learned Friend the Justice Secretary. My hon. Friend also has the distinction of being the only person to present me with a bouquet of flowers after I made one of those tours to visit organisations in the constituency before the election. He has indeed started well in this place.

I shall try to cover as much ground as I can, but I will not be able to mention every point that has been made in this important debate. It is the first time I have wound up a debate opened by the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg). A few weeks ago, I sat at the Cabinet table with him for the first time and then held my first meeting with him.

Coalition Government has brought many first-time experiences for us all, but nowhere is the coalition stronger than in the field of home affairs. After the years of encroachment on our freedoms, we will restore our civil liberties. After the years of trying to run the police from Whitehall, we will free the police and empower the communities they serve. After the years of allowing immigration to soar out of control, we will bring it back to the reasonable levels of the 1990s.

We have before us a unique opportunity to work together to make Britain a brighter, safer and fairer place for all. The spirit of the coalition can be found running through the legislation that we seek to pass—a spirit of freedom, fairness and responsibility. Those themes are particularly prevalent in the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office. The programme that we have announced will manage the delicate balance of protecting our citizens' safety and liberty.

Before I comment on the legislative programme, let me make this commitment: the Government will never compromise the security of the British people, and we will protect our civil liberties. Where they have been lost, we will fight to restore them, and we will fiercely preserve those that already exist. That was interestingly summed up by my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), who said that the new politics is ushering in ancient rights—it is indeed—and we will review legislation on a number of counter-terrorism measures, including on control orders, to which he specifically referred in his speech.

Keith Vaz: I welcome the Home Secretary to the Dispatch Box. One of her first decisions was to announce a review of the case of Gary McKinnon, a constituent of the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes). That decision is welcome. Does she have a timetable for when she thinks that she will conclude her review of that case?

Mrs May: I am not able to give the right hon. Gentleman a timetable at the moment. Indeed, I took a decision that we would agree to an adjournment of the judicial review that was due to take place towards the end of May. I was asked whether I would do that and received further representations from Mr McKinnon's legal representatives. I am waiting for those further representations to be received.

Mr David Davis: I thank my right hon. Friend for her response to my question. I raised another issue—28-day detention, which is coming up for annual review very shortly. There are stories in the press this evening that she will review that limit as well. In the light of the Government's commitment to telling the House before they tell the press, can she tell us anything about that?

Mrs May: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving me an opportunity to respond to that point. As he has just said, the decision is up for renewal towards the end of July. No decision has been taken at the moment, but I can assure him that Parliament will be informed of any decision that is taken. That question partly leads on to the freedom Bill. Protecting the country from terrorist attacks is, of course, of primary concern, but striking the right balance between safety and liberty is something that the previous Administration got horribly wrong. We have seen a significant erosion of individual freedoms, and power has been diverted from the citizen to the state. That is why we are legislating to roll back the state, to reduce the amount of Government interference and repeal unnecessary laws, but our commitment to protecting the public will not be compromised. The freedom Bill will help us to balance an individual's right to privacy and liberty against the collective safety and security of the entire country.

At the heart of our reforms is the desire to build a stronger society with responsibility and fairness at its heart. We will enable people to take back responsibility

for themselves and their families. We are determined to value the British people, to invite them into the debate and to listen to them—something that was sorely lacking under the previous Administration. The right hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Hazel Blears) talked of linking the Government and the people—a worthy aim indeed, but it is a pity that the last Labour Government did not do that. For 13 years, they took powers to the centre and away from people and communities.

Mr Tom Harris: The first Bill Committee on which I served as a Back Bencher after being elected nine years ago was the one that considered the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. Throughout the 39 sittings in Committee, the Conservative party constantly made requests for the measures to be watered down. Now that the right hon. Lady is in government, can she confirm that that Act will not be watered down but, in fact, strengthened?

Mrs May: The Government and the Conservative party will take no lessons from Labour about being tough on crime. I remember that when I came into the House in 1997 the Labour Government had been elected on the slogan, "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime." What did we see? Criminal justice Act after criminal justice Act, new offence after new offence, and nothing to do with the causes of crime.

Alan Johnson: Will the Home Secretary please confirm—now she has seen the statistics, now there can be no ambiguity about it—that crime has gone down by 41 per cent. since 1997? Violent crime is down, burglary is down, theft is down, domestic violence is down, murder rates are down. Will she confirm that that is the case?

Mrs May: I was rather amused by the right hon. Gentleman's reference— [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes or no!"] I was rather amused by his reference to the fact that, as an incoming Home Secretary, I was inheriting the best legacy that had been left. I have to say to him that, of course, figures produced by the House of Commons Library have shown that it is wrong to say that violent crime has gone down. It has not. It has gone up. The Home Secretary who left a good legacy to his successor was in fact the former Member of Parliament for Folkestone and Hythe, the right hon. Michael Howard, under whom crime did indeed go down.

A number of hon. Members have referred to the Identity Documents Bill. As I am sure every Member of the House is aware, the new Government have made a commitment—

John Hemming (Birmingham, Yardley) (LD): Will the right hon. Lady please give way?

Mrs May: I am going to make a little progress, if I may. *[Interruption.]* I am going to make a little progress.

The new Government have made a commitment to abolish the costly and unnecessary national ID cards. They are typical of the Labour Government's blatant disregard for public opinion and common sense, and we aim to abolish this pet Labour project before the summer recess.

I say to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), who is one of those who mentioned ID cards, that we were always clear in opposition that we would abolish ID cards. The Liberal Democrat party was also clear in its opposition to ID cards. As my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) said on a number of occasions, anybody buying an ID card was effectively buying a souvenir. That Bill has already been introduced. We will cancel identity cards and we will cancel the national identity register.

I note the passionate speech made by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) about ID cards and CCTV, but what she said about CCTV, and what the shadow Home Secretary said, betrayed Labour's approach to these matters: either all in favour of something or all against. We are talking about not abolishing CCTV, but ensuring that it is properly regulated.

I have touched on the delicate balance between the protection and freedom of our citizens, but part of maintaining that balance involves enabling people to take responsibility for themselves. To build a free and fair society—the big society—we all need to work together. That is why the Government will be introducing the police reform and social responsibility Bill. That legislation is emblematic of the guiding principles of this Government. We will make police officers more accountable to the public they serve and in so doing replace the bureaucratic, centralised control of recent years with local, democratic accountability.

I say to the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) that I made that point absolutely clear in the speech that I gave recently to the Police Federation. Directly elected individuals will in no way interfere with the operational independence of the police. I welcome the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Mark Reckless), who, from the point of view of a member of a police authority, supported our proposals on directly elected individuals.

It was a great pity in the early stages of the debate that, on the issue of constitutional reform and the dissolution of Parliament, there seemed to be at best a misunderstanding of the Government's position among a number of hon. Members, and at worst a wilful misrepresentation of it. Of course, the powers for the House to pass a vote of no confidence in the Government, on the basis of a simple majority, will continue to exist. They will be reinforced by powers relating to the dissolution of Parliament.

Regarding the Opposition amendment, I thought that the past 13 years had almost never happened. Endorse their record on crime, they say. After 50 criminal justice Acts—

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab) *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 251, Noes 347.

Division No. 1] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Alexander, Heidi
Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob	Ali, Rushanara
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas	Allen, Mr Graham

Anderson, Mr David
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bain, Mr William
Balls, rh Ed
Banks, Gordon
Barron, rh Mr Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary
Benton, Mr Joe
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Roberta
Blears, rh Hazel
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Blunkett, rh Mr David
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Brown, Mr Russell
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Byrne, rh Mr Liam
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Mrs Jenny
Clark, Katy
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crausby, Mr David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Tony
Curran, Margaret
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
Darling, rh Mr Alistair
David, Mr Wayne
Davidson, Mr Ian
Davies, Geraint
De Piero, Gloria
Denham, rh Mr John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Doran, Mr Frank
Dowd, Jim
Doyle, Gemma
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elman, Mrs Louise
Engel, Natascha
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Mr Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flello, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goggins, rh Paul
Goodman, Helen
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hain, rh Mr Peter
Hamilton, Mr David
Hamilton, Mr Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Mr Tom
Havard, Mr Dai
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Heyes, David
Hillier, Meg
Hilling, Julie
Hodge, rh Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Mr Jim
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hoyle, Mr Lindsay
Hunt, Tristram
Illsley, Mr Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda
James, Mrs Siân C.
Jamieson, Cathy
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Diana R.
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeley, Barbara
Keen, Alan
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian
MacShane, rh Mr Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Mann, John
Marsden, Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
McCann, Mr Michael
McCarthy, Kerry
McClymont, Gregg
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKinnell, Catherine
Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Meale, Mr Alan
Mearns, Ian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, rh David
Miliband, rh Edward
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morrice, Graeme
Morris, Grahame M.
Mudie, Mr George
Munn, Meg
Murphy, rh Mr Jim
Murphy, rh Paul
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Nash, Pamela
O'Donnell, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Osborne, Sandra
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Perkins, Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Qureshi, Yasmin
Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Robertson, John
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Roy, Mr Frank
Roy, Lindsay
Ruddock, Joan
Sarwar, Anas
Seabeck, Alison
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shuker, Gavin
Singh, Mr Marsha
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Mr Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela *(Penistone and Stocksbridge)*
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Soulsby, Sir Peter
Spellar, rh Mr John
Straw, rh Mr Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thornberry, Emily
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mr Tom
Watts, Mr Dave
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, rh Malcolm
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wood, Mike
Woodcock, John
Woodward, rh Mr Shaun
Woolas, Mr Phil
Wright, David
Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Ayes:
Lyn Brown and Mark Tami

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Alexander, rh Danny
Amess, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bagshawe, Ms Louise
Baker, Norman
Baker, Steve
Baldry, Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Binley, Mr Brian
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Mr Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Peter

Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brake, Tom
Bray, Angie
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Mr Steve
Brokenshire, James
Brooke, Annette
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona
Bruce, rh Malcolm
Buckland, Mr Robert
Burley, Mr Aidan
Burns, Conor
Burns, Mr Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burstow, Mr Paul
Burt, Alistair
Burt, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Cable, rh Vince
Cairns, Alun
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cash, Mr William
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clappison, Mr James
Clark, Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, Stephen
Crockart, Mike
Crouch, Tracey
Davey, Mr Edward
Davies, David T. C. *(Monmouth)*
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Philip
de Bois, Nick
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
Dorries, Nadine
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Jonathan
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farron, Tim
Featherstone, Lynne
Field, Mr Mark
Foster, Mr Don
Francois, Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fullbrook, Lorraine
Fuller, Richard
Gale, Mr Roger
Garnier, Mr Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gilbert, Stephen
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Green, Damian
Greening, Justine
Grieve, Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Sam
Hague, rh Mr William
Halfon, Robert
Hames, Duncan
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hancock, Mr Mike
Hands, Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, Mr John
Heald, Mr Oliver
Heath, Mr David
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Hendry, Charles
Herbert, Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hollingbery, George
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Horwood, Martin
Howarth, Mr Gerald
Howell, John
Hughes, Simon
Huhne, rh Chris
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hunter, Mark
Huppert, Dr Julian
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, Sajid
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kelly, Chris
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Kwarteng, Mr Kwasi
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lancaster, Mark
Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Jessica
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leech, Mr John
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Mr Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lloyd, Stephen
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
Main, Mrs Anne
Maude, rh Mr Francis
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Karl
McCrea, Dr William
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Patrick
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, Maria
Mills, Nigel
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Michael
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Mundell, David
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
O'Brien, Mr Stephen
Offord, Mr Matthew
Ollerenshaw, Eric
Opperman, Guy
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, Mr James
Parish, Neil
Patel, Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Pickles, rh Mr Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pritchard, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Raab, Mr Dominic
Randall, Mr John
Reckless, Mark
Redwood, rh Mr John
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reid, Mr Alan
Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm
Robathan, Mr Andrew
Robertson, Hugh
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rogerson, Dan
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, Amber
Ruffley, Mr David
Russell, Bob
Rutley, David
Sanders, Mr Adrian
Sandys, Laura
Scott, Mr Lee
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Shepherd, Mr Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, David
Simpson, Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Miss Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Sir Robert
Soames, Nicholas
Soubry, Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mr Mark
Stanley, rh Sir John
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Mr Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sturdy, Julian
Swales, Ian
Swayne, Mr Desmond
Swinson, Jo
Syms, Mr Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Teather, Sarah
Thurso, John
Timpson, Mr Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Tredinnick, David
Truss, Elizabeth
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, Mr Andrew

Uppal, Paul
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Wallace, Mr Ben
Ward, Mr David
Watkinson, Angela
Weatherley, Mike
Webb, Steve
Wharton, James
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, Mr John
Willetts, Mr David
Williams, Mr Mark
Williams, Stephen
Williamson, Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wright, Jeremy
Wright, Simon
Yeo, Mr Tim
Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Bill Wiggin and
Roger Williams

Question accordingly negatived.

10.15 pm

The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Ordered, That the debate be resumed tomorrow.—*(Jeremy Wright.)*

Business without Debate

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 15),

That, at this day's sitting, proceedings relating to the Motions in the name of Sir George Young, relating to the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, Select committees (Election and allocation of chairs), Pay for chairs of select committees and Pay for chairs of select committees (No. 2) may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour, and Standing Order 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—*(Jeremy Wright.)*

Question agreed to.

Motion made,

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 22 October, 12 and 19 November and 3 December 2010 and 21 January, 4 and 11 February, 4 and 18 March, 1 April, 13 May and 10 and 17 June 2011.—*(Jeremy Wright.)*

Hon. Members: Object.

Political and Constitutional Reform Committee

Mr Speaker: It might be for the convenience of the House if I explain that I intend that this motion should be debated together with motions 4, 5 and 6.

10.16 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Heath): I beg to move,

That the following new Standing Order be made, until the end of the current Parliament:–

(1) There shall be a select committee, called the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, to consider political and constitutional reform.

(2) The committee shall consist of eleven members.

(3) The committee shall have power–

(a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from time to time; and

(b) to appoint specialist advisers to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference.

(4) Unless the House otherwise orders, each Member nominated to the committee shall continue to be a member of it for the remainder of the Parliament.

(5) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report to the committee from time to time.

(6) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the evidence taken before the sub-committee.

Mr Speaker: With this we shall discuss the following motions on: Select Committees (Election and Allocation of Chairs)—

(1) That Standing Order No. 122B (Election of select committee chairs) be amended by inserting, after line 6:

'(aa) the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee;'

(2) That the Order of 26 May relating to Select Committees (Allocation of Chairs) be amended by inserting at the appropriate place in the Table:

'Political and Constitutional Reform	Labour'; and

(3) That, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 122B, the ballot for the election of the chair of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee shall take place on Wednesday 9 June.

Pay for Chairs of Select Committees—

That this House expresses the opinion that the Resolution of the House of 30 October 2003, relating to Pay for Chairs of Select Committees (No. 2), should be further amended by inserting after "the Committee on Members' Allowances", "the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee".

Pay for Chairs of Select Committees (No. 2)—

That the Resolution of the House of 30 October 2003, relating to Pay for Chairs of Select Committees (No. 2), be further amended by inserting after "the Committee on Members' Allowances", "the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee".

Mr Heath: This is a fairly straightforward matter, but I know that nothing is totally straightforward at this time in the evening and with a full Chamber, so I shall take a little time to explain what the motions will do.

Motion 3 will establish a Select Committee on Political and Constitutional Reform, which reflects the new portfolio of the Deputy Prime Minister. Motion 4 will provide for the Chair of the Committee—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. This noise is not fair to the Deputy Leader of the House, who is trying to explain these important matters. There are far too many private conversations taking place in the Chamber, which I am sure will now cease.

Mr Heath: I am grateful, Mr Speaker.

Motion 4 will provide for the Chair of the Committee to be elected from among the Labour Members of the House in accordance with the distribution of Select Committee Chairs that you indicated at the beginning of the Parliament, Mr Speaker. Motions 5 and 6 will provide for the Chair of the Select Committee to be paid.

The Government have committed to establishing the Committee as quickly as possible and with cross-party support, to ensure that the House is able to scrutinise the work of the Deputy Prime Minister. I stress that that scrutiny will be in addition to the Deputy Prime Minister's regular questions sessions in this house. It is our intention, if the House so agrees, that the election of the Chair of the Committee will take place on Wednesday, alongside the election of all other Chairs of Select Committees, to ensure that the Committee can start work as soon as possible.

I do not wish to anticipate the debate or any individual Member's contribution, but I shall pick up one point in advance. I think that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) suggested that a joint Committee of both Houses might be set up. Perhaps it will be helpful if I say from the outset that the Government do not believe that a joint Committee is the right way forward. First, no other Minister would be scrutinised by a Committee of both Houses. Secondly, the House of Lords Constitution Committee will continue, as its remit states, to

"examine the constitutional implication of all public Bills coming before the House; and to keep under review the operation of the constitution."

I will be interested to hear Members' comments, to which I shall respond. However, that is sufficient at this stage to introduce the motions.

10.20 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): It is the dawn of a new age and I congratulate the Deputy Leader of the House on introducing the debate so ably. When he was on the other side of the Chamber, he was keen on scrutinising the House's actions. The House is not packed by chance tonight with Members wanting to see how the business progresses. I am sure that that will happen on many future occasions. It is a great achievement by the new Government.

For new Members, let me explain that, in the past, the Government would try to get something through on the nod, at the end of a sitting. If no one objected, it would become law. That will not happen under the coalition. The Government will table the issues for debate. *[Laughter.]* Hon. Members laugh, but let us consider what the Leader of the House said last Thursday.

The motion was tabled for the best of reasons. As the Deputy Leader of the House said, it was done to speed up the elections so that they could coincide with those for other Select Committee Chairmen on Wednesday. It was therefore introduced for a noble and proper reason. However, there are some questions about the Committee. As soon as an objection was made, the Leader of the House did not sulk, as the previous Leader of the House used to do. In business questions, he made helpful remarks. He explained that the motion had been tabled for speed and for the benefit of the House, but also said:

"The consequence"

of not allowing the motion to go through on Thursday

"would be that we would lose a bit of time in establishing this new Select Committee, but it would not be the end of the world if that happened—and my hon. Friend"

the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope)

"could, indeed, raise in that subsequent debate the broader questions about how this proposed new Select Committee would interface with, for example, the Public Administration and the Justice Select Committees."—[*Official Report*, 3 June 2010; Vol. 510, c. 582.]

In my five years in Parliament, I never heard the Labour Leader of the House say anything so supportive to the House. The new transparency and the idea that we will discuss business after 10 o'clock if necessary are a refreshing change, on which the Leader of the House should be congratulated.

Several little issues have arisen. If we could consider them briefly, that might become the pattern for such little debates, when we have a packed House and people can raise some issues. When I sat on the Opposition Benches, we were never given such opportunities.

Some people have asked me forcefully today, "Why waste the House's time? Why keep it sitting for three or four hours?" The House will not sit for three or four hours if I have my way. However, it is wrong, when setting up a Select Committee on an issue as important as constitutional change, to deny hon. Members the opportunity to raise significant issues. Other hon. Members have said that sitting after 10 o'clock might inconvenience some Members. The fact that the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has made people commute makes it difficult for Members to be here late. However, we should not be running the House for the benefit of IPSA, but for that of democracy. It is not the House that should change its hours, but IPSA that should change its rules.

This is not a minor matter: we are talking about a Committee to scrutinise our constitution. I believe that such a Committee is thoroughly right. The Deputy Prime Minister helpfully said that he is proposing the biggest reform of our constitution since the Great Reform Act of 1832, so we certainly need to ensure that we set up the proposed Committee correctly. On 2 June, the Prime Minister announced in a statement that

"the Deputy Prime Minister has been given special responsibility for political and constitutional reform".—[*Official Report*, 2 June 2010; Vol. 510, c. 22WS.]

That includes major items and reforms such as fixed-term Parliaments, holding a referendum on the alternative vote system, the West Lothian question, all-postal primaries and, significantly, a mostly elected second Chamber, so we need to get the scrutinising Committee right.

[Mr Peter Bone]

My hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House anticipated what I was going to say on that. In the previous Parliament, I sat on the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments. The former dealt with matters that affected both Houses, but the latter dealt only with matters affecting this House. If, as we have been told, the Deputy Prime Minister is to introduce reforms to the House of Lords, surely the scrutinising Committee should be a Joint Committee. The Deputy Leader of the House alluded to that in his opening remarks, but will he address that specifically in his winding-up speech?

Select Committees cost about £500,000 a year to run, so if we are going to set up a Committee, we must be sure that another Committee cannot do that work. I do not argue, as I used to hear when I sat on the Opposition Benches, that we will not do this or that because it will cost too much money—democracy cannot cost too much—but we must have an answer on that from the Deputy Leader of the House. Could the powers of scrutiny have been undertaken by the Select Committee on Justice? We are trying to cut the cost of government, so could that existing Committee have reviewed the activities of the Deputy Prime Minister, at no extra cost?

Given that there will be overlap between the Justice Committee, the Select Committee on Public Administration and the proposed Committee—if it is established—how do the Government see those conflicting interests working? We could have the absurd situation in which three Select Committees look at the same item and produce three reports. What does the Deputy Leader of the House have in mind and how will that tension be resolved?

On a more minor matter, paragraph (4) of the proposed Standing Order states:

"Unless the House otherwise orders, each Member nominated to the committee shall continue to be a member of it for the remainder of the Parliament."

That is fine in itself, but it suggests that the Whips will nominate the members of the Committee, whereas other Select Committees will be elected by party groups. I do not know whether that is just a matter of wording, but will the Deputy Leader of the House clarify that matter?

On the election of the proposed Committee's Chairman, motion 4 states that he must be a Labour Member, but that is wrong, because it should state that a member of Her Majesty's official Opposition will chair the Committee. During this fixed-term Parliament, there could be a vote of no confidence in the coalition—of course, that is extremely unlikely—and a change of government, but the Chairman of the Committee would still be a Labour Member. That is not the case, of course, with the Public Accounts Committee, which has to be chaired by a member of Her Majesty's official Opposition. I wonder whether we could look at this further, because I do not think it was the Government's intention to bring that situation into being. A committee looking at constitutional reform should surely be chaired by someone who is not part of the governing party.

Finally—*[Interruption.]* Finally, in concluding my opening remarks, I would like to deal with Standing Orders, which exist to protect this House and the power of the Back Benchers. We should always change Standing Orders with great reluctance and with a lot of thought. This motion changes paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 122B, under which 14 days' notice is required for nominations to be given for Select Committee Chairmen, once the Committee has been set up. It is instead proposed that we set up the Committee tonight, that the nominations close tomorrow and that the election takes place the following day.

I have certain concerns about elections suddenly being announced, nominations being opened and elections being held the following day. Unless there is a really good reason for that to happen, it should not. In this particular case, there is a problem, because if Labour Members have nominated themselves to be Chairmen of an existing Select Committee, they are ruled out of putting themselves forward to be Chairman of the proposed Committee, which they did not know would be established when they put their names forward. Again, I would like to hear the views of the Government and the Deputy Leader of the House on that.

With that, I finish, having raised the issues that I wanted to raise in the debate. If we can have debates like this in future—with a packed House in which Members can raise issues about House business, rather than one in which things go through on the nod—we will be putting Parliament first. That would be a change in our democracy; this coalition has got off to a very good start.

10.32 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): I welcome the formation of this Political and Constitutional Reform Committee. I rise to speak because, in common with other Members, I was disconcerted by the Deputy Prime Minister's speech today, in which he announced the formation of another constitutional Committee, which is not being created as a Committee of this House and is not going through this careful and laborious process. When the Deputy Prime Minister announced the membership thereof, he excluded all the Members of the smaller Opposition parties. I thought that that was, frankly, a disgrace. That initiative to prepare legislation for reform of the second Chamber was really disappointing.

The present proposal, which provides an opportunity for the House properly to scrutinise the other constitutional reforms offered by the current Government, risks, I think, a combination of cynicism from the Conservatives and over-optimism from the Liberal Democrats who have coalesced with them. It is important that constitutional change wins the trust not just of the whole House, but of the citizens whom we have the privilege to represent. It is very important that this Committee gets the same level of respect and power as all the other Select Committees of the House so that it can look at House of Lords reform as much as at the other issues with which it is concerned. I hope to hear from the Deputy Leader of the House that that will be the case and that the bounced-forward Committee that was announced earlier today will not in any way take powers away from the Select Committee that we are debating tonight.

10.35 pm

Mr William Cash (Stone) (Con): I do not think that there is a time in recent history when there was a greater need for a Committee of the kind that we are discussing this evening. I also believe that the issues that we are concerned with in 2010 largely turn on the question of

who governs Britain and how. Those are matters that the Committee should and must look at very carefully indeed.

One point that I would like to put to the Leader of the House—or the Deputy Leader of the House, if he is replying to the debate—is this: are we sure that there will be an opportunity for the momentous issues put forward in the coalition agreement to be considered by the Committee before the decisions are taken and put through? I am thinking, for example, of the question of the alternative vote and the referendum on it.

I am also thinking of whether other referendums—of the kind that relate to the European Union—would be considered by the Committee and given full weight, in the light of the fact that, for so much of the legislation that goes through this House, it is in fact incumbent on us to pass it, because of section 2 of European Communities Act 1972. That raises the question of sovereignty, which is another matter that has to be considered in the Committee before decisions are taken, because the fact is that the sovereignty of this House is not just the sovereignty of this House; it is the sovereignty of the people who elect us to this House. This is their Parliament, not ours. For that reason, sovereignty is another matter that needs to be given the most careful consideration.

Then there is the issue of fixed-term Parliaments, which my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) mentioned, and the 55% rule that is being brought forward. Is that not something that the Committee should look at? If we are serious about the importance of a Select Committee to look into such matters, with powers, as the motion says,

"to send for persons, papers and records...to adjourn...and to report from time to time; and...to appoint specialist advisers,"

is it not incumbent on us in passing it to be aware that it is essential that such matters should be considered by the Committee before decisions are taken? Otherwise the motion might turn out to be no more than an empty piece of paper.

Then there is the further issue, which my hon. Friend also mentioned, of the West Lothian question, along with the whole question of devolution—I look across the Chamber to the Members from the Democratic Unionist party and other minority parties. These are huge issues; they are not just minor matters, to be rammed through at a moment's notice. They need careful and proper consideration, and the Committee would be able to give them just that.

I should also mention the fact that the coalition agreement contains proposals on the sovereignty issue, which has now been taken out of our manifesto commitments, much to my regret, and put into what I hope will not be the long grass, so that there can be a proper consideration of the necessity of having a sovereignty Act—a gold-standard sovereignty Act, if I may say so, along the lines of that which I have proposed, which has been approved by eminent constitutional authorities. The reason for that necessity is that there are occasions already when measures go through—at least three such measures have gone through the European system—without proper consideration by the European Scrutiny Committee, and they are matters that would normally be subject to scrutiny reserve. The Leader of the House has kindly replied to me this evening regarding my concern on those points. They are huge matters affecting the entire economy of this country and its stabilisation, not to mention the City of London, regulation and many other things.

Then there is the whole question of human rights. That is another matter that might overlap to some extent with another Select Committee, but it is a matter of enormous importance, because it affects the entire social fabric of the nation. The Lord Chief Justice himself has recently remarked that we must beware of the manner in which the common law is being superseded by the decisions and precedents being taken by our judiciary at the expense of the common law. He mentioned in particular the Strasbourg convention—let alone the Human Rights Act itself. In a recent and very important speech, Lord Hoffmann, a former Law Lord, pointed out that the Strasbourg Court aggrandises itself, and believes that it is no more than a federal system.

In a speech the other day, the Deputy Prime Minister described the Reform Act of 1832 as the basis for the reforms now being proposed. There have been several Reform Acts, but the 1832 Act, in itself, was far less important than the Reform Act of 1867 and the Acts that followed from it, for the simple reason that the Reform Act of 1867 resulted from a massive campaign by the people of this country, in the wake of the repeal of the corn laws, to ensure that there was a proper and democratic system whereby the people's own views would be expressed in general elections on a scale commensurate with the requirements of the time.

I must point out, with respect to the Deputy Prime Minister, that the 1832 Act was necessary to get rid of corrupt rotten boroughs, although it did not prevent rotten boroughs from persisting. The borough of Stafford, which I had the honour to represent for about 14 years, was up for the chop in 1835. The Bill to disfranchise the electors of Stafford was passed in the House of Commons, and they were only saved by the intervention of a general election.

This is an issue of the greatest importance. Parliamentary reform—radical parliamentary reform—is fundamental to the future of this Parliament and of this nation. I believe that the Committee can do the job, but it will not be able to do the job that is being prescribed for it if decisions have already been made, under the coalition Government and agreement or otherwise, which pre-empt its ability to make recommendations about the seminal reforms that are needed to return true democracy to this country.

10.42 pm

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): I should like the Leader of the House to clarify a point. This has been a learning curve for everyone. We are now to have two Committees on constitutional reform, the one proposed by the Leader of the House and the one mentioned by the Deputy Prime Minister earlier today. The Deputy Prime Minister did not seem sure of his position; he did not want to take interventions or to answer questions.

I want clarity on this issue. If we are to have major reforms—radical and far-reaching reforms—surely the best possible debate should take place in the House among Members who are representative of the whole of the United Kingdom. Is it the case that minority parties representing people in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland will not be represented in either of the Committees that have been mentioned in the House

[Dr William McCrea]

today? Is that what the Deputy Prime Minister was saying? Surely it will not be reaffirmed in the House tonight, for that would be absolutely disgraceful.

10.44 pm

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): This is a very welcome debate, which was promised by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House when I raised the issue on Thursday. It seemed from informal conversations that I held with him afterwards that the debate would take place in prime time on Tuesday week. It has been brought forward, but that does not mean that people should feel they have been detained here and must stay here. Let me say, at the risk of inviting a mass exodus, that neither I nor, I am sure, any of my hon. Friends intend to call a Division this evening; therefore there will not be a vote, and therefore there is no need for anyone to stay here unless they wish to listen to the arguments.

In brief, my argument is that when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House introduced this motion without notice last Thursday, he said it could have gone through on the nod then but that he would be pleased for questions on it to be put to him, and I would like to put some of them to him now.

First, how will this proposed Political and Constitutional Reform Committee interact with the other Select Committees proposed for the new House, for whose Chairmen we will be voting on Wednesday? On the face of it, this does not seem to be a departmental Select Committee. If it were a departmental Select Committee, it would be the Select Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and would deal with all the activities and responsibilities of that Department, including, most importantly, that Department's budget, but it appears instead to be a cross-cutting Committee on political and constitutional reform. Therefore, I hope that this question can be responded to in answering this debate: if the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is not going to be scrutinised by this Select Committee, by which Select Committee will its responsibilities that fall outside political and constitutional reform be monitored and held to account?

Following on from that point is this question: if this is a Political and Constitutional Reform Committee with a remit to consider political and constitutional reform, does that mean that all other Select Committees of this House are precluded from looking at issues of political and constitutional reform when they think those issues are material to the matters falling within their particular remits? If the purpose of tonight's motion is effectively to exclude all other Committees of the House from considering political and constitutional reform, the implications of that should be clearly spelled out.

Finally, how will this new Committee interact specifically with the Justice Committee and the Public Administration Committee? Prima facie, the Public Administration Committee has a remit that would cover a lot of the day-to-day responsibilities of the Cabinet Office. Will they still be within its remit, or will they instead be within the remit of this new Committee? If it will not be the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Select Committee, why are we not spelling that out in terms?

It is a pity that this motion was put on Thursday's Order Paper without any prior notice. We were invited to let it go through on the nod on Thursday evening, but my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) said that that should not happen so he objected to it. We have now rightly got a debate about it, and I hope that, in the spirit of the new politics, we will have some proper answers, including to the question that if this was such a good idea, why was it not thought of initially when we were setting up all the original Select Committees? Why, in other words, does it appear to be rather an afterthought?

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, I invite the Deputy Leader of the House to reply.

10.49 pm

Mr Heath: First, may I say how gratifying it is that we so often seem to have a full House late in the evenings? That is, perhaps, a sign of the new Parliament's commitment. I also must say that I am basking in the approbation of the hon. Members for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) and for Christchurch (Mr Chope). That is an unlikely position for a Deputy Leader of the House to find himself or herself in. The hon. Member for Christchurch regretted slightly that this debate was not in prime time, but what could be primer time than 10.49 pm for this House? It is the perfect opportunity to debate this matter.

Let me try to respond to the questions that have been put. One of the key issues for the hon. Members for Wellingborough and for Christchurch was how this Committee relates to other Select Committees of the House, and whether there is any overlap or crossover. Let us first be clear that it could not have been set up last week, because before last Wednesday there had not been the written ministerial statement setting out the new ministerial responsibilities and machinery of government changes that mean that the Deputy Prime Minister has areas of responsibility not covered by other Ministers of the Crown. Until that had happened, we were therefore unable to put the matter before the House in terms of Select Committees. That is an important point to make.

The second point is that as soon as that had happened, those areas of responsibility ceased to be the responsibility of, for instance, the Ministry of Justice, so they were then outwith the responsibility of the Select Committee on Justice. Therefore, if this House is properly to scrutinise those areas, it is absolutely essential that a Select Committee be formed for that purpose.

I turn to the third element. Several references were made, particularly by the hon. Member for Christchurch, to the "Office of the Deputy Prime Minister". Let us be absolutely clear: my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has an office, but it is within the Cabinet Office. It is clear that this Select Committee is being set up to look at the specific political responsibilities of the Deputy Prime Minister, not the rest of the Cabinet Office responsibilities, which remain the province of the Public Administration Committee. I hope that once this Committee is set up and begins its work—provided that the House agrees to it—the Chairs of it, the Justice Committee and the Public Administration Committee will have an early opportunity to ensure that they are clear about their separate roles and that there is no work

overlap, that they seek the advice of the Liaison Committee if there is any difficulty, and that we have a clear differentiation.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): That would appear to make sense at face value, but if we have enhanced Calman proposals on initial devolution to Scotland and the proposed referendum on parliamentary powers in Wales, would they be scrutinised by this Select Committee, with the Deputy Prime Minister's powers over the constitution, or by the Select Committees on Scottish and Welsh Affairs?

Mr Heath: The position would be no different from that which obtains now in respect of the responsibilities of the Justice Committee—at least until the changes in the machinery of government—where there was that overlap and it was quite proper for the Justice Committee to look at devolution issues. Indeed, having served as a member of the Justice Committee, I know that we did look at devolution matters, but I do not think that at any stage we trod on the toes of the Scottish or Welsh Affairs Committees in the process. It is quite possible to have proper co-ordination that prevents that from happening.

Mention was made of Lords reform. Obviously, this is a key area of the Deputy Prime Minister's responsibilities, so of course, the Committee will have the capacity to look at it if it chooses. I am not going to pre-empt the work programme that the Committee will agree. It would be a huge abuse for a Minister to set out what a Select Committee should choose to do, but I would expect it to be an early priority for the Committee to look at the emerging picture of constitutional reform, which would include Lords reform.

In answer to the hon. Member for South Antrim (Dr McCrea), there is also a clear commitment in the setting up of the proposals for Lords reform that, first, there would be pre-legislative scrutiny of the proposals that emerge, which would involve any Member of this House who chose to take an interest. As a constitutional Bill, when any legislation is introduced—indeed this applies even to the preliminary motions before the House—it would be taken on the Floor of the House and involve every Member of the House. Therefore, I do not think that he needs to be concerned.

I listened to what the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) had to say about how disappointed she was about today's announcement of the Government Committee—it will not be a Select Committee of the House, and that is an important distinction—to consider and introduce proposals for Lords reform. If she was disappointed at that announcement, she must have been devastated when her own Justice Secretary—her own Lord Chancellor—did exactly the same thing in the previous Parliament. I served on that Government Committee, which did not contain any Members from minority parties; only the three main parties were represented. She must have been devastated to have heard of that arrangement then, so our doing the same thing has simply added, like Pelion on Ossa, to her discomfiture. That is not a concern that we need to dwell on, because it is clear that this Government programme of consideration of Lords reform will result in proposals that will receive more than adequate scrutiny in this House.

Mr Cash: The Deputy Leader of the House has addressed a number of points, but not some of the ones that I raised. Would he be kind enough to consider my point regarding whether this Committee might, to put it in ordinary parlance, be bounced by the fact that decisions have been taken under the coalition agreement, or by other means, to put through proposals such as the alternative vote and other matters of the kind that I mentioned, before the Committee has had a chance to consider the issues? In particular, will he state now that the proposals under the coalition agreement to implement the Wright Committee's recommendations in full mean just that, and that the wording of the Standing Order that will be introduced shortly will be exactly the same as that of the one proposed earlier this year?

Mr Heath: The hon. Gentleman wished me to answer his points before I had dealt with those of other hon. Members, and I am sorry that he had to be a little patient in that respect. He said that decisions have been taken, but Parliament takes decisions on legislation. Perhaps the key difference between this Administration and the previous one is that we want Parliament to take these decisions. It is for the Government to propose and for this House to dispose of those propositions. Therefore, it is not wrong in any way for the Government to be committed to a programme of government that is placed before this House for consideration. Both my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and I are absolutely committed to ensuring that this House has the proper opportunities to have its say. That is the difference between how we do business and how the previous Government did it. I am unable to deal with the hon. Gentleman's point about the Wright Committee, because that would be completely outside the terms of this motion. However, he will find that his questions on implementing the Wright Committee recommendations will be answered in the very near future.

Let me deal briefly with the other points raised, one of which related to costs. We know that it costs money to have Select Committees, but it is equally important that this House has the opportunity to scrutinise the decisions of every Minister of this House. Thus, this is a cost that we have to bear, but I must say to the hon. Member for Wellingborough that we have abolished a whole tier of Select Committees in the form of the Regional Select Committees, which were an unnecessary and expensive farce. We have got rid of them, so we have a little money in the bank, as it were, in terms of the cost of scrutiny.

I was asked whether the membership of this Committee would be appointed. No, it will be elected, like that of every other Select Committee; this is a perfectly normal Select Committee of the House.

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster Central) (Lab): The Deputy Leader of the House is totally wrong to say that the abolition of Regional Select Committees will save any money that could be put to this new Committee. That is not true because the Regional Select Committees were served by staff who already worked on the Select Committees that were previously in place. I have inquired about this and he is wrong to say that there is any saving from the abolition of Regional Select Committees.

Mr Heath: It is an intriguing argument that however many Select Committees there were, they could operate

[Mr Heath]

and travel around the country at no cost to the House at all. That is an interesting argument, but not one for today, perhaps.

I was asked why the chairmanship of this Committee is to be Labour, and it was suggested that perhaps the wording should be "the official Opposition". This was a decision of the House, and it decided that the Speaker should allocate the Chairs of the various Select Committees according to the proportion of Members in the House elected from each party. It was the Speaker's decision—based, I am sure, on excellent mathematical principles—that this chairmanship should be allocated to the Labour party. Unless the House decides otherwise, it is not the Government's position that the decision that the House has already taken should be changed.

On the time interval for nominations, that is for the convenience of the House. If the House does not like it, it is at liberty to say that it wants the full period for nominations, but I think that most want the Select Committees up and running at the earliest opportunity. They want to make sure that people have the opportunity to vote for the Chairs of all the Select Committees at the same time. They want to make sure that the best people, and not people who have been rejected for other chairmanships, put themselves forward for the Chairs in which they are most interested. I think that is the right way of doing things, but it is for the House to decide.

I think I have dealt with all the points that have been raised.

Mr Chope: Will the Deputy Leader of the House give way?

Mr Heath: Yes, but this is the very last effort from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Chope: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for the way in which he has responded to the debate. One point that I raised that he has not addressed yet is whether this Select Committee will have exclusive control over the consideration of political and constitutional reform, or whether other Select Committees that wish to consider aspects of political and constitutional reform that fall within their ambit will be free so to do.

Mr Heath: The hon. Gentleman is right that I did not answer that point other than tangentially in relation to the question about Wales and Scotland that was raised by the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Stewart Hosie). Every Select Committee has the right to consider matters that fall within the ambit of the Department or ministerial team that it scrutinises, and nothing will change on that. This Committee is exactly the same as every other Select Committee of the House. I expect Committees to be sensible about this and not to duplicate each other's activities, but there are no artificial barriers and no one is going to say to a Committee that has an issue or a constitutional bearing within its departmental responsibilities, "You are not allowed to scrutinise that because we now have this new Select Committee to do the job." That is not the way that I would expect Select Committees to work. I would expect the Chairs of Committees to discuss these matters with one another, to use the good offices of the Liaison Committee when it is set up and to make sure that there is not duplication of effort. On that basis, I hope that I have responded to the debate and that the House will accept the motions before us so that we can get the system up and running as quickly as possible and extend the scrutiny of the House to the full range of members of the ministerial team.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That the following new Standing Order be made, until the end of the current Parliament:-

(1) There shall be a select committee, called the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, to consider political and constitutional reform.

(2) The committee shall consist of eleven members.

(3) The committee shall have power-

(a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from time to time; and

(b) to appoint specialist advisers to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference.

(4) Unless the House otherwise orders, each Member nominated to the committee shall continue to be a member of it for the remainder of the Parliament.

(5) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report to the committee from time to time.

(6) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the evidence taken before the sub-committee.

SELECT COMMITTEES (ELECTION AND ALLOCATION OF CHAIRS)

Ordered,

(1) That Standing Order No. 122B (Election of select committee chairs) be amended by inserting, after line 6:

'(aa) the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee;'

(2) That the Order of 26 May relating to Select Committees (Allocation of Chairs) be amended by inserting at the appropriate place in the Table:

'Political and Constitutional Reform	Labour'; and

(3) That, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 122B, the ballot for the election of the chair of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee shall take place on Wednesday 9 June.—*(Mr Francois.)*

PAY FOR CHAIRS OF SELECT COMMITTEES

Resolved,

That this House expresses the opinion that the Resolution of the House of 30 October 2003, relating to Pay for Chairs of Select Committees (No. 2), should be further amended by inserting after "the Committee on Members' Allowances", "the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee".—*(Mr Francois.)*

PAY FOR CHAIRS OF SELECT COMMITTEES (NO. 2)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Resolved,

That the Resolution of the House of 30 October 2003, relating to Pay for Chairs of Select Committees (No. 2), be further amended by inserting after "the Committee on Members' Allowances", "the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee".—*(Mr Francois.)*

Rape Defendants (Anonymity)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Mr Newmark.)*

11.5 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity this evening to question the Government's proposals to give anonymity to defendants in rape trials.

I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr Blunt), to his new position. He is a reasonable man and I know he realises that this issue has caused much concern to many Members. I am grateful to my hon. Friends who have stayed in the Chamber this evening and I am also grateful to Members on the Government Benches. I hope the hon. Gentleman will hear the points that are made tonight.

Rape devastates women's lives. Every 34 minutes a rape is reported to the police in the UK. Many more go unreported. The Fawcett Society suggests that 47,000 women are raped every year. Much has been done in the past decade. More rapes and sexual assaults are reported to the police, although the conviction rate is still too low. More rapists are brought to justice, and across the criminal justice system rape victims can expect to find greater compassion, respect and sensitivity.

That is welcome progress, and I pay tribute in particular to Vera Baird, not just for her work as Solicitor-General, but also for the campaigns she led for victims of rape and sexual abuse long before she was a Minister or an MP, and for her advice to me in preparing for this debate.

Let us be in no doubt, though, that justice still eludes too many rape victims in too many parts of the country. Only one in 20 rapes reported to the police results in a conviction. On whatever measure we choose to use, most rapists are never held to account for their actions and most victims never see their attacker brought to justice. So what does the coalition plan to do about it?

In its programme for government, the coalition set out its solution in just one short sentence proposing anonymity for defendants in rape trials. Those proposals, if implemented, would deter victims from coming forward and make it far more difficult for the police to charge offenders and convict rapists. We know that many rapists are serial offenders; their trail of victims often runs into double digits. Many women—for a variety of reasons—do not come forward straight away. They are afraid; they want to pretend it never happened. They are embarrassed; they feel as though they did something wrong. They are ashamed; they believe that what happened was their fault. They feel alone.

Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the reasons why young women who may be in a dependent relationship with someone when they are raped do not come forward is that they feel that in some way it was their fault? Only subsequently, perhaps when they hear that the person has done the same thing elsewhere, do they gain the courage to speak up?

Caroline Flint: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is often only publicity about a rape charge that leads other victims to come forward. It is only at that point that they understand that they are not alone—that it is not their fault and they can do something about it.

Let us consider the case of the black-cab driver, John Worboys. When he was arrested for a string of sex attacks in 2008, 85 women came forward to say that they, too, had been attacked by him. Offering attackers the blanket of anonymity will prevent victims from getting the justice they deserve and hinder the police in protecting the public.

However, the real question is this: on what basis do we distinguish rape defendants from those accused of any other serious, violent or sexual offence? What singling out rape defendants says is that rape victims are less reliable, less credible and less trustworthy—that they are to be believed less—than the victims of any other crime. It reinforces the myth that women who report rape are lying, and gives succour to those who peddle the same old lies about women being responsible for being raped.

Let me be clear that no one doubts the damage that false allegations cause—innocent men find their lives turned upside down, police time is wasted and public money is misused, and they insult genuine victims, belittle their suffering and make juries more sceptical than they would otherwise be—but in the most recent and authoritative report, Baroness Stern could find no evidence that the incidence of false allegations was higher in rape cases than in any other crime. A report by the Home Office in 2005 came to the same conclusion. International research in 2007 showed that, even of the very small number of false allegations, in most cases no offender was named—malice was not the motive; it was a cry for help from a distressed woman. Moreover, the law already deals with those who make malicious complaints against others, because making a false allegation perverts the course of justice and those who do it can, and do, receive substantial prison sentences.

Rape is, by its nature, an extremely difficult crime to prove. Most victims are raped by people whom they know. It takes people a tremendous amount of courage—more courage than anyone who has never been raped can ever understand—to tell someone, anyone, let alone the police, that they have been raped.

Cathy Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are particular issues in relation to young people who have been in the care system in cases of historical abuse and that the Government's proposal would have a very negative effect on the opportunity for young people to come forward, perhaps at a later date?

Caroline Flint: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I commend her for all the work in this area that she has done in Scotland. I very much welcomed the time when, as a Home Office Minister, I worked with her. She is right: more and more these days, we hear of people coming forward later, when they have developed the confidence to do so and to talk to others about the crimes that have been committed against them. Again, the serial nature of the crime that we are talking about is important, because when a crime is reported and people hear the name of the person who has been charged, they feel confident to come forward and stand by the victims in the modern day, rather than just in the past.

[Caroline Flint]

If we understand what the evidence actually shows—that women are no more likely falsely to report allegations of rape than any other crime—what possible justification is there for giving those accused of rape anonymity? The only other possible explanation is that the stigma associated with being accused of rape is of an entirely different order to that associated with any other serious, violent or sexual offence, but unless we seriously think that there is less stigma attached to being a paedophile, wife beater or murderer than to a rapist, or that society is more understanding of those who sexually abuse children or kill in cold blood, we cannot have anonymity in rape cases without granting anonymity across the board. That principle is totally alien to our system of open, transparent justice, where anonymity is granted only when there are overwhelming, compelling reasons to do so.

I understand that the coalition may be shifting on this matter—I would welcome that—and that it is perhaps considering limiting anonymity to defendants between arrest and charge. That may be worth looking at, but only if the same rule is applied to defendants in all violent crimes, not just rape.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): Is it not true that it is very often between arrest and charge, when people hear that someone has been arrested for something, that other people come forward with similar patterns to create the weight of evidence that enables the prosecuting authorities successfully to proceed with the charge.

Caroline Flint: Again, my hon. Friend makes a very good point. Where do we draw the line in establishing someone's identity—whether on arrest or charge—and then allowing other victims the time to present their experiences? We are meddling in something that should not be meddled in. Plenty of other parts of the justice system need to be attended to, and this is not one of them.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I share my right hon. Friend's relief that the Government seem to be showing signs of back-pedalling or U-turning, or at least having a serious rethink on the issue, but does she share my concern that the proposal was not in either of the other two parties' manifestos, yet it suddenly appeared in the coalition agreement? Does she share my hope that the Minister will explain why the proposal ended up in the coalition agreement and who was responsible for pushing the idea forward?

Caroline Flint: Yes, it was in neither the Conservative nor the Liberal Democrat manifesto at the general election, although I would have thought that that was the platform from which to make such a proposal. I really think that it was nine short words that conveyed this policy in that coalition agreement, and those nine short words developed a policy that has not been thought through, but is very dangerous.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): I have been participating in these late-night Adjournment debates for 16 years and I have never seen so many Government Members paying such attention as they are paying to what my right hon. Friend is saying. I pray and hope that what she is arguing tonight will be well received and that we can have a change of policy. Without making a great party claim of victory, the coalition Government have got it wrong, and they should be man and woman enough to accept that tonight.

Caroline Flint: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. I hope that we can end this proposal tonight, because the real issue—the real injustice—is not the rights of defendants, but the plight of tens of thousands of women who are raped but never see their attacker brought to justice. Our priority must be delivering justice for victims of rape and protecting the public from dangerous offenders.

The last time a Government made proposals to grant those accused of rape anonymity was 1975. Despite making much of their parties' modern, progressive credentials during the 2010 election campaign, the coalition Government's proposals would take us back to a time when there was a residual doubt about rape victims built into the criminal justice system, which denied thousands of victims justice.

When victims of rape are afraid—afraid of what has happened, afraid to come forward, afraid that no one will believe them—we must show them that we will believe them. When rapists believe that they can attack with impunity, and go on and on wrecking women's lives and never face the consequences of their actions, we must show them that we will bring them to justice.

When proposals such as this are made—dangerous proposals, I am afraid to say, that insult victims of rape and inhibit the ability of the police to catch dangerous criminals—in this House we must show, through the strength of our case and the passion of our arguments, that we will speak up for those without a voice.

11.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Crispin Blunt): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) for welcoming me to my new responsibilities and for her kind remarks about my reasonableness. I sincerely hope that she still holds that view when I have concluded my reply to her debate. I congratulate her on raising the issue and on securing the time to discuss it. It is a matter of importance, as the exchanges at Prime Minister's Question Time last week showed, and it merits very careful consideration if we are to be fair to all sides of the argument.

I would like to remind the House that, long before acquiring my current responsibilities, I took an interest in these issues. In 1999, I introduced the Sexual Offences (Anonymity of Defendants) Bill to protect teachers from the consequences of accusations by children who have anonymity and the subsequent reporting by a sometimes salacious media. My Bill was prompted by the suicide of a constituent, Nick Drewett, a popular and committed teacher who took his own life after being accused of behaving improperly with pupils in his care. The accusations fell very far short of any suggestion of rape, but the combination of the way in which the accusations were investigated by the police and their reporting led to his death. His headmaster, who was charged with him but tried alone, was acquitted.

My experience means that I come to this subject with a predisposition to protect victims, which can sometimes include those who are accused. We are in the business of

reducing the number of future victims of crime, not inadvertently creating more.

Rape is a very serious crime. The rights and welfare of the victim are vital, and we are committed to ensuring that every victim of rape has access to appropriate support. In particular, we are looking to establish new rape crisis centres where there are gaps in provision and to put funding for such centres on a stable and long-term footing. There are 39 such centres and we are looking at the possibility of a further 15.

The Prime Minister has already made clear in the House his view that the low conviction rate in this country is a scandal. It is not good enough and we need to improve it. That means, as he has said, working with the police and also doing more to help rape victims, including backing rape crisis centres. Our overriding aim must be to reduce the incidence of the offence, not least by increasing the number of successful rape prosecutions.

The very last thing we want is investigative failures. We believe that they can be countered by more intelligence-led policing. We will carefully consider how we can support agencies' joint working to share intelligence and good practice, and to ensure that there is an effective response to rape and victims of sexual violence. Introducing anonymity would not prevent the identities of those suspected and accused of rape from being shared among criminal justice practitioners.

As the Deputy Prime Minister made clear this afternoon, our policy on defendant anonymity in rape cases is sensitive—

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Blunt: No, if the hon. Lady will forgive me. Let me get to the conclusion of my remarks. *[Interruption.]* I am grateful for the hon. Lady's sedentary comments. It is the debate of the right hon. Member for Don Valley. I am certain that she and the House will want to hear my remarks—

Mr MacShane: The Home Office wrote them.

Mr Blunt: Plainly, the remarks have been carefully prepared in conjunction with other Government Departments—*[Interruption.]*—but not entirely, I am delighted to say. I have already made clear—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman is not behaving in a way that does credit to the subject. It is not one that lends itself to barrack-room style interventions from a sedentary position. I would be grateful if right hon. and hon. Members on the Opposition Benches would do me the courtesy of listening carefully to these remarks. If they continue to intervene from a sedentary position—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman. There are certain right hon. and hon. Members who are not serving the dignity of the House particularly well at the present time. This is a deeply serious subject. It is the subject of a half-hour Adjournment debate. I do not believe that this will be the last time that the subject is likely to be discussed in the House. At all times we should discuss things in a calm and reasonable manner, particularly, I suggest to the House, a subject of this nature.

Mr Blunt: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As the Deputy Prime Minister made clear this afternoon, our policy on defendant anonymity in rape cases is sensitive and we will consider all the options carefully before bringing proposals to Parliament. This evening's debate and the comments of the right hon. Member for Don Valley have been an early opportunity to listen to views, as promised by the Deputy Prime Minister this afternoon.

We will bring a policy to the House setting out our preferred option after we have considered each one with the care that this subject merits. In doing so, we will of course take into account potential implications for victims and for the conviction rate, as well as the reporting issues. There are sound reasons for our approach. Rape is such a serious and emotive crime that it attracts both a high degree of stigma for the defendant and a disproportionate degree of media interest. The combination of those factors distinguishes rape from other crimes. The reality is that sex in all its guises continues to fascinate the media. Reducing the level of prurient interest can only be in the interests of victims.

Hazel Blears (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Blunt: Giving evidence as a complainant is both difficult and stressful, and there are already policies in place to try to make this easier. Anything that can be done to reduce the pressure on witnesses in these circumstances is surely something we should contemplate. Equally, defendants accused of rape and not convicted are entitled to some protection. Anybody accused of rape is likely to be subject to minute scrutiny, often raising matters detrimental to the individual's reputation that, in any other circumstances, would be regarded as trivial or irrelevant.

Caroline Flint: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Is he really, seriously suggesting that the stigma associated with being accused of rape is no less than that associated with being accused of child abuse, assault, murder or wife beating? Why does rape stand out? Is it really about the fact that you just believe—[HON. MEMBERS: "You?"] Sorry, is it really about the fact that the hon. Gentleman just believes that women who come forward to accuse someone of rape must be putting forward false allegations and are not to be believed, when the evidence shows that that occurs in a complete minority of cases?

Mr Blunt: No, and no. I should be grateful if the right hon. Lady would, as we ought to in handling such cases, try to take the temperature out of the debate and turn to evidence rather than supposition. Let me continue with my remarks.

If the defendant is acquitted, quite apart from the lingering suspicion of guilt that might remain, there might be a range of adverse material about that individual in the public domain which would otherwise have remained private and which cannot even be expunged by an acquittal. Our approach to defendants who are accused

[Mr Blunt]

of rape but not convicted will be based on what is just. There are a number of possible options on the timing and scope of anonymity. On timing, it could extend from the point of the accusation until the time the defendant is charged; or to the beginning of the trial; or to the point of conviction.

Further options relate to the scope of the anonymity in so far as the offences are concerned. It could cover anonymity in rape cases, but it could go wider. There are reasons why it might also be applied to other offences. I remind the House that our coalition agreement also states that we will give anonymity to teachers accused by pupils and take other measures to protect against false accusations. The principle is linked to anonymity in rape cases, as the tragic case of Nick Drewett showed. It was the reputational damage that caused him to take his own life, and, although we recognise the difficulties in any extension to particular professions or classes of offence, anonymity for those in positions of trust could apply more widely than to sexual offences. We have not yet discounted any options.

Whatever our conclusions, I can make it absolutely clear that we have no intention of extending similar protections to rape defendants once convicted. The media will be able to report the cases of convicted defendants in the usual way. A reason in principle for bringing forward the proposals is to help to restore the balance in rape cases with the anonymity given to complainants. It has often been said that the justification for complainant anonymity does not apply to defendants, on the basis that the purpose of complainant anonymity is to encourage more complainants to come forward—a factor that does not apply to defendants.

Mr MacShane: Go on, get someone else in that job.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr MacShane) is behaving disgracefully and not assisting a debate of this kind. Now he really has enough experience of this House, as a Minister and as a Back Bencher, to realise that what he is doing is out of tune with how we should conduct our business in this House. I hope that I will not hear from him again.

Mr Blunt: I am grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Complainant anonymity was introduced against a background of public concern about the lurid reporting of the cross-examination of complainants in rape trials. Of course, the protection from reporting provides the inducement to complainants to come forward. The underlying problem of exposure to publicity applies to defendants and complainants alike, and I want to make it clear that we have no plans to withdraw in any way the rights of complainants to anonymity. Our proposals are based on sound precedents. Defendant anonymity was the norm in rape cases for many years, and, of course, defendant anonymity continues to be the rule in all criminal proceedings in the youth court.

Let me address some of the points that the right hon. Lady made. She said this morning on the radio, in *The Independent* and repeated this evening that we know from the evidence that many rapists are serial offenders. I feel this to be true, but when I asked for evidence of how many rapists were serial offenders, and what proportion of convicted or charged rapists might fall into that category, there appeared to be insufficient data to form a reliable evidential picture.

Furthermore, in trying to acquire accurate detail on the number of times that convictions have been obtained because the identity of the defendant was known and further complainants came forward who were crucial to securing a conviction, I have again been unable to get a reliable picture or—

Fiona Mactaggart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Blunt: Let me continue.

I have again been unable to get a reliable picture or, indeed, any firm evidence at all in the time available. I would welcome help from the right hon. Member for Don Valley, and those of her right hon. and hon. Friends who are supporting her this evening, in identifying serious analysis that can help us to discuss these issues on the basis of evidence rather than supposition.

The right hon. Lady referred this morning on the radio, in her article in *The Independent* and again this evening to the Worboys case. The facts of that case are that it was the police who finally identified a mode of behaviour from several different complainants, identifying 12 offences. It was that mode of behaviour which led to the charging and subsequent conviction of John Worboys on 19 counts. The police were criticised for the length of time it took them to identify Worboys, but that name would have meant no more to the complainants than it did to the police. It was the manner of the offences that led to his conviction.

Fiona Mactaggart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Blunt: No.

Shortly before John Worboys' trial, the police appealed, with the assistance of the media, for further victims to come forward. The appeal identified 70 to 85 further complainants—to use the right hon. Lady's numbers; it is 81 according to the briefing that I have received—who recognised his modus operandi. However, none of those was central to his conviction as the police already had sufficient evidence, and had he been granted anonymity until conviction, it would still have been possible to identify those further complainants, and he would still have been convicted. So to understand the issues as perfectly as possible, if the right hon. Lady, and all those who have helped her to prepare, can identify cases where anonymity until conviction would have prevented an initial conviction being secured, I would be anxious to learn of them.

Mr Russell Brown (Dumfries and Galloway) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Blunt: No, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

If the right hon. Lady and others have further examples, it will come down to a question of balance. That is why we have said that we intend to reflect on the provisions carefully before we bring forward legislation.

Probably the most commonly encountered criticism is that defendant anonymity inhibits the reporting of criminal trials, but one might say the same of any anonymity for the parties to criminal proceedings, including

complainant anonymity in rape cases and cases involving other sexual offences. The question is where the balance properly lies. We have no difficulty with full and robust reporting of defendants convicted of rape. That is entirely proper. But we believe that because the possibility of pre-emptive vilification of those accused of rape is so great, the stronger arguments are in favour of anonymity.

The related argument is sometimes made that defendants suspected of, or charged with, a wide range of offences may experience discomfort even if acquitted. For example, people working in the City—the right hon. Lady alluded to some of these points—and charged with fraud could also argue that they are likely to suffer fundamental reputational damage. That is true, but it overlooks the particular vulnerability of rape defendants to vilification to which I have already referred. It is that vulnerability, and the unique statutory anonymity for complainants, that distinguishes rape from other crimes.

Some people argue that defendant anonymity in rape cases would imply that the Government, and perhaps by extension the criminal justice system as a whole, felt that complainants were unreliable and so deter complainants from coming forward. I absolutely and robustly reject that argument, as did my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister during Prime Minister's questions last week. The justification for defendant anonymity in rape cases is the stigma attached to an accusation of rape. It has nothing to do with the likelihood or otherwise of acquittal. There is no implied view in our proposals of the prevalence or otherwise of false allegations in rape cases.

In conclusion—

Fiona Mactaggart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way before he concludes?

Mr Blunt: In conclusion, the Government want informed contributions on the basis of evidence which will help us to bring forward proposals that will command the confidence of the House. The right hon. Lady has contributed to that process today; I rather regret that one or two of her right hon. and hon. Friends have not conducted themselves in the manner that this subject merits. *[Interruption.]* I am inviting the right hon. Lady, and other right hon. and hon. Members, to contribute evidence properly and sensibly rather than simply proceed on the basis of supposition. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Lady has contributed to that process, and I am grateful to her. The Government have the interests both of victims and of unconvicted defendants fully at heart, and the Government will proceed upon the evidence.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Question is that this House do now adjourn—*[Interruption.]* Order. The House must not behave in this manner. This was a half-hour Adjournment debate, which was perhaps too short a time to contain all the opinions that, understandably, hon. Members have on this matter. It would be a pity, however, to ruin the reputation of the House by bawling from a sedentary position.

Question put and agreed to.

11.35 pm

House adjourned.

House of Commons

Tuesday 8 June 2010

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Economic Growth

1. **Tony Lloyd** (Manchester Central) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect on economic growth of the programme of expenditure reductions announced on 24 May 2010. [918]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): The Treasury's assessment is that the effect will be positive. The in-year reductions in spending are part of the Government's efforts to bring down the budget deficit, the level of which threatens the recovery. This weekend the G20 stated:

"Those countries with serious fiscal challenges need to accelerate the pace of consolidation. We welcome the recent announcements by some countries"—

including Britain—

"to reduce their deficits in 2010".

Tony Lloyd: I welcome the Chancellor to his place, but will he have the candour to admit that his strategy is very risky, because it risks putting this country back into a double-dip recession? In any case there will be losers, so will he say who they will be?

Mr Osborne: Let us be clear about who the losers would be if we did not deal with this record budget deficit. The whole country would lose out, because there would be higher interest rates, more businesses would go bust and international investor confidence would be lost. The hon. Gentleman needs to examine what is happening in the rest of the world, and realise that because Britain has the largest budget deficit of any advanced economy, we have to get on and deal with it.

Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) (Con): I welcome the Chancellor to his position. Will he give an absolute assurance that the coming Budget, and future Budgets, will always be presented first to Parliament, and that they will not have to be pre-notified to, or approved by, Brussels?

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend has my absolute assurance that I would not sign up to that. Indeed, I have made that position clear to ECOFIN, and my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who is taking my place at today's ECOFIN meeting, has also done so. It is absolutely certain that future Budgets will be presented first to the House of Commons.

Mr Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Chancellor to his first Treasury questions. I know that he prefers the safety of the Treasury courtyard, but I am sure that the House will be on its best behaviour with him this afternoon. Since the 1970s, almost no country has cut its deficit significantly without increasing inequality. Will he make it a central goal of his deficit reduction plan to ensure that inequality does not rise?

Mr Osborne: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his welcome. He is Labour's "man of letters", and it is good to see him still on the Front Bench. The point that I make to him is that Labour had 13 years in government, and inequality increased during its time in office. What we will do is deal with the very large budget deficit bequeathed to us by him and his colleagues in a way that is fair and reasonable, and protects people across the country.

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): It is clear that in the past few days a new system of public expenditure control has been put in place. What will the Chancellor do to ensure that Parliament is fully informed about the new system? Will he publish a full explanation of exactly how it works?

Mr Osborne: I think that we have the two candidates for the chairmanship of the Treasury Committee here today. *[Interruption.]* I do have a vote, but I am not going to exercise it on that matter. The point that I should make to my hon. Friend—I shall speak about this a bit more in our debate on the Queen's Speech later—is that we are publishing today details of the framework that we will adopt in conducting the spending review. I will say more about that at the time of the Budget—and I will, of course, answer questions about it in detail before the Treasury Committee, whoever is in the chair. Parliament will also have a number of opportunities to discuss it, and when the spending review is finally produced in the autumn it will, of course, be presented to this House. I want all Members of this House, from all parts of it, to engage in the big national challenge of resolving how we get this country to live within its means.

Tax (Pensioners)

2. **John Robertson** (Glasgow North West) (Lab): If he will assess the merits of increasing the level of financial assistance to pensioners through the tax system. [919]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Justine Greening): This Government are committed to supporting pensioners to ensure that they can live with the respect and dignity they deserve. We have already said that we will restore the earnings link, protect key pensioner benefits and ensure that the retirement age can rise if pensioners want to continue working in order to support themselves. We think that, despite the fiscal deficit left to us by the former Government, that is the fairest way to proceed.

John Robertson: I thank the hon. Lady, and welcome her to her position—but I am somewhat disappointed in her answer, because she has not identified exactly how she will support our elderly people at a time when cuts will be made all over the country and will affect everyone, including pensioners. What priority will she give to pensioners? What kind of increased payments will be made to cover some of the cuts, which will hit pensioners harder than anyone else?

Justine Greening: The hon. Gentleman seems to have missed the fact that this Government are having to tidy up a huge financial mess left to us by the previous one. We have made it clear that, despite that mess, we want, first, to protect key pensioner benefits—the benefits that Labour Members claimed we would take away—such as free bus passes, free prescriptions, free eye tests and the winter fuel allowance. That is a range of benefits that the Labour party said we would remove, but we are going to keep them. I can assure him on that, so he can go back to the pensioners in his constituency and explain why he was telling them mistruths during the last election.

Budget Deficit

3. **Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the level of the budget deficit. [920]

6. **Nadhim Zahawi** (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): What recent representations he has received on the level of the budget deficit. [923]

12. **Karen Lumley** (Redditch) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the level of the budget deficit. [929]

13. **Mr Kwasi Kwarteng** (Spelthorne) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the level of the budget deficit. [930]

14. **Chris Skidmore** (Kingswood) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the level of the budget deficit. [931]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): In the past month, we have created an independent Office for Budget Responsibility to bring credibility to the Government's forecasts, undertaken and completed in-year budget reductions of £6.2 billion and, today, laid before the House the process for the spending review that will take place this summer. In two weeks' time, the Budget will set out a credible plan to accelerate the reduction of the budget deficit so that investors are reassured, interest rates can be kept lower for longer, and the recovery can be put on a stable footing.

Neil Carmichael: I note those excellent plans. Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer tell the House how many conversations he has had with colleague Ministers of Finance, and how much support and encouragement he has had from them to deal with our deficit?

Mr Osborne: I attended the G20 in South Korea this weekend. The G20 communiqué calls on countries with significant fiscal challenges—we have the highest budget deficit in the G20, so that includes us—to accelerate the reduction in the structural deficit. It has also been part of the European Union discussions that I have taken part in, that countries with significant budget deficits need to get on and reduce them. I am afraid that the Labour party, as it continues to oppose what we are doing, finds itself outside the international mainstream.

Nadhim Zahawi: Has my right hon. Friend the Chancellor read yesterday's International Monetary Fund report, which warns that the current crisis management was no alternative to fundamental economic restructuring? Does he agree that the previous Government either naively or deliberately chose to mislead the nation?

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I have, of course, seen the IMF report, and the lesson we learned is that you have to fix the roof when the sun is shining. That is what the previous Government completely failed to do. They had 13 years to fix the national finances, and now it is up to us to clear up the mess that they left behind.

Karen Lumley: Has the Chancellor received any apologies from the previous Government for the mismanagement of the economy over the past 13 years?

Mr Osborne: No, but we did receive a letter from the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr Byrne), apologising for the fact that there was no money left. We will discuss this issue in the debate on the Queen's Speech. I note that the Labour party has tabled a motion, which it is asking us all to vote for, noting

"the need for a clear plan to bring down the deficit".

I look forward to hearing that clear plan in the shadow Chancellor's speech.

Mr Kwarteng: Has the Chancellor received any more correspondence from the former Chief Secretary?

Mr Osborne: No, sadly I have not, but I discovered that he had a large bust of Oliver Cromwell sitting behind his desk, and that when the Irish peace negotiations were being conducted they had to be held in another room.

Chris Skidmore: In my constituency, the number of people claiming jobseeker's allowance has increased by 147% in the past five years. Does the Chancellor agree that unemployed people in Kingswood would be best served by decisive action to tackle Labour's legacy of debt now?

Mr Osborne: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. Of course, we inherited rising unemployment from the previous Labour Government and it is a fact that all Labour Governments have left office with unemployment rising—[Hon. Members: "It's falling."] Opposition Members say that, but they are not looking at the unemployment figures, which show that unemployment is rising, that we have the highest youth unemployment in Europe, and that a record number of children are growing up in workless households. That is what we have inherited from the Government who had 13 years to sort out these problems. We will sort this out, and give people real life chances.

Natascha Engel (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new position. Has he calculated what his announcement of a £125 million reduction in the police grant means, in terms of fewer police officers and fewer special constables in Derbyshire?

Mr Osborne: All public services have to find efficiencies, and that is true of the police service, as it is of every other service. I have to say to the hon. Lady, and all Opposition Members, that if they are going to play a serious part in the discussion about how to reduce Britain's record budget deficit, they need to come up with their own proposals instead of attacking every proposal put forward by the Government.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): When the most recent Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws), made his debut two weeks ago—which became, of course, his swansong—my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Tony Lloyd) asked him whether he could give any idea how many jobs would be lost as a result of the deficit reduction package. His answer was that it is not right to pluck figures out of the air. Can we have some more concrete evidence from the Chancellor?

Mr Osborne: Our plan is to increase employment in this country by putting the public finances on a sound footing. It is about time the Labour party understood that it left behind the largest budget deficit in the EU and the G20. All over the world, people are looking at sovereign credit risks. This Government are determined to do something about the problem before people start looking at Britain.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): The Chancellor could take the opportunity today to spell out to us how he and his coalition colleagues hope to popularise their cuts agenda. We seem to be being told that the public will be consulted on which spending should continue and which cuts might be made. How will that "axe factor" approach to government play out?

Mr Osborne: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the pun—but this is a very serious national challenge, which whoever won the election was going to have to face. The 11% budget deficit will not disappear. A very large part of it is structural, and so will not automatically reduce as growth returns to the economy. We want to make sure that all political parties, including his, and the brightest and best brains across Whitehall and the public sector, as well as voluntary groups, think-tanks, trade unions and members of the public, are all engaged in the debate and discussion about how, collectively, we deal with the problem. After all, it is our collective national debt.

Mr Alistair Darling (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): First, may I welcome the Chancellor and his team to the Front Bench? I hope that he will join me in sending our good wishes to my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr Timms), who remains a member of the Opposition Treasury team and who I am glad to say was in very good heart when I saw him a couple of weeks ago. He is looking forward to returning to the House at an early opportunity.

Unemployment is high today, but it is half what it was in the 1980s. Repossessions in the past couple of years are half what they were in the 1990s. Our economy is growing and our borrowing is coming down. Does the Chancellor accept that all of that is because we, in common with other countries—yes, as part of an international consensus—were prepared to take action to save our economy as we went into recession? Every one of those measures was opposed by him when he was shadow Chancellor.

Mr Osborne: It sounds as if we are rerunning the general election campaign. First, may I pay tribute to the work that the right hon. Gentleman did over three years, I think it was, as Chancellor of the Exchequer? He did the job in very difficult times, with the best of motives. Although we did not always agree with each other, as he has just made clear, he was always very courteous to me. I also thank him for the fact that I inherit from him a far more functional and less chaotic Treasury than the one that he inherited from his predecessor.

I make the point to the shadow Chancellor that the situation that we inherited from his Government—I do not say that he is solely to blame for this—is an extremely critical one. We have a very large budget deficit at a time when, as I have said, countries around the world are having to look at sovereign credit risks. We are having to deal with that, and with rising unemployment and growing inequality in our country. Regional disparities are growing as well, and we have to deal with those problems.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about the international consensus. He surely must have noted how, in the month since the general election, the EU, G20, the IMF, the OECD, and of course our own Governor of the Bank of England, have all warned us about the consequences of not dealing early with our budget deficit, and not accelerating the reduction in the budget deficit that he proposed in his March Budget.

Mr Darling: I agree that there are many issues that need to be resolved, in this country and others. No doubt we will return to them when the debate on the Gracious Speech resumes.

I want to ask a specific question about the Office for Budget Responsibility that the Chancellor is about to set up. When that body makes its recommendations, will he undertake that it will publish all the underlying assumptions that lead to them? Will he ensure that its deliberations, rather like those of the Monetary Policy Committee, are open and available for all to see?

Mr Osborne: I should have joined the right hon. Gentleman in wishing the right hon. Member for East Ham (Mr Timms) a speedy recovery. I understand that he has now sworn in, which is fantastic for everyone here concerned. The fact that he was assaulted in his constituency surgery doing his job as a constituency MP makes the incident all the more chilling, and we all wish him very well.

Let me deal specifically with the right hon. Gentleman's question. We have set up the Office for Budget Responsibility on a non-statutory basis because we need to pass legislation to make it statutory. The model that we have followed is the approach taken by the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown) when he set up the Monetary Policy Committee. Sir Alan Budd will be available to answer questions from the

Treasury Committee on exactly the kind of points that the right hon. Gentleman raises—such as the underlying assumptions. It is ultimately up to him how he publishes his information, and I do not want to prejudge that, but the purpose of the exercise is for people to have confidence in official figures and growth forecasts, and confidence means transparency. I am sure that the spirit of what the right hon. Gentleman says will be taken on board by Sir Alan.

Consultants

4. **Richard Harrington** (Watford) (Con): If he will estimate Government expenditure on external consultants in (a) 1997 and (b) the last year for which figures are available. [921]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Danny Alexander): Information on 1997 central Government expenditure on external consultancy is not held centrally, but records for 2007-08—the first year for which figures are available—show that spending on external consultants was £773 million in central Departments. In 2008-09 that rose to £1.1 billion for central Departments, or £1.57 billion when the whole of central Government is taken into account. Future expenditure will fall significantly as a result of the freeze on consultancy spending recently announced by the Government.

Richard Harrington: I thank my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary for that answer, and welcome him into the job. He should note that the figures show gross profligacy and a waste of taxpayers' money that affects everybody in the House, all my constituents in Watford, and everybody in this country. I should very much like the Chief Secretary to assure us that that disgraceful waste of money will not happen again.

Danny Alexander: My hon. Friend is right about waste and inefficiency, and consultancy is not the only example. I can give him two or three more. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills spent £12,000 on branded golf balls over three years. The Ministry of Defence spent £232,000 on eight paintings in a single year. The Department for Communities and Local Government has spent £6,000 on deluxe espresso coffee machines for nine new, but empty, regional fire control rooms. He can rest assured that the actions that we take will ensure that that kind of waste and inefficiency will never happen again.

Mr Speaker: Order. I know that the Chief Secretary will want to stick to the narrow subject of external consultants.

Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): Is Andy Coulson a consultant? How much are you paying him?

Danny Alexander: He works at No. 10 Downing street—*[Interruption]*—and I will give the hon. Gentleman a full response if he wants one.

Economic Growth

5. **Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase economic growth. [922]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): The Government are taking action to support enterprise and create a fair, competitive and efficient tax system to deliver the private sector-led recovery that will be the foundation of future growth. Fundamental to this strategy will be tackling the budget deficit and providing a stable macro-economic environment that will underpin private sector investment and growth. Further details of the action that the Government will take to secure future growth will be included in the emergency Budget on 22 June.

Peter Bottomley: We agree that investment, enterprise and modest tax rates will help the economy grow out of the inherited mess. In addition to the academic work of Arthur Laffer and Sir James Mirrlees, will my hon. Friend hold in mind the situation of an elderly lone mother who may have put money aside to buy a house, and after decades may wish to sell it, without too high a capital gains tax bill?

Mr Gauke: Obviously, this Government will want to encourage hard work and enterprise, just as the Government in which my hon. Friend served with much distinction in the 1980s did. As for specific tax measures, I am sure that my hon. Friend will understand that with only a fortnight until the Budget, I do not intend to make any specific comments. None the less, I am grateful for his remarks.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his elevation to his post. I also take the opportunity to thank the Chancellor of the Exchequer for taking time out during the general election to come and support my re-election in Harrow West. The Opposition recognise that the new politics is not designed to help Labour Members, but I am grateful for the little bit of Tory love that came my way.

Can the hon. Gentleman tell the House who in the Government will have the final say on whether and which regional development agencies will survive? Will it be the Business Secretary—once a supporter of RDAs—or will it be the Chancellor? No one expects it to be the Chief Secretary. Is not the real truth that RDAs such as One NorthEast are playing, and could continue to play, a key role in helping to deliver new jobs in new industries crucial to Britain's economic future, such as renewable energy and advanced engineering?

Mr Speaker: One answer will do.

Mr Gauke: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. I should congratulate him on being re-elected on this occasion, but I also note that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) is here, which is a bit of a triumph for us. On the hon. Gentleman's specific points, the decision will be made collectively. The Government will work in a cohesive manner in making those decisions.

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con): When I was in business, it was the oldest trick in the book for managers to come in with hopelessly optimistic growth estimates. Does the Minister think that that was endemic in the last Administration, and has he greater confidence, now that we have the impending Office for Budget Responsibility,

that it will not be the case with our Administration so that, for the first time in many years, we will have realistic growth estimates?

Mr Gauke: It is clearly very important that we have credible growth projections. We look forward to hearing the projections from the Office for Budget Responsibility. As for the previous Government's record, time will tell.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): Transport infrastructure is of course important for economic growth, and as the hon. Gentleman's right hon. Friend the Chancellor will know, as a Cheshire MP, there is a very important project, the Mersey Gateway project, which is crucial to the economic regeneration of Cheshire and Merseyside. Will that be excluded from the proposed cuts that his Government are making?

Mr Gauke: The Government will make a decision on all matters considering the value for money and considering the very difficult financial circumstances that we find ourselves in, bequeathed by the previous Government.

Equitable Life

7. **Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): What steps his Department is taking in respect of payment of compensation to Equitable Life policyholders. [924]

9. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking in respect of payment of compensation to Equitable Life policyholders. [926]

15. **Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): What steps his Department is taking in respect of payment of compensation to Equitable Life policyholders. [932]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): The coalition Government have pledged to make fair and transparent payment to Equitable Life policyholders, through an independently designed payment scheme, for their relative loss as a result of regulatory failure. The Queen's Speech announced the Government's intention to introduce a Bill in the first Session of Parliament to enable payments to be made to Equitable Life policyholders. On the same day, the Government also announced that an independent commission would be established to design the payment scheme. These steps are a strong sign of the Government's commitment to deliver on their pledge.

Dr Lewis: More than 60 of my constituents in New Forest East, and indeed even one of my own relatives, will be delighted to know that the Government intend to implement the recommendations of the ombudsman. Can he tell me when this is going to happen—and can he guarantee that the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority will not be put in charge of making the payments?

Mr Gauke: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. The intention is that Sir John Chadwick's report will reach its conclusion in mid-July; at the same time the independent commission will be established. We are making progress in this area—in contrast, I am afraid, to the dither and delay of our predecessors.

John Howell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his previous answer, but he will be aware that many of us have had to put in place our own means of keeping constituents who have got caught up in Equitable informed of what is happening, so poor has been the Government communication programme. So will he say a little more about his plans to keep that group of people informed as the payment scheme goes through?

Mr Gauke: I suspect that one of the reasons why the previous Government were so poor in communicating progress was that there was very little progress to communicate. As I mentioned earlier, we are keen to ensure that there will be progress, that we have the independent commission in July, and that we will have the conclusions of Sir John Chadwick's report; we intend to make progress there. I hope that we will have more information to give my hon. Friend in mid-July. This is a matter that has caused enormous anxiety for many people, and it is right that we keep people up to date with exactly what progress we are making.

Neil Parish: I would like to follow up those questions on Equitable Life. Over 1 million policyholders were affected by the fact that the previous Government did not accept the ombudsman's proposal that they be compensated. I am particularly worried that many people have died during the whole process; the previous Government was rather cynical in that respect. May I be assured that, through this process, we will ensure that people are compensated quickly? That needs to be done.

Mr Gauke: We are keen for the independent commission to design the scheme, but one of the points that we have made clear is that the dependants of deceased policyholders should be included in the scheme to address that point. Clearly, however, my hon. Friend highlights the need to move quickly, after 10 years of inadequate progress.

Michael Connarty (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (Lab): On the question of Equitable Life, there can be few constituencies that do not contain people who are waiting for payment or people who have died while waiting for payment. Is it not shocking that one of the main perpetrators of the Equitable Life fraud—for that is what it was—will, after last weekend, be able to take up a senior position in a financial institution? Can the Government re-examine what happened in that process, so that these people are not allowed to have senior financial positions in future?

Mr Gauke: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand that I am not going to be drawn on an individual case without all the information in front of me. He has made his point very clear.

Mr Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley) (Lab): First, would the Minister care to share with the House the date that the cheques will arrive through the doors of those who are still waiting for payment? That is the key. My second question is, as people have, tragically, died while the process has gone on and on, will there be compensation for the families that have missed out as well?

Mr Speaker: Order. To ask a second question was very cheeky on the part of an experienced Member, but I know that the Minister will not be tempted to follow suit.

Mr Gauke: I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about delays. He knows as well as I do where a lot of the blame for that lies. I made the point earlier that dependants of deceased policyholders should be included in the scheme. As for a specific date, the only thing I can say is that we are clearly making much more progress than the previous Government did.

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): Bearing in mind the fact that many of the policyholders are getting older—*[Interruption]*—surely it is vital that we get money into their hands as quickly as possible.

Mr Gauke: I do not want to be pedantic, but all of them are getting older. The hon. Gentleman rightly says that there is a need to move quickly. I think that we all feel that. I am pleased that the Government have already announced in the Queen's Speech that there will be a Bill on this subject. We have already announced a date for the establishment of the scheme. We are making progress. That is a very welcome change from what we have seen in the previous 10 years.

Child Poverty

8. **Ann McKechin** (Glasgow North) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the future of Government targets to eradicate child poverty; and if he will make a statement. [925]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Justine Greening): The coalition Government have announced that they want to see an end to child poverty in the UK by 2020. We now have 1.9 million children living in workless households in the UK. The OECD says that we have the highest proportion of children living in workless households of any OECD country—nearly 18%. That is one of the reasons why my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions have been discussing that matter. One of the early outcomes of those discussions, as I am sure Members will be aware, is the announcement of the review by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) of child poverty and life chances. We think that that will be an informative way of engaging people in the debate, and of coming up with some policy options, which we can then feed into our consideration of child poverty.

Ann McKechin: The hon. Lady will be aware that disabled children are much more likely to live in poverty and have much reduced life chances. Given that, and given her Government's decision to abolish the child trust fund, can she tell me how many disability organisations they consulted prior to that decision, and what assessment they have made of the impact that that decision will have on thousands of disabled children throughout the country?

Justine Greening: We are providing support for disabled children and their families. In fact, regarding the child trust fund, part of the package was the funding of 8,000 extra week-long breaks for the parents of disabled children—breaks that we know are well valued.

Mr Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the main reason for the scale of child poverty in this country is that we have inherited a benefit system that punishes thrift, work and traditional families? If the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) does indeed think the unthinkable, will we, unlike the previous Government, support him?

Justine Greening: Unlike the previous Government, we all recognise that child poverty is about much more than just money. If we are to be successful in improving children's life chances, wherever they start their lives in this country, we need to look at a little bit more than the child tax credit; we need to look far more broadly. We need to look at issues around health and education. That is one of the matters that we will consider over the coming months. It is vital to realise that if we do not tackle the root causes of child poverty, we are very unlikely to tackle the symptoms. Of course, the ultimate way of tackling child poverty is sorting out our economy and getting people back into jobs, so that children are not in workless households in the first place.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Under the previous Conservative Government, child poverty doubled; thanks to the efforts of the Labour Government, with the minimum wage, working families tax credit and child benefit rises, 500,000 children were taken out of poverty. Today, will the Minister, whom I welcome to her new position, not just commit to tackling the targets that the Labour Government set, but support the means—the minimum wage, working families tax credit, and child benefit?

Justine Greening: The previous Government managed to raise a number of children who were just below the poverty line just above it, without tackling the fundamental causes of why they were in that position in the first place. What is particularly depressing is that it is as if nothing has been learned from the experiment of the past 13 years. Clearly, we need to look more broadly, rather than just at giving households in poverty money. We need to help them to get back into work. It has to be wrong that in this country, the marginal tax rates for those in low-income families who are going back to work can be in the 90th percentile range. We would never dream of taxing people who are rich that much, but we tax people who are poor at those rates.

Economic Growth

10. **Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the level of growth in the UK economy compared with those of other OECD countries. [927]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Danny Alexander): The independent Office for Budget Responsibility will publish forecasts for growth in the UK ahead of the emergency Budget.

Charlie Elphicke: There is too much deprivation in Dover and Deal. We need more jobs and money locally. What action will the Government take to increase the trend growth rate of this nation, so that the people of Dover and Deal get more jobs and money, and Britain does better?

Danny Alexander: The best thing that we can do to increase growth and create jobs in this country is tackle the enormous budget deficit that we inherited from the previous Government. By taking firm action to reduce the deficit, we can restore confidence in the economy and help the private sector to create jobs. That is what we need to do.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The £80 million loan to Sheffield Forgemasters was an investment designed to encourage the growth of the advanced manufacturing sector of the economy, not just across south Yorkshire but across the UK as a whole. Will the Government bear in mind that investment, and the long-term context, when they make a decision on the future of that loan?

Danny Alexander: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that point, and I have certainly heard what she said. Obviously, we are reassessing carefully projects approved by the previous Government between 1 January and the election, and we will make an announcement in the near future.

Devolved Administrations

11. **Mr Mark Williams** (Ceredigion) (LD): What his policy is on the mechanism for the provision of funding from the Exchequer to the devolved Administrations; and if he will make a statement. [928]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Danny Alexander): The Government recognise the concerns expressed by the Holtham commission about the system of devolution funding, but as we made clear in the coalition programme for government, the first priority has to be reducing the deficit.

Mr Williams: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, and for the acknowledgement in the coalition agreement of the work of the Holtham commission. Its message was that there was historical underfunding of Wales to the tune of £300 million a year; that was backed up by Lord Barnett himself and a Lords Committee. Does my right hon. Friend accept the report's conclusion that Wales has, historically, been underfunded? We acknowledge that cuts will be borne right across the UK, and across all its regions and nations, but will he use this opportunity to confirm the Government's commitment to fair funding across the country?

Danny Alexander: In the coalition agreement, we say that we recognise the concerns raised by the Holtham commission, but the priority must be to reduce the deficit. We also said that once the forthcoming referendum has taken place, there will be a Calman commission-like process. The Calman commission looked at greater financial accountability for the Scottish Parliament, and a similar process for Wales might help to address some of my hon. Friend's concerns.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow Central) (Lab): Will the Chief Secretary please tell us why his party campaigned throughout the election against immediate spending cuts, but is now, in return for jobs in the Cabinet, willing to risk tens of thousands of jobs across the country?

Danny Alexander: The hon. Gentleman just needs to look around the world to see that the argument for rapid fiscal consolidation is becoming stronger by the day. He should look at the G20 and the independent assessments. Clearly, making the sort of decisions that we are making now—the £6 billion exercise and the decisions that will no doubt be announced in the Budget—is absolutely essential to create a responsible basis for the public finances and return the country to the right economic track.

Tax Avoidance

16. **Mr Adrian Sanders** (Torbay) (LD): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the level of tax avoidance. [933]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): Tackling tax avoidance is essential, and we will make every effort to do so. We are committed to preventing avoidance through deterrence, and by ensuring that we have a robust legislative framework. We detect avoidance early using the disclosure of tax avoidance schemes rules and other information. We tackle avoidance quickly where we find it by strengthening legislation or through the operational work of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

Mr Sanders: Recent research has shown that up to £120 billion a year is lost to tax avoidance. Will the Minister ensure that he looks at the way in which HMRC works, and does better so that people will not have to pay higher taxes and receive poorer services as a consequence?

Mr Gauke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question. We would disagree with the number, as the tax gap estimate produced by HMRC is £40 billion. None the less, that is a significant sum, and it is absolutely right that people pay the tax that is due, and HMRC will continue to pursue matters to reduce tax avoidance.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Is not the general view correct, and the estimated tax gap of £40 billion a significant underestimate? Will the Minister explain how cuts to HMRC staffing and capacity are to be aligned with attempts to close the tax gap?

Mr Gauke: Staff in HMRC have been reduced for many years, from 97,000 to 69,000. Any Government will want to ensure that HMRC's resources are deployed as effectively and efficiently as possible, and we will certainly seek to do so.

Bingo Industry

17. **Simon Kirby** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Con): What his policy is on taxation of the bingo industry; and if he will make a statement. [934]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Justine Greening): We keep all taxes under review. It would not be appropriate to discuss taxation in relation to bingo before the Budget in a couple of weeks, but we are keen to have a dialogue with the industry.

Simon Kirby: Does the Minister agree that sometimes it is possible to increase revenue by reducing taxes?

Justine Greening: I think that my hon. Friend is probably referring to the well-known Laffer curve. I am sure that he is aware, too, that the tax on bingo participation clubs was reduced in the last Budget from 22% to 20%. As I said, I look forward to talking to the industry over the coming months.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): Is it not the case that bingo is taxed more severely than other more dangerous forms of gambling, and that the Government would do well if they at least brought them into line?

Justine Greening: I know that that argument has been made by the industry, and I am aware of its campaign on fair taxation. We want fair taxation. One of the Government's key priorities is tackling the budget deficit, and ultimately the best way for us to support not just bingo clubs but other companies in Britain employing staff is to get the economy back on its feet, creating jobs so that people have money in their pocket to spend, including in bingo clubs.

Budget Deficit

18. **Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): What recent representations he has received on the level of the budget deficit. [935]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Justine Greening): We have received a number of representations on the budget deficit, not least from many other European countries, which are now taking steps, as we are, to reduce their deficit—a point that still seems lost on the Opposition.

Mr Bone: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for answering my question and for her arrival at the Dispatch Box, which is very welcome on our side of the House. Will she take a representation from me on reducing the Budget deficit? Can the emphasis be put on cutting public expenditure, rather than increasing taxes? Does she have any idea of the proportion that will be raised by tax increases and by public expenditure cuts?

Justine Greening: We have said that we want to see the bulk of the deficit reduced by restraining public spending. I know that a number of other countries have taken proportions of roughly 80%:20% on restraining public spending and increasing taxes. We are particularly keen to cut out as much of the waste as possible. As we work our way through the previous Government's horrific spending plans—not that they had any projections into the future—we will do our best to make sure that we do not just bring down our public spending, but use this opportunity to ensure that it delivers better public services for the public whom it is there to serve.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): In *The Sun* the Deputy Prime Minister wrote about the enticing prospect of progressive cuts. Can the hon. Lady explain what a progressive cut would look like?

Justine Greening: The hon. Gentleman might be better off directing that comment to the Deputy Prime Minister. I did not see it in the paper. We are conscious of the need to make sure that we can protect front-line services that people depend on. We have already debated pensions this morning, for example, and we are doing our best to protect money that supports the most vulnerable in our society.

Topical Questions

T1. [943] **Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): The core purpose of the Treasury is to ensure the stability of the economy, promote growth and employment, reform the banking system and manage the public finances so that Britain lives within her means.

Mark Lazarowicz: Whether the amount lost by tax avoidance or tax evasion is £100 billion or £40 billion a year, it is a lot of money which could go a long way to tackling the deficit. Will the Chancellor tell his ministerial colleagues sitting next to him to give a higher priority to tackling tax evasion and tax avoidance so as to make sure that those who are most able to pay the costs of the deficit do so, rather than those who are least able to pay?

Mr Osborne: Yes, we will.

T6. [949] **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): At a time of low investment returns, which mean that many people in the private sector are struggling to fund a pension for their retirement, what steps will be taken to tackle the ballooning public sector pension bill?

Mr Osborne: The Government will establish an independent commission to look at public sector pension provision. We will make an announcement on that in due course.

T3. [945] **Mr Graham Allen** (Nottingham North) (Lab): Has the Chancellor yet had a chance to have a one-to-one with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to discuss the thing that would most affect the structural nature of the deficit: early intervention with our babies, children and young people to ensure that we do not accumulate massive costs of failure that need to be met much later? If he has not done that, will he undertake to do so, please?

Mr Osborne: I have had several conversations with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on this issue and on the broader issues of welfare reform. I broadly agree with the point that the hon. Gentleman makes—he made it forcefully in the last Parliament—that support for children in the early years can yield real results later on. We will bear that in mind as we conduct our spending review.

T2. [944] **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): While the Chancellor is reviewing the projects agreed by the previous Government since 1 January, may I commend to him the Better Healthcare Closer to Home programme and the plans that it has for St Helier hospital? May it draw it to his attention that the plans were very enthusiastically endorsed by the

new Secretary of State for Health when he visited my constituency just a couple of days before the general election?

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Danny Alexander): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question and pay tribute to his assiduous campaigning on the issue over many years. He will know that we are carefully reassessing the projects agreed by the previous Government between 1 January and the election, and we will make an announcement shortly. He will also know that it is right that we are making sure that each and every one of the many projects that were announced is affordable and represents value for money.

T5. [948] **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): I was disappointed to see no mention of the credit union movement in the coalition agreement. Although I admit that I have not yet got my head around what the big society is, I hope that there is a role in there for the credit union movement. When can we expect the Legislative Reform (Industrial And Provident Societies and Credit Unions) Order 2010 to be laid before the House?

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Justine Greening): We do support credit unions. In fact, one of the first things that the new Secretary of State for Wales did on her appointment was to visit her local credit union in Wales. We have said that we want vibrant, sustainable credit unions. We are looking at the legislative reform order to which the hon. Lady referred and I hope that we can come back with some further dates in the next few weeks. As she can imagine, the focus right now has been on the emergency Budget, but I am aware of the order and officials are talking to me about the time lines for it.

T4. [947] **Mr Mark Williams** (Ceredigion) (LD): There was great relief in the tourism sector when the furnished holiday lettings rules were scrapped just before the election in the wash-up. What will the Government do to ensure that the rules are EU compliant, but do not disadvantage tourist operatives in the way that it was feared that the old rules would do?

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): My hon. Friend raises a very good point, and what was proposed on the furnished holiday lettings rule would have caused great difficulties. There is an issue with the EU law, but I can assure him that we are working hard on the matter and we hope to be able to say more in the next few weeks.

T8. [951] **Alun Michael** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Chancellor will be aware of the public and cross-party support given to the proposal to turn British Waterways into a sort of national trust for the waterways of the UK. That was given official endorsement in the last Budget. Can the Chancellor confirm his intention to pursue this proposal, and perhaps give an idea of the time scale within which it might be brought about?

Mr Osborne: If the right hon. Gentleman will allow me, I will look into the details of the proposal to which he refers and write to him.

T7. [950] **Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): In 2008-09, our contribution to the EU was £2.5 billion. This year it will be £6.4 billion. Why does every budget have to be cut except the EU's, which can increase by 150%? Is it not a case not of ring-fencing, but of gold-plating?

Mr Osborne: I am sure that my hon. Friend will be glad to know that in my first ECOFIN I proposed to the Council that we freeze the EU budget, and there was support from other countries around the table. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is supporting an increase in the EU budget, he should tell the House.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): I welcome the Chancellor and his team to their new posts. As part of the consultation on cuts that is being announced today, would he be prepared to visit Dudley, so that we can discuss the importance of maintaining investment in education and training as our No.1 priority, so that we can bring to the area the new industries and jobs on which our future prosperity will depend? While he is there, I can take him to Priory road, and he can see the devastating impact that his decision to cut spending on housing is having on that community.

Mr Osborne: I am always very happy to visit Dudley. I have done so many times in the last three or four months—which was half successful.

We have found additional money to support social housing. We discovered that the housing commitments made by the Labour Government just before the general election were completely unfunded. We have found money to fund additional social housing, which during the past 13 years the previous Government almost completely failed to do.

T9. [952] **Bob Russell** (Colchester) (LD): Further to excellent question of the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), can the Minister who was briefed to answer the excellent Question 25, in my name, now give a more substantive answer? What will the Government do to support credit unions such as the excellent one in Colchester?

Justine Greening: The best thing that we can do to support credit unions is make sure that they are on a sustainable footing. When I talk to Conservative Members, many of them say that they want to see their credit unions merge. We need to ensure that credit unions can offer a broader range of products to local people, and we need to look at how credit unions operate. Interestingly, although complaints to the financial services ombudsman are broadly increasing, when it comes to credit unions they are falling. The most recently released statistics show that just one in 66,000 complaints related to a credit union. The hon. Gentleman is right to ask how we can support credit unions. The Prime Minister has been supportive of them and we look forward to seeing what more we can do to support them over the coming months.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): If everybody has to share the burden of cutting the budget deficit, will the Chancellor start at the very top, and call upon the royal family to tell them that under no circumstances will they get a single penny of the £7 million increase that they are demanding in the civil list?

Mr Osborne: We will be making an announcement on the civil list in due course, but if the hon. Gentleman is looking for cost savings, perhaps early retirement is something that he could consider. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr James Clappison (Hertsmere) (Con): Does not part of the contribution to the EU budget result from the surrender of the UK rebate in 2005 by the previous Government, which will cost taxpayers in this country up to £9 billion over six years and was given in return for nothing? Should we not add that to the Chief Secretary's list of waste by the previous Government?

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The former Prime Minister Tony Blair gave away the UK's budget rebate in return for absolutely nothing. We were promised at the time that it would give us leverage over CAP reform, which never arrived, and I am afraid that that is just one of the many decisions that the previous Government got wrong.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Growth throughout the UK economy has often been geographically uneven. Has the Chancellor considered what help a rural fuel derogation might bring to the highlands and, in particular, the islands of Scotland; and can I volunteer my own constituency, Na h-Eileanan an Iar, for any pilot project?

Danny Alexander: The Government are well aware of the benefits that a rural fuel derogation might bring to remote parts of the economy. We are examining that issue, which is contained in the coalition agreement, and we note the hon. Gentleman's interests from his own constituency.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Under the previous Government, unemployment in Harlow was the highest in west Essex. Do the Government agree that a low-tax, low-debt economy is the best way to bring jobs back to Harlow?

Mr Osborne: May I say how particularly pleased I am to see my hon. Friend in the House? His victory was one that I found particularly satisfying on election night.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the ambition of a low-debt, low-tax economy is one to which people who care about the long-term economic future of this country should aspire. The key challenge, of course, is getting there, and that means dealing with the 11% budget deficit.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Gentleman will know that the budget deficit at the time of the Budget was £22 billion less than was predicted four months earlier in the pre-Budget report, showing that the major engine for reducing the deficit is economic growth. Will he give an undertaking that the cuts that he intends to make will not cut the capacity for economic growth in Britain, thereby increasing the deficit?

Mr Osborne: May I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his return to the House, as we both served on the Public Accounts Committee when I first arrived in the House? I make this point: he makes an original observation that somehow the British budget deficit is low, when, actually, of course, it is an 11% budget deficit and we are borrowing £156 billion—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Osborne: Oh, go and take the pension, please. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Can I just remind right hon. and hon. Members of the basic principle of "Erskine May": good temper and moderation in parliamentary exchanges at all times?

Mr Osborne: Mr Speaker, you are absolutely right.

I make this point to the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies). The serious observation that he makes about investment in productive economic assets is one that is reflected in the document that the Treasury produced this afternoon.

Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): A Select Committee in the other place found that reform of the Barnett formula could lead to a reduction in the budget deficit. In terms of the imperative of achieving that, will not the Treasury team look once again at that Select Committee report?

Danny Alexander: I am happy to look at the report, but as I said in answer to earlier questions, we made it clear in the coalition programme for government that, although we recognise those concerns, the priority must be to address the budget deficit, and that is what we are going to do.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): Will unemployment and inequality increase or decrease in the coming year?

Mr Osborne: The ambition, of course, is to try to get unemployment falling, but it is rising at the moment. That is the situation that we inherited—as is inequality, which we inherited too.

Matthew Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con): Is the Chancellor aware of the recent Institute for Fiscal Studies report which showed that, going into the recession, the budget deficit in the UK was already one of the highest in the developed world?

Mr Osborne: I am absolutely aware of that report, because my hon. Friend drew it to my attention about three months ago, for which I thank him.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab):Everybody is assuming that the budget cuts are based on the Canadian model, which itself was based on 3% growth and not least on strong growth in the American economy. I want to ask the Chancellor something in all seriousness. If there is not equivalent strong growth globally and within the eurozone, will that not mean that we get all the pain and none of the gain?

Mr Osborne: There does seem to be collective amnesia on the Labour Benches. They were in government for 13 years, they ran up the largest budget deficit in the European Union and they handed over office to us after an election in the middle of a eurozone crisis. The threat to the British economy is what will happen if we do not

deal with this budget deficit. Let me say to the hon. Gentleman and all Labour Members that until they have their own proposals to deal with the problem that they have bequeathed the new Government, they are not going to be taken seriously.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I ask my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to outline to the House exactly what not tackling the deficit would mean for my constituents in Elmet and Rothwell and for their mortgages.

Mr Osborne: Unfortunately, my hon. Friend would have to tell his constituents that interest rates would start to rise and international investor confidence would be lost. Today, one of the credit rating agencies has published a report that makes the observation that the UK's deficit reduction plan is particularly weak. That is the situation that we have inherited, and we are going to put it right.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Chief Secretary to the Treasury rule out the means-testing of child benefit?

Danny Alexander: A range of announcements will be made in the Budget across a whole range of issues, but as the Chancellor has said repeatedly, one of the key tests of measures is fairness, to ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the previous Government in allowing inequality to widen and in missing child poverty targets.

Gordon Birtwistle (Burnley) (LD): Does my right hon. Friend intend to continue using the very expensive PFI funding for future capital investment in the NHS? The most expensive to date has been in Wythenshawe hospital, where the NHS will pay back 16 times the original capital value. More prudent borrowing in the past would have delivered the investment without adding to the deficit.

Mr Osborne: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good observation about the hidden costs of PFI liabilities. After the Office for Budget Responsibility creates an independent set of national economic forecasts, it will go on to look at PFI liabilities. The deficit and national debt that we have been talking about are, of course, only half the story; there is the hidden iceberg of the PFI liabilities that the Labour party ran up over 13 years as well.

Point of Order

3.33 pm

Mr Alistair Darling (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that the coming spending review was going to change our whole way of life and that today the Chancellor and Chief Secretary would publish a framework for this year's spending review. I am not seeking to reopen your decision in relation to my request for an urgent question, and I would normally have expected a statement in the House from the Chancellor in relation to what I took to be an important document. I understand that his argument is that he will be able to speak in the Queen's Speech debate; the problem is that because of the order of speakers, he speaks after me. In fairness to him, he did offer to let me have a copy of the document at 2 o'clock, but sadly it did not get to me until I was just walking into the Chamber.

Given what you said on your re-election, Mr Speaker, I really think that it would be far better, especially on matters as important as this, if the Chancellor, as well as other Ministers, were prepared to come to the House and defend the decisions that they are taking. As it is, I have had a quick look through the document, and there does not seem to be very much substance in it at all, which may be why the Chancellor decided not to give a statement. But the principle is an important one.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. If I were uncharitable, I would think that he was in some sense seeking to continue an earlier debate—but I am not, so I assume that he is not. My judgment is that the matter in question, which is extremely important, can be debated very fully today. However, I trust that any major announcement to be made in due course, on this or any other matter, will be made first in the House.

Speaker's Statement

3.34 pm

Mr Speaker: The House will know that the election of Deputy Speakers took place today, and the ballot was closed at noon. The counting is finished, and I have the results.

Before I announce the results, I would like to take this opportunity to thank, on behalf of the whole House, the two temporary Deputy Speakers who have helped to chair the House during the Queen's Speech debate. The hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley) has brought to the House his experience of chairing Public Bill Committees, and he has done so with great care and good sense. Sir Alan Haselhurst was a newcomer to the Chair 13 years ago, when Betty Boothroyd was Speaker. He has served as Chairman of Ways and Means with distinction through three Parliaments, guiding the House in the Chamber and helping its work behind the scenes. I particularly thank him for all his wise counsel to me during my first year as Speaker. I know that the House will benefit from his judgment and commitment in other ways in this Parliament.

This also gives me the opportunity to pay tribute in the House to Sir Michael Lord and Sylvia Heal, who retired from the House at the general election having served the House so well as Deputy Speakers from 1997 and 2000 respectively. The standard set by these three Deputy Speakers in their combined service in the Chair of some 36 years will be an inspiration to their successors elected today.

I will now announce the result of the ballot held today for the election of Deputy Speakers. Mr Lindsay Hoyle was elected Chairman of Ways and Means. Mr Nigel Evans was elected First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means. Dawn Primarolo was elected Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means. They will take up their posts tomorrow. I congratulate those elected, and I look forward to working with them.

The results of the count, under the single transferable vote system, will be made available as soon as possible in the Vote Office and published on the intranet.

Debate on the Address

[6TH DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 7 June).

Question again proposed,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Economic Affairs and Work and Pensions

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. Standing Order No. 33 provides that on the last day of the debate on the motion for an Address to Her Majesty, the House may also vote on a second amendment selected by the Speaker. I have selected the amendment in the name of Angus Robertson for that purpose. The vote on that amendment will take place at the end of the debate after the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition has been disposed of.

3.38 pm

Mr Alistair Darling (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): I beg to move an amendment, at the end of the Question to add:

"endorse the successful steps taken by the previous administration to return the economy to growth, to keep people in their jobs and homes, and to support businesses; note the need for a clear plan to bring down the deficit; respectfully believe that securing the recovery and robust future growth should be central to that plan; further believe that such a plan must be fair and protect front line public services; therefore oppose your Government's measures to cut the support provided by the Future Jobs Fund for tens of thousands of young people out of work, to damage growth in the regions by scaling back regional development agencies, and to cast uncertainty over support for key low carbon sectors like the nuclear supply chain and lower carbon vehicles; further note that a rebalanced British economy must be built as the UK emerges from the recession; and therefore urge your Government to reconsider the removal of investment allowances which support manufacturing businesses seeking to grow."

I congratulate all those Members who have made their maiden speeches over the past few days, and commend the speeches that we will hear from new Members during the debate this afternoon.

Before I turn to what I suspect will be the main focus of the debate—the economy—I want to mention a number of Bills in the Gracious Speech on which the Chancellor might want to respond in the course of his speech, which will follow mine. The Government want to bring before the House several measures on which the Opposition can offer complete support or, I hope, can be constructive in their support. The first is the terrorist asset-freezing Bill. That piece of legislation is necessary as a result of a recent decision by the Supreme Court and we will certainly support the Government in getting it on the statute book as soon as possible. I am grateful for the co-operation I received when I was Chancellor from the then shadow Chancellor and his Liberal counterpart.

I appreciate what the Chancellor said a few moments ago about the Office for Budget Responsibility currently operating on an extra-statutory basis, but I hope that the principles on which it will operate—with as much openness and transparency as possible and with us being able to look at the deliberations of the budget responsibility committee and understand its reasoning before it reaches a recommendation—will be part of its practice now and will be in the legislation when it comes before the House. I welcome the fact that Sir Alan Budd, who has been appointed acting chairman of that office, has made it clear that he is willing to speak to all hon. Members. That is important, as the office will work only if it is seen to be non-partisan.

On Equitable Life, all of us know that the process has been long and drawn out. I think the Government may have already found that the process is not straightforward and that the ombudsman's ruling was not as clear-cut as some people thought. We therefore commissioned Sir John Chadwick to investigate the matter, and I am glad to say that he will report in July. I had thought he was going to report at the end of May, which is what he had told us, but it may be that he has had further discussions with the Treasury. *[Interruption.]* The Chancellor is saying from a sedentary position that it was at his request. That is fine, but I wonder whether he will make provision for whatever Sir John recommends in his June Budget, or whether the fact that Sir John is reporting in July means we will have to wait for a further Budget to see what provision is being made.

On the financial services regulation Bill, we had many exchanges across the Floor of the House in the last Parliament on this matter, but I simply say to the Chancellor that it would be helpful if he could perhaps tell the House exactly what the coalition agreement is in relation to who has responsibility for regulation. We have read conflicting reports in the newspapers about whether the Financial Services Authority is to be brought within the responsibility of the Bank of England and whether it is the Governor or Lord Turner who is to be responsible for the regulation of the financial services industry. Other reports say that no decision has been made and the decision has been parked. It is important that we have some certainty about that, because the very nature of such things means it is inevitable that some problem may arise quickly. It is therefore important to know who is in charge, as we do not want the FSA and its staff to be concentrating more on their future than on what is happening in the financial services industry.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): On the point about banking regulation, the shadow Chancellor will remember the closure of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International and the Bingham report. That report was commissioned by the previous Government and its conclusions mentioned an independent regulator. It is important that we look carefully at the issue of regulation and that we do not hand back to the Bank of England all the powers for regulation. In his conclusions, Lord Bingham recommended that that should not happen.

Mr Darling: My right hon. Friend will know that I have always had reservations about transferring responsibility for regulation to the Bank of England, as I am not sure that it is the best body to deal with it.

[Mr Darling]

Certainly, for much of the past 10 years, it has had a good and distinguished record on monetary policy, but I am not so sure whether it should have widespread responsibility for regulation.

My right hon. Friend is also right to draw attention to the Bingham report. The Chancellor will no doubt recall, or I am sure his officials will remind him, that Lord Bingham produced two reports—one was published and one was not. I strongly advise him to read the second, unpublished report, because it sheds considerable light on some of the problems that arose. Perhaps after such a length of time, it might be possible to reconsider whether that report should be published, because I think many of the people concerned would not be so badly affected.

Keith Vaz: Will the shadow Chancellor give way?

Mr Darling: I will give way once more to my right hon. Friend.

Keith Vaz: On the Bingham report, if the shadow Chancellor has read the confidential parts, why did he resist the publication of that second report? That is something that some of us who have been concerned about the liquidation of BCCI for 20 years have urged him to do.

Mr Darling: I think it was providing a response to a parliamentary question from my right hon. Friend that obliged me to read the report. I remember spending two days reading it and giving my decision. However, I do not have the benefit of the advice I received, which I now need to remind me why I refused his request at that time. All I can say is that I refused his request for entirely the right reasons but, 10 years later and in the spirit of freedom of information, I am not saying that it definitely should be looked at, but the present Chancellor or whoever is dealing with the issue should look at the matter and perhaps 10 years further on someone else looking at that report might reach a different conclusion. I reiterate, whatever decision I reached was right for the reasons I gave at the time.

May I also tell the Chancellor that it would be helpful if he took the opportunity to spell out the Government's policy on the banks in which the Government have shareholdings—Northern Rock, Lloyds, the Royal Bank of Scotland—because that is a matter of interest, especially now that RBS is talking about disposing of its Williams & Glyn's branches and others? I believe it is the view of both main political parties that there ought to be more competition in the system, so a clear statement on Government policy on how we do that would be helpful. We do not want to end up selling a tranche of banks to another big UK operator, because that would mean that we would not get the competition we want.

I was interested to re-read last Friday the Business, Innovations and Skills Secretary's criticism of the banks' failure to lend, but it is not entirely clear to me what the new Government are doing to increase bank lending. It would be useful to hear from the Chancellor, or at least one of his colleagues, in the fairly near future on that.

However, the main focus of today's debate is, inevitably, the economy, as it was in Treasury questions for the past hour or so. Yesterday, predictably, the Prime Minister, as the Chancellor did today, sought to lay the blame for everything the new Government plan to do on the previous Government. There is nothing new in that: new Governments frequently blame their predecessors and it is the easiest thing in the world to do. It is equally unsurprising that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor should go around the country and other parts of the world and say, "The situation is much, much worse than we thought. It's all terrible and we will have to do terrible things." By a stroke of good fortune, they have the Liberal Democrats to front up some of the difficult decisions they must take.

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): Did not the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr Byrne), rather than the new Government, reveal the desperate state in which the shadow Chancellor left the country's finances?

Mr Darling: Forgive me if I have misunderstood the hon. Gentleman, but throughout the three years when I was Chancellor, I do not think that I ever, on any occasion, concealed from anyone the difficulties that we and other economies would face as a result of the deepest global downturn in the past century. There can be no doubt about that.

However, I should tell the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues that by 2008, it was clear that this country, and every other major developed country in the world, faced the catastrophic consequences of the failure of the banking system. Had we not taken action to stabilise the banking system—many of those decisions were opposed by the Conservatives—and to ensure that we supported our economy when private sector investment dried up and died away, we would have had a situation in which recession tipped into depression. That is why we took the action that we did. We were right to do so, and the Conservatives were wrong to oppose us. Our economy is now growing, and as I said earlier, unemployment is half that in the downturn of the 1990s, and borrowing is coming down, because of the action we took in 2008 and 2009. We took that action along with most developed countries.

Matthew Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con) *rose—*

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Darling: I shall give way to the hon. Lady first.

Dr Coffey: Will the shadow Chancellor explain why, if he was so open about the state of the economy, he would not hold a comprehensive spending review, and why he would not publicise the impending debt payments of £70 billion that the people of this country must pay for his profligacy?

Mr Darling: First, I said on many occasions that the right thing to do was to hold a spending review this year, before the end of the current review period ran out. There is still a lot of uncertainty, as I shall explain later, and the hon. Lady would do well to remember that at present, while we are coming out of recovery, our growth is modest. I hope we will see recovery secured, but what is happening in continental Europe and other parts of the world shows that we are not out of the woods yet and there is still a lot of uncertainty

around. On the hon. Lady's main point, however—which I dare say her colleagues will make too—our borrowing and debt levels rose for exactly the same reason as they are rising in America, Japan, Italy, France, Germany and just about every other country in the world: because we went through the deepest global recession in modern times. The hon. Lady might also want to remember that until well into 2008 the Conservatives, far from condemning our spending, were supporting our spending plans. They are therefore in no position to say now that they were opposing all this in times past. That is simply not right.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con) *rose—*

Richard Harrington (Watford) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Darling: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), and then I shall make some progress.

Mr Sheerman: Will the shadow Chancellor join me in recommending Sam Brittan's article in the *Financial Times* last week entitled "Now is the time to ask: 'What crisis?'"? He is a Conservative and he supports the coalition Government, but he says that it does nobody any good to exaggerate the state of the British economy, which he believes is much stronger than that of most of our competitors.

Mr Darling: I think it is necessary for anyone charged with responsibility for the British economy to take a measured approach. If things are difficult, they have a duty to speak out, even when that causes them some problems, as I found out myself a couple of years ago. I think it is better that we do that, than not. Equally, however, it does no good to go running around saying the situation is absolutely terrible and dire, because sooner or later we may find that the markets call our bluff; we may find that one day they say, "Whatever you do, it isn't enough." I believe that that approach is as irresponsible as saying nothing about a difficult situation.

We must discuss these matters in a reasoned and rational manner, because while it is important that we identify the things that need to be put right, equally we must not give an impression counter to the fact that, fundamentally we have an economy that is coming through this period, that we can get through it and ensure that we have growth, which is absolutely critical in the future. Running around scaremongering and raising all sorts of fears could have the perverse effects of turning market sentiment against us, which we do not need, and of dampening consumer and investor confidence, which is simply not necessary.

Charlie Elphicke: The shadow Chancellor says that Government Members are scaremongering by pointing out that the Budget deficit is 13%. We are not scaremongering; we are scared, as the position is extremely serious. The recession was so deep in the first place because the right hon. Gentleman's colleague, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown)—who has not been seen of late—ran things so badly that the money ran out, which meant that we were more exposed before the recession. The shadow Chancellor should therefore be apologising to the House for the mess that his right hon. Friend and the previous Government have left behind.

Mr Darling: No, I do not agree with that. I think the hon. Gentleman will find that an awful lot of things that went wrong in 2007 were a result of what went wrong in the banking system, not just here but in other parts of the world as well.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): Does the shadow Chancellor agree with this statement by the Governor of the Bank of England:

"I don't think you can compare the UK with Greece. There are big differences"?

I suggest that not the least of the differences between our countries is that our debt-to-GDP ratio is about half that of Greece.

Mr Darling: The Governor was making a very fair point, as he does on many occasions. It is interesting that even in the past couple of days Government members—the Prime Minister yesterday, and one or two of his ministerial colleagues—are rowing back from direct comparisons with Greece because that may have been very convenient to them in opposition, but it might not be such a good idea now that they hold office.

Our economy is experiencing growth at present, and that is because of the action we took over the past couple of years. I do not intend, as the Chancellor said, to fight the last general election again or to go through everything that happened over the last two or three years—that is, perhaps, for another occasion—but I do say this about the action we took. The fiscal stimulus we put in place—the VAT reduction; the decision to bring forward capital spending; the measures we took to protect people's jobs and ensure that if people were out of work for a short period we could get them back into work as quickly as possible; the time to pay scheme, which is still helping hundreds of thousands of businesses throughout the country; the car scrappage scheme; and the action we took internationally—have all come together to make sure we came through this recession. Interestingly, although the predominant position of the financial services industry in this country meant that it took us longer to come through into recovery than it took some other countries, Britain has had two quarters of growth whereas other countries, particularly those in continental Europe, have seen their growth slip back and, in some cases, they have slipped into recession. What that tells me is that had the previous Government not taken the action that they did over the past couple of years we would not now be in a position to say, "Yes, our economy is growing." Equally, our action has meant that although our borrowing is still very high and needs to come down, it is coming down faster than many people believed, even a few months ago.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I wish to assure the shadow Chancellor that Conservative Members appreciate that the previous Government had to borrow money during the recession. What baffles us is why they borrowed money during the boom.

Mr Darling: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for accepting what is obvious: the fact that during a recession Governments do have to borrow in order to support their economies. However, I should remind him that during the earlier part of the previous decade the Conservative party supported our spending programmes,

[Mr Darling]

saying that they would stick to our spending levels. The Prime Minister, when he was Leader of the Opposition, said that as recently as 2008. The hon. Gentleman was not here during the previous Parliament, but I can assure him that I do not recall any Conservative standing up to say, "Don't build a new school in my constituency. Don't build more housing. Don't open a new hospital." Conservative Members were not saying that at all; they wanted more spending in just about every area. So the idea that the Conservative party was behaving in a way that would have meant that there was no borrowing and that the Conservatives would have behaved any differently is absolute nonsense. The hon. Gentleman just has to accept that.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend agree that some of the measures that have now contributed to the deficit were being demanded by manufacturing industry in order to sustain the corporate manufacturing base needed for us to grow out of recession, the car scrappage scheme being one case in point?

Mr Darling: I agree with my hon. Friend. The new Government will find that for every industrialist or manufacturer who says that public spending needs to be cut, in areas that benefit from such spending people take a rather different view. The car scrappage scheme is an example of that, and it made a huge difference to the car industry and the motor vehicle industry in general. As the hon. Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen) said, the action that we took did involve more borrowing and it does result in increasing debt. However, the point is that the cost of failing to act would have been far greater.

The Chancellor was talking about the international consensus. I know something about that, and I can tell hon. Members that over the past three years it was very much in favour of our continuing to support our economies; of course, as we come through to recovery we have to get the borrowing down. Nobody disputes that, and at least two of the parties that fought the previous election were absolutely clear about it—it was never clear what the third party was in favour of, and its position remains something of a mystery even today.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): The shadow Chancellor rightly says that there was an international consensus, and I supported many of the actions that he took. However, in this financial year, when recovery is not secure, why did he leave the economy without a fiscal stimulus? Ours is one of only two countries in the G20 without a fiscal stimulus, and I still believe it was absolutely necessary for us in order to secure recovery and prevent our slipping back into recession.

Mr Darling: What economists call the "automatic stabilisers" are still operating and are still supporting the economy. I have always been clear about this, and I believe that the deficit has to be reduced. One of the reasons why I wanted to halve it within a four-year period was that I wanted to get it down in a way that did not damage the economic or, indeed, the social fabric of the country while that was being done. Obviously I do not know what the new Government are going to come up with, but I suspect that they will not go too far before they start seeing that when they want to reduce expenditure quickly that sometimes has severely damaging consequences. We shall wait to see what happens, but I believe that that is a substantial risk.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Darling: Before I leave this point I should say something further because a number of hon. Members mentioned our spending in the earlier part of our Government. It is not just about what we did during the recession; it is about the fact that over the relevant 10-year period, there was an unprecedented decade of growth such as this country had not seen before, as well as low interest rates, low inflation and falling unemployment. Gross domestic product per capita grew faster in this country than in any other G7 country even after one takes into account the effects of the financial crisis. The economic environment was one that this country had not had for many years. Of course, we had to deal with the effects of the banking crisis and the downturn that followed, which had a very severe effect on our public finances as well as other public finances.

Mr David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): My right hon. Friend did a phenomenal job as Chancellor of the Exchequer. The measures that he has just outlined and the success were considerable, but is it not also true that back in 2002 his Government, and my Government, finally paid off the second world war and post-war debt that was run up with the Americans in 1947? The final bonds were paid off not by the Conservatives in the 1950s, 1960s or 1980s, but by the Labour Government in 2002. *[Interruption.]* That is absolutely true.

Mr Darling: My right hon. Friend is right. No doubt there will be another occasion to revisit the lend-lease arrangements that the then Government entered into in the 1940s, although I commend to the House Lord Robert Skidelsky's excellent third volume on Keynes, which deals with this matter quite extensively. Some people thought that we got a pretty bad deal in 1943, but there you are.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con) *rose—*

Matthew Hancock *rose—*

Mr Darling: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman who I think used to advise the Chancellor at one point.

Matthew Hancock: The shadow Chancellor has mentioned the banking crisis several times. With hindsight, does he regret the system of banking regulation that was introduced in 1997, and recognise that it failed?

Mr Darling: No, I do not think that was the main problem. The system of regulation that we introduced in 1998 brought together about eight or nine different regulators—self-regulators, as the Conservative party used to be very keen on self-regulation. The problem in relation to the Financial Services Authority, the American regulators and most other regulators was that they simply did not understand the systemic risks that arose in the previous decade or the consequences of the failure of one bank for another. The system in this country was not the problem, but there was undoubtedly

a failure on the part of regulators right across the world, including in our country. The FSA's inquiry into what went wrong in Northern Rock demonstrated that the FSA had spotted problems in Northern Rock in February 2007 but had not taken action. I shall say this in the nicest possible way to the hon. Gentleman: he might want to have a word with one or two of the people who were running Northern Rock—members of his party—who might have had a better look at what they were supposed to have been doing when they were running that bank.

Richard Harrington *rose—*

Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Darling: I shall give way to the hon. Lady. It might be a mistake, but I will.

Claire Perry: I thank the shadow Chancellor for giving way. May I say that as a bystander, rather than a participant, in the last Parliament, I was always struck by his excellent manners? As a mother of three children, I am very hot on manners. In particular, when my children make a mess that I have to clear up, I encourage them to say sorry. Would the shadow Chancellor like to apologise to the Government and the people of Britain for the mess he has left for this Government to clean up?

Mr Darling: I am glad that I gave way to the hon. Lady for at least the first part of her intervention. I do not agree with her on the second part, but I should like to address that point now. It is true that our borrowing has risen very substantially—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Darling: I shall not give way. I want to make some progress, because I know that many hon. Members want to make their maiden speeches, and I do not want to be blamed for not allowing them to do so. I might give way before I finish, but not just now.

As I was saying, borrowing has clearly increased, but that has to be put into perspective. Our deficit for this year is broadly similar to that of the US. All other major countries have had the same problem.

We went into the recession with the second-lowest level of debt of any of the G7 countries, but IMF projections for this year show that our debt is lower than that of France, Germany, Italy and Japan. Yes, we have to get our borrowing down and make sure that we start to bear down on debt, and I agree with everyone who says that it is far better to spend money on things other than debt interest. However, it is worth making the point—because it is one that the present Government never do make—that this problem does not affect our country alone. It has affected all countries, and certainly all the developed countries.

It is not a surprise that borrowing and debt went up, because our tax revenues fell dramatically in 2007 and 2008. Our spending on unemployment and social security went up because tax credits were there to help people who lost their jobs. Yes, that was increased expenditure but, if we had cut then, the risk was that we would turn a recession into a depression. That was a cost that I was certainly not willing to contemplate.

We made an active choice to allow borrowing to rise to support the economy. As I said, that policy was supported by the then Conservative Opposition right up until 2008. It was not as though they were saying anything different immediately before that, but I fundamentally disagree with the analysis that the Chancellor made when he was shadow Chancellor. He said:

"Even a modest dose of Keynesian spending"

was

"a cruise missile aimed at the heart of a recovery."

He said that in 2008, when the banking system and the world economies were close to collapse. That seems to me to be complete nonsense. Of course we will have our arguments about how and at what rate we reduce our deficit, but I simply do not accept the argument that by implication he seems to be advancing—that somehow the previous Government should have been cutting spending just as we were going into a recession. I know of no other Government who were doing that.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): The construction sector is one of the most important barometers of the national economy, and I was privileged to serve as construction Minister. If that spending by Government had not taken place in the last two years, would we not have had a massive increase in the level of unemployment in the construction industry? That would have opened up the horrific prospect of having 3.5 million people unemployed—a level that we reached twice under the Conservative party.

Mr Darling: That is indeed right, and many people in the construction industry say that an already difficult situation would have become much worse if we had not done what we did in 2008-09. Not many Conservatives or Liberals—we must include the two together—now stand up and say, "Actually, in retrospect, we shouldn't have been supporting the construction industry." I rather get the impression that they are telling local industries in their constituencies something entirely different.

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Darling: I will give way, for the last time, to the hon. Lady, whom I last met in a BBC studio. I got the distinct impression that she did not like Scottish accents, so I cannot resist.

Margot James: Will the shadow Chancellor clarify his party's position on our proposed spending reductions? Before the general election, it was my distinct impression that the Labour party was planning public expenditure cuts of up to 25% across some Departments. In my constituency of Stourbridge, we were extremely concerned when the results of a freedom of information request on the NHS in the west midlands revealed plans for significant cuts to doctors, nurses and beds in our area. By anyone's definition, they must be front-line services.

Mr Darling: I agree with that. If the hon. Lady is worried about spending cuts, she is going to have an interesting time over the next few months. I look forward to the exchanges that she has at future Question Times.

As I draw to a close—

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Darling: No, I am not going to give way. I want to draw attention to one of the biggest problems that I see in the future. I know that Governments in countries right across the world have to get their borrowing down and reduce their deficits. However, I am particularly worried that, if we do not have some countervailing pressure to support growth and measures to get growth in our economy, we run the risk of having many years of it merely bumping along the bottom, sometimes growing and sometimes not. That will inevitably mean that we will have higher unemployment and that aspirations and sentiment will be affected.

I see that especially in the EU at the present time. The EUROSTAT figures published last Friday went almost unreported in this country, but what is worrying is that we see that Germany's growth in the first quarter of this year was 0.2%. We see France's at 0.1%. We see Greece not surprisingly, back in recession. We know that Spain has unemployment of more than 20%. I am glad that the Chancellor enjoys going to ECOFIN so much, and long may he enjoy that. I am fascinated that the Conservatives now find so much succour in Europe. All I can say to him is that I worry that rather too many finance Ministries, yes want to get their deficit down, but are not concentrating on the structural reforms that are necessary within the EU or on measures to achieve growth in the future. That is a real threat.

It worries me that the present Administration here in the United Kingdom also fall into that camp. It is interesting that in the past six months the Prime Minister has made only one speech on growth. It flickered into life in November just before the CBI conference last year. We do not hear what measures the Government intend to put in place to get the rebalancing of the economy that we want to see—measures to encourage private sector investment to come back. It is not coming back yet in sufficient volume to take the place of the public sector investment that the Chancellor wants to take away. We have to have a clear, strategic look at this to make sure that we can get growth in this country as well as in the EU, which after all is our major export market.

Mr William Cash (Stone) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Darling: I knew that if I mentioned Europe this would happen, as sure as night follows day.

Mr Cash: I do not want to disappoint the shadow Chancellor, but I am much more interested in the reasons why, when he was Chancellor—despite the tissue of self-justification that we have just heard—he was never prepared to refer to the true level of debt. He said that no Conservative raised it, but a number of us raised the true level of debt from 2008 onwards. Does he deny that the true level, according to the Office for National Statistics, is £3.1 trillion and not the amount that he has been describing over the past few months?

Mr Darling: When comparing the judgments that we make about what is necessary fiscally, I do not think that bringing on to the main balance sheet PFI, Network Rail and everything else particularly helps. However, if that is the course of action that he has managed to persuade the Chancellor to take, we will look with great interest at the Budget in a couple of weeks. I just do not think that it is a particularly accurate or informative way of looking at the accounts. I have said that before to the hon. Gentleman.

Robert Halfon: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Darling: For sheer endeavour, I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Robert Halfon: Before the last election, in an interview with the BBC, the right hon. Gentleman said that he believed that the cuts needed to be more savage than anything Mrs. Thatcher had done. Does he still hold to that view?

Mr Darling: I think that the word "savage" was used by the Deputy Prime Minister, of whom the hon. Gentleman now finds himself a great admirer. It was not a word that I used.

It is important in the task that confronts the whole country and the Government that we do not get ourselves into a situation of almost competitive austerity, in which Governments and countries become blind to the need to secure growth. There is a substantial risk, as I have said for a long time, that if the Government take action prematurely without considering its consequences as a whole, they will choke off the recovery. We have to get borrowing down, but we also have to get growth and recovery firmly established.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Darling: No, I will not. If we are to maintain jobs and ensure that borrowing does indeed come down, we need to have growth. Policies to achieve that are notable by their absence both in this country and the rest of continental Europe. It is no use Government Members citing what happened in Canada and Sweden. Yes, Canada reduced its structural deficit, but it did so at a time when its next door neighbour, which happened to be the biggest economy in the world, was growing strongly. So the Canadians benefited from a strong US economy. Equally, when Sweden was going through its retrenchment, Europe was starting to grow again. So the comparisons are not entirely appropriate.

We must realise that we need to put in place policies that ensure growth, get our borrowing down and, critically, equip this country to compete in the markets that are going to be opened for it and take advantage of the opportunities that will be here.

As I said during the election campaign and have said since, I believe that the Conservative party remains a risk to the recovery. I believe too that no matter how they dress it up, and how they seek to blame other people, even if they use the Liberal Democrats to cover their true intentions, what they are about is ensuring that they cut exactly the same expenditure as they have always wanted to, and they are using this as an excuse for doing so.

I believe that action does need to be taken, but crucially I believe that we need to ensure that we secure the recovery, and I hope that this Government have got the sense to see that now, before it is too late.

4.15 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): I enjoyed what sounded very much to me like a valedictory speech by the shadow Chancellor, going through all the decisions he took and explaining to the House why they were all right. Of course, I paid tribute to him in Treasury questions for the work he did during that period, which was clearly a very stressful one, but it was pretty extraordinary that he did not once accept that he had made a single mistake during those three years—that for all his good manners, he did not once apologise for the fact that he has bequeathed to the incoming Government the worst inheritance that any British Government have faced since the second world war.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Osborne: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I would like to make some progress first.

I guess that the shadow Chancellor is entitled not to apologise. I would only say this to the people who are standing for the leadership of the Labour party. As far as I can tell from their contest at the moment, they seem to think that they just did not speak enough about immigration and Europe in the campaign. Let me tell him: I have done that campaign and I did not get the medal. Perhaps the leadership contenders will at some point turn their attention to the very serious economic problems that this country faces, and tell us what they would do—what they would cut. The amendment that we are being asked to vote for tonight—tabled by the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor—states that we need

"a clear plan to bring down the deficit".

I agree with that; I would happily vote with the shadow Chancellor if he could perhaps tell me exactly what his clear plan to bring down the deficit is because, as far as I could tell, he opposed every single decision that we have taken to try to reduce the deficit.

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Lab): In *The Sunday Times*, the Prime Minister said that the cuts would be unprecedented in their severity and would change Britain. In *The Observer*, the Deputy Prime Minister said that the cuts would not at all be as serious as in the 1980s and '90s, and would be progressive in nature. Can the Chancellor tell us—which is it?

Mr Osborne: It was the shadow Chancellor who said—and we were reminded of this—that the cuts would be deeper than anything that Margaret Thatcher had undertaken, and that was the proposal from the Labour party when it was in government. It is unfortunately an economic fact that the budget deficit that this country faces is higher than at any point in our peacetime history, and whoever forms the Government of this country has to deal with that budget deficit and cannot ignore it. Indeed, there is a rather striking fact about the Labour Government's proposals, which they left in their Budget book—the shadow Chancellor has a copy in front of him. There are £50 billion of cuts built into the Labour Budget produced in March, and not one single pound of those cuts has yet been identified by the Labour party.

David Tredinnick: Many congratulations to my right hon. Friend on taking up his position. Was not one of the greatest weaknesses of the last Government, which the former Chancellor avoided mentioning, the fact that the number of people in non-taxpaying employment rocketed up and the number of those working in productive jobs that produce taxes drifted down?

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is right. There was a profound imbalance in the economy. We heard the shadow Chancellor saying, "What are the Government going to do about the unbalanced economy?" He seems to forget that he has been running the economy for the last three years. His Government have actually been in charge for the last 13 years. If there is an unbalanced economy, the people responsible are sitting on the Opposition Benches.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Osborne: I want to make progress, as I know that a lot of people want to make their maiden speeches; I was talked out of my maiden speech on the day I wanted to give it by over-long Front-Bench speeches. However, I want to give way to the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), because I want to know where his Friend the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown) is.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): This morning, we all read the Prime Minister's comments telling us that the cuts would affect every family in the land, and that no one would be exempt from the deep pain that those cuts would cause. Given that we are all in this together, can the Chancellor tell me which public services he and his family rely on, and which they will miss the most?

Mr Osborne: If that is the quality of the intervention by the Labour party as the country faces a very serious economic challenge, it confirms my view that, at the moment, it is not a serious player on the national political stage.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Osborne: I want to make a little progress because a lot of Members on both sides of the House want to make their maiden speeches. I will give way in a little while, perhaps, to Members who stood up.

Of course, the economic situation is the backdrop to the Queen's Speech. Our country is borrowing £156 billion a year. Our national debt has doubled and is set to double again. Those Opposition Members who think that this is some abstract problem should pay heed to the warning noises from the European continent. Countries that cannot live within their means face high interest rates, greater economic shocks and larger debt interest bills.

Let us consider this one fact, raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), which the previous Chancellor refused to publish. The only reason she can deploy that fact in the Chamber is

[Mr George Osborne]

that this Government published it. It is that, on the spending plans that we inherited from the previous Government, British taxpayers are going to pay £70 billion a year in debt interest by the end of this Parliament. That is higher than the education budget, it is higher than the defence budget, and it is far higher than the policing budget. That figure was kept secret from the British people, but we will publish it because people need to know where their money is going.

Mr Sheerman: A lot of brickbats will be thrown across the Chamber today. Surely all hon. Members, on both sides of the House, as people who care about the long-term future of our economy, agree that cuts are necessary, but is it sensible to cut widely and deeply before private investment has recovered?

Mr Osborne: At least the hon. Gentleman acknowledges—it is the first time, either in this debate or in Treasury questions, that we have heard this from those on the Opposition Benches—that cuts have to come. [HON. MEMBERS: "The shadow Chancellor said that."] I am sorry, but we have just listened to a speech by the shadow Chancellor in which he explained why we should not be trying to accelerate the reduction in our structural deficit, despite the advice of the Governor of the Bank of England, the European Commission, the OECD, the G20, virtually every international investor in the UK economy and virtually every business organisation that represents businesses in this economy. The hon. Gentleman acknowledges at least that there have to be cuts. The offer that I make to him—he may take this up; I am not sure that his colleagues will—is to engage in a proper conversation in the Chamber over the next three or four months about the decisions that will obviously have an important impact on the way the Government function over many years to come.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr Osborne: I will give way on one more occasion and then make some progress.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I want to extend to the right hon. Gentleman the courtesy of asking the question that I asked previously, because he did not do me or my constituents the courtesy of answering it. If his judgment is wrong and the cuts are either too soon or too deep so that there is not sufficient economic growth to deal with the cuts that will be imposed, will that not mean that my constituents will suffer all the pain of the cuts and have none of the gain of the growth?

Mr Osborne: If the hon. Gentleman is not prepared to trust my judgment, let me read out what the Governor of the Bank of England has said:

> "The most important thing now is for the new government to deal with the challenge of the fiscal deficit. It is the single most pressing problem facing the United Kingdom; it will take a full parliament to deal with, and it is very important that measures are taken straight away to demonstrate the seriousness and the credibility of the commitment to dealing with that deficit."

That is the judgment of the Bank of England Governor—appointed, by the way, by the shadow Chancellor—and the judgment that we have taken in order to protect the prosperity and the livelihoods of the people whom the hon. Gentleman represents, and the people represented by everyone else in the House of Commons.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Osborne: I will make a little progress, and will give way later on in my speech, if Members will allow.

Of course, the backdrop is that our economy has become deeply unbalanced. There is deep imbalance between different parts of the country: the wealth gap between regions widened over the past 13 years. There is imbalance between different sections of society: the gap between the rich and the poor widened in our country over the past 13 years. There is imbalance between different parts of our economy: the public sector boomed to take almost half our national income, while the private sector struggled with the deepest recession that we had seen since the war. This Queen's Speech, with its landmark reforms of welfare and education, begins the task of righting those wrongs. Later in this debate, we will hear from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, who has done more than anyone to highlight the trap of low aspiration, poor education and welfare dependency that our fellow citizens do not deserve and our country cannot afford any more.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): However dismissive the Chancellor may be, those of us who have been here since 1979 and who saw what the last Tory Government did saw only too clearly that the burden of the cuts that were made then fell on those least able to bear it, and the rich and prosperous did very well indeed. That is why we are so sensitive about the people whom we represent, and why we are so suspicious of what the Chancellor is saying, no matter what sort of qualifications he makes. I am afraid that it is our people—the people who sent us here to sit on the Labour Benches—who will suffer the worst of the burdens.

Mr Osborne: The similarity is this: in 1979, a new Conservative Government also had to deal with a terrible economic inheritance from the Labour party. If the hon. Gentleman is so affronted by what Margaret Thatcher did during her premiership, perhaps he could explain why, every time there is a new Labour Prime Minister, virtually the first person they invite round for tea is Margaret Thatcher.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Osborne: I will make a little progress.

The Queen's Speech contains five Treasury-sponsored Bills, and I should say something about each of them. There is the national insurance contributions Bill to stop the jobs tax that Labour would have imposed. Like every post-war Labour Government, the previous Government left office with unemployment rising, and their answer was to increase the cost of employing low-paid people. I have not yet heard from the shadow Chancellor, or anyone else, whether that is still the official Opposition's policy. Our reforms to national insurance will not just stop the most damaging part of the jobs tax but will, by raising employer thresholds, reduce the cost of employing people on lower incomes. The Budget will also contain further measures to stimulate private sector employment and to proclaim to the world that Britain is open for business.

There is the financial services regulation Bill to fix the previous Government's system of banking regulation. To respond to the question asked by the shadow Chancellor, next week I will set out in more detail the content of that Bill and how we propose to take the matter forward. I find it somewhat baffling to be told by him that he is unsure who is in charge of banking regulation at the moment. That was the question posed by the Treasury Committee in the last Parliament—a question about the system of regulation that his predecessor as Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, created in 1997. That system meant that no one was in charge of looking at the growing levels of debt and the systemic risks building up in our banking system.

I believe that it is still the Opposition's policy to oppose our decision to introduce a bank levy; they claim that they want every country in the world to have agreed to such a levy before Britain goes ahead with it. Our decision is to proceed with it, because the banks should pay some contribution to clearing up the mess that they helped to create.

We are working urgently on a problem that the shadow Chancellor correctly raised, but to which, of course, he found little solution when he was Chancellor: the problem of getting credit to small and medium-sized businesses that still face a credit crunch out there in the country.

I welcome the shadow Chancellor's support for the terrorist asset freezing Bill, which, of course, has bipartisan support. Then there is the Bill that should have been introduced by the previous Government years ago—the Equitable Life payments scheme Bill to help those who lost everything and were given nothing by the Labour Government.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I warmly welcome the fact that the Chancellor has introduced that Bill, which is an important piece of legislation, and I hope that compensation arrives for those who lost an awful lot of money. However, may I urge him to learn one thing from the miners compensation scheme, which ended up putting an awful lot of money into lawyers' pockets—unscrupulous lawyers in many cases? Will he make sure that it is a simple, transparent scheme that does not require us to pour taxpayers' money into lawyers' pockets?

Mr Osborne: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. What happened with the miners compensation scheme was a tragedy, and we will certainly seek to learn the lessons of what went wrong. He is more than welcome to correspond with us—I am going to volunteer, if he wants, a meeting with one of my colleagues to discuss the issue—because we are determined to introduce the legislation and help those people who lost everything. We hope that that will command support on both sides of the House.

Finally, we will introduce a Bill to give the independent Office for Budget Responsibility statutory authority and to bring transparency and honesty to our nation's finances. I cannot work out whether the shadow Chancellor now supports that proposal, which he opposed in government, but it is a revolutionary step in budget making, removing forever the historic power that Chancellors have had to make the official forecasts. It is based, however, on a very simple idea—perhaps completely alien to the thinking of the previous Government—that in future, we fit the Budget to fit the figures, instead of fixing the figures to fit the Budget.

With the help of Sir Alan Budd, we have established the Office for Budget Responsibility on a non-statutory basis. Today I am publishing in a written ministerial statement the terms of reference that I have agreed with Sir Alan. With his consent, I can confirm in the House for the first time that the office will produce its independent assessment of the growth forecast and other forecasts next week, on Monday 14 June. The Budget will be presented just over a week later, well within 50 days of the election, as we promised.

Geraint Davies: On the figures, the Chancellor will remember that in February last year the unemployment rate was 2.5 million. Independent forecasters and economists were predicting that unemployment would now be between 3.5 million and 4 million. Does he accept that we do not have those levels of unemployment because of the fiscal stimulus from the previous Government? Furthermore, he will know that the cost of an extra 1 million unemployed is £6 billion, which would wipe out the savings that have just been announced. Will he therefore be extremely careful not to make cuts that will undermine the economic capacity for growth in future?

Mr Osborne: Unemployment is rising. We have the highest youth unemployment in Europe. We have the highest proportion of children growing up in workless households of any country on the European continent—that is not a record of which I would be particularly proud if I were a Labour MP. We are going to introduce a comprehensive work programme, and reform welfare to create genuine incentives to make work pay. One of the issues that came up time and again in the general election—for me at least, and perhaps for other Members—was the frustration felt by working people on low incomes who go out to work every single day and find that their next-door neighbour has been sitting on out-of-work benefits for years. That is going to be part of the reform that we introduce in our welfare Bill.

I was discussing the Budget, which needs to address the immediate debt situation that the country faces. However, it will also begin the long-term task of moving an economy based on debt—too much consumer debt, too much banking debt, too much Government debt—to an economy in which we save, invest and export in future. If anyone needs to be reminded why the immediate debt situation we have inherited is so serious, I suggest that they read the report on the UK produced by one of the world's three credit-rating agencies today, which warns of

"a rise in public debt... faster than any other AAA rated sovereign"

country, and points to

"the largest cyclically-adjusted budget deficit in Europe".

The rating agency says that the previous Government's plans to reduce the deficit are "distinctly weak" and lack "credibility". It says that we are the only European economy set to run a budget deficit above 3% in five years' time. That is all at a time when, as it points out, the fiscal crisis in Greece and other eurozone countries has caused a major shift in investors' attitude to sovereign risk.

Mr Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. He spoke earlier about judgment. Is he not concerned about the outbreak of competitive austerity across Europe? Does he not think that that may well lead to European economies all bumping along the bottom because we cannot get international trade up and running again to sort out the difficulties of our economy?

Mr Osborne: But the reason why European economies, particularly those in southern Europe and in the eurozone, are having to take the measures that they are taking is that there are concerns about sovereign credit worthiness. Of course they must deal with their situation, but, in the month that I have done the job, I am very aware when I sit down at ECOFIN or at the G20 that I represent the country with the largest budget deficit at either of those gatherings. That is the situation that we inherited—*[Interruption.]* For two years we had to listen to all the lectures about how the European Union, the G20 and the OECD disagreed with what we are saying. Now they agree with what we are saying. The G20 communiqué signed in South Korea stated:

"Those countries with serious fiscal challenges need to accelerate the pace of consolidation".

That is the situation bequeathed by the previous Government to Britain.

Mr Ivan Lewis: I thank the Chancellor for giving way. I have some simple questions. Were we right to save Northern Rock? Were we right to recapitalise the banks? Were we right to go for fiscal stimulus? Can the Chancellor be frank with the House about the decisions that my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor made?

Mr Osborne: Talk about refighting the last war. We spent the entire general election talking about those decisions. The answer is that the British people agreed with us and not with the shadow Chancellor.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Osborne: Let me make some progress.

It is striking that the Opposition do not have a single positive idea to propose about how we sort out our nation's economic problems. They are still talking about decisions taken a year previously or in 2008. I am happy to debate them; I debated them on television with the shadow Chancellor during the general election; I debated them in the House on many occasions, but what I am now interested in is sorting out the country's economic problems and getting Britain working again.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Osborne: I have given way a great deal, and there are Members on both sides of the House who want to make their maiden speeches.

Let me say this to Labour Members: their response in this debate and in Treasury questions is pretty striking. The credibility of our country is put at risk by their borrowing decisions, and they do nothing. Higher debts threaten higher interest rates, and they do nothing. Every single measure that we have taken they oppose. They sign up to every pressure group complaint. They agree with every trade union protest in order to gobble up votes in their leadership contest. They now find themselves in the ridiculous position whereby the reductions in spending for this year are applauded by the G20 but opposed by the shadow Chancellor who used to attend it, and our clear commitment to accelerate the reduction in the deficit is supported by the US Treasury Secretary but opposed by the shadow Chief Secretary. Let them lurch off leftwards into the comfort zone of opposition, while the rest of us work together in the national interest to fix the problems that they left behind. Let me explain how we propose to do that.

Alongside other measures to support the recovery, the Budget on 22 June will set out the overall mandate for bringing the deficit under control, against which the Office for Budget Responsibility will judge the Government's fiscal policy in future. It will set the overall envelope for spending, but it will not allocate spending between Departments. That is what the spending review will do this autumn.

Today I am placing in the Library of both Houses the document that explains how the review will work. The shadow Chancellor complained that he received the document only as he was coming into the Chamber. That was about an hour before I used to receive any document from him in the debates in this place.

Given the scale of the spending reductions required, the review needs to be quite different from any that this country has seen in recent years. For the past 13 years, spending reviews have not exactly been collegiate affairs—more of a one-way process. The Treasury told Departments what they were getting and precisely what they would do with the money—no room for innovation, no acknowledgement that some of the best ideas for doing things differently might come from the front line and not from the centre. The result of this top-down, centre-knows-best approach was falling public sector productivity and that large budget deficit—less for more. We cannot afford to continue in that direction.

As has been said in the Chamber today, we need to look at Canada and its experiences in the 1990s, when it too faced a massive budget deficit. It brought together the best people from inside and outside government to carry out a fundamental reassessment of the role of the state. They asked probing questions about every part of Government spending. They engaged the public in the choices that had to be made, and they took the whole country with them. That is what we will seek to do. We are committed to carrying out Britain's unavoidable deficit reduction plan in a way that strengthens and unites the country.

The spending review will be guided by the principles of freedom, fairness and responsibility. It will deliver on the Government's commitment that health spending will increase in real terms in each year of this Parliament, and we will honour the promise that we as a British people made to the developing world on overseas aid. It will limit as far as possible the impact of reductions in spending on the most vulnerable in society and on those regions heavily dependent on the public sector. It will protect as far as is possible the spending that generates high economic returns so that we build the economy of the future while cleaning up the mess of the past.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): The Chancellor mentions those areas heavily dependent on the public sector and the impact on different regions of the United Kingdom. I welcome that commitment, but in order for it to be real, as opposed to simply rhetoric—he talks about the Finance Ministers quadrilateral meetings discussing the spending review—will there be a robust resolution mechanism, so that it is not just the Treasury that decides what happens with regard to the devolved Administrations, which, after all, have their own independent administrations, budgets and economic settlements?

Mr Osborne: The devolved Administrations have to be part of the wider spending review. With the best will in the world, we cannot let the three devolved

Administrations simply determine what they will spend, particularly when most of them do not have significant tax-raising powers, but I give the hon. Gentleman the commitment that we will engage in an open and frank way and that we will listen to the concerns from Northern Ireland. I am well aware that one of the big challenges in Northern Ireland is how we can stimulate the private sector in Ulster, and we want to work with him on that. As I am sure he knows, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has some ideas in that area. We will engage not just with the Administration in Northern Ireland but with the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly and its Administration. For us, this is genuinely about trying to bind as many people as possible into a collective discussion which I hope other Opposition parties will be part of, even if the main Opposition party does not want to be.

Let me explain to the House how the review will work. First, we will build on the in-year savings that we have already made in order to drive for efficiency and value for money. We are creating a new efficiency and reform group at the heart of Government, which brings together a variety of bodies that are separate across Departments in order to try to bring to one place expertise on renegotiating contracts, maximising collective buying power and the like. We will ask for administrative spending in central Whitehall and quangos to be reduced by at least a third. Each Secretary of State will appoint a Minister with specific responsibilities in their Department over the next three months for driving that value-for-money agenda across their Department, and we will place a new obligation on public servants to manage taxpayers' money more wisely by strengthening the role of the departmental finance director.

Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): I strongly support the Chancellor in his drive to have more transparent budgeting, in particular the obligation on Departments to announce every item of expenditure over £25,000. Will he be legislating to make that a statutory obligation? Will he explain the slight incongruity between the obligation on local government to publish items of expenditure over £500 and civil servants getting away with a little bit more at £25,000? Does he think that merits him reducing that bar?

Mr Osborne: We chose £25,000 because, quite frankly, the US model suggested that that was an appropriate sum. I am very willing to consider moving to a lower level of disclosure in central Government, once we get the system up and running and working, but I did not want to make the sum so small that it stopped the thing working in the first place. Local councils have much smaller budgets, of course, relative to central Government, and that is why we chose a lower threshold. However, the £25,000 threshold is perhaps just the first step. The big IT challenge is to make the system work, but in the United States they have done so, and they call it "Googling your tax dollars". Barack Obama, when he was a senator, helped to sponsor the Bill that introduced it, and we are absolutely committed to introducing such a measure here in the United Kingdom.

Secondly, the spending review will challenge Departments, local government and others to consider fundamental changes to the way they provide public services. As part of that process, every part of government and every spending programme will have to answer a series of probing questions. Is the activity essential to meet Government priorities? Do the Government need to fund that activity? Does the activity provide substantial economic value? Can the activity be targeted on those most in need? How can the activity be provided at a lower cost? How can the activity be provided more effectively? Can the activity be provided by a non-state provider or by citizens, wholly or in partnership? Can non-state providers be paid to carry out the activity according to the results that they achieve? And can local bodies, as opposed to central Government, provide the activity? The answers to those questions will inform a fundamental reassessment of the way in which government works.

Dr John Pugh (Southport) (LD): Where will the Public Accounts Committee and, indeed, other Select Committees play a part in the process? How will they play their part?

Mr Osborne: The Public Accounts Committee will, I hope, be very involved in the process, and I want to involve the expertise not only of its current membership, but of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr Leigh), who chaired the Committee with such distinction during the previous Parliament. I served on the Public Accounts Committee when I first entered the House, and it is perhaps our most effective parliamentary tool for dealing with some of the big issues of public expenditure and value for money. One has only to read its reports on, for example, the big Ministry of Defence procurement contracts over recent years to realise that it has identified a very serious problem and, with the National Audit Office, brings a considerable expertise to solving those problems.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Osborne: I shall give way, but then I must bring my speech to a close.

Chris Leslie: At Treasury questions some time ago, I was concerned about items of expenditure that might have met the tests that the Chancellor has set out in the spending review. On some of those tests, will the Chancellor now go where the Chief Secretary to the Treasury could not and say whether he has any plans to means-test child benefit? Many people are quite worried about that.

Mr Osborne: I welcome the hon. Gentleman back to the House, but I shall not be drawn down the path whereby new, eager and young—or no longer so young—Members jump up with every cherished item of Government expenditure and pose such questions. The hon. Gentleman will have to wait for the spending review and Budget for a discussion of the whole Government programme, but he should not assume anything from that answer.

The next thing that we will do is bring together, from within the Government and outside, the best people in their fields. We want the best civil servants helping us in that collective effort, not defending their Whitehall Departments. We want the inspirational head teachers, the chief inspectors in the police service and the nurses

[Mr George Osborne]

with new ideas to have their opportunity to put their ideas to us. The remit will be to innovate, to challenge entrenched ways of doing things and to identify the best ideas from throughout the world; and, in order to ensure that the resulting reform programme is achieved, we will establish robust mechanisms to ensure accountability to the public.

Thirdly, the spending review will cover the large, cross-cutting areas of Government spending. We will set out our plans to reform the welfare system and restrain the cost of public sector pay and pensions, and for capital spending we will undertake a fundamental review of spending plans to identify the areas of spending that will achieve the greatest economic returns. Opposition Members should know that we have inherited a capital budget that is set to halve.

Mr Douglas Carswell (Clacton) (Con): My right hon. Friend has been quoted talking about having a Star Chamber to oversee public spending. For years, have we not had an elite clique of Treasury officials doing precisely that? Somehow, no Executive quite manage to rein in the executive as planned. Why not in addition try a radical solution and give the newly liberated Select Committees powers to curb departmental spending? As well as fixing our finances, that might give Parliament some purpose.

Mr Osborne: I am probably going to regret this, but I am quite attracted to the idea that my hon. Friend has proposed, not just in the Chamber today but to me privately; I think he has also written about it. The key thing that he proposes is that Select Committees should be able to recommend reductions, rather than increases, in Government Department budgets. I would certainly welcome that if we were ever to proceed in that direction.

I honestly mean it when I say to my hon. Friend that I am attracted to his idea. I will come back to him and see whether we can take it forward. Obviously, it would be the collective decision of the Government, rather than mine alone. My hon. Friend is right to say that we are trying to get away from it simply being the Treasury that conducts the spending review, imposing its decisions on everyone else.

I believe that when Tony Blair was Prime Minister, he and the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath would simply agree a total. Every Secretary of State would then receive the number in an envelope, before it was announced to the press about 20 minutes later. We are going to have a more collegiate approach and we are genuinely seeking to engage as many people as possible—the brightest civil servants across all the Government Departments and the best people from the devolved Administrations, pressure groups, independent think-tanks and front-line public services. There will be a Cabinet committee to chair and oversee the process and its membership will be restricted to those Cabinet Ministers with very small budgets of their own. Other Cabinet Ministers will be eligible to be members of the committee once they have settled their departmental allocations. That will create an incentive structure within the Cabinet.

Finally, over the summer we are going to conduct a wide public engagement exercise so that the whole country has a chance to get involved. We have already begun to implement the most radical transparency agenda that the country has ever seen. The hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Mr Watson) and I were talking earlier about the £25,000 disclosure limit for central Government expenditure. The previous Chancellor refused my freedom of information request to publish the Treasury's combined online information system, or COINS, database of public spending. But the current Chancellor of the Exchequer has accepted that request and the raw data in the COINS database are now available online.

Mr Bailey *rose—*

Mr Osborne: I will give way on this point, if the hon. Gentleman likes, but just let me say this. We have published the database as quickly as we have been able to. By August, we will be able to publish a more user-friendly version of the data; the current version is quite difficult to operate. We need a couple of months to get the computer software to enable people to search the database.

Mr Bailey: In his list of those who would be consulted on the budget cuts, the Chancellor omitted to mention manufacturing industry. Will he undertake to talk to representatives of manufacturing industry about his proposals on investment allowances, as portrayed in the run-up to the general election?

Mr Osborne: My team and I are in regular discussions with manufacturing industry, representatives of which were vocal supporters of our proposals during the general election to avoid the jobs tax.

Let me conclude by saying that all parts of government and society—and all parts of this Parliament, if they want to take the opportunity—will have a chance to make their voices heard. This is the great national challenge of our generation. After years of waste, debt and irresponsibility, we have to get Britain to live within its means. It is time to rethink how the Government spend our money. We did not choose the terrible economic situation that we inherited; the Labour party chose that for us. But we can work to put it right—deal with our debts, set our country on a brighter economic course and show that we are all in this together. I commend the Gracious Speech to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I must at this point remind the House that Mr Speaker has placed a seven-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches, which operates from now on. Obviously, anyone who can speak within that limit and spare us an extra minute will earn the gratitude of nervous hon. Members who are waiting to make their maiden speeches.

4.54 pm

Mr David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): I shall endeavour to adhere to what you have requested, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I am standing to defend the record of my Government, not to traduce it. I am proud of those 13 years—proud of the new schools, the jobs that did not previously exist, the environment that has been improved, the houses that have been completely refurbished, and the complete transformation of Sheffield, Brightside and

Hillsborough. I say that because I am little worried about people who are now looking over their shoulder, some of whom are competing for the leadership of my party, and who are in a 1930s denial situation whereby they have to pretend that they had nothing to do with the decisions that were taken. I did, and I am proud of the decisions that we made, some of which were about investing in communities that had been neglected for years.

When I hear Conservative Members saying, as has the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the media and this afternoon in this House, that we are all in this together, it makes me want to be sick, because those Members across the aisle know, and we know, that we are not all in this together. It will be the people we on the Labour Benches represent, and some Liberal Democrats represent, who face the greatest difficulty, because they cannot buy their way out of deteriorating public services, and they do not have the alternatives that those with resources, including capital assets, have.

That is why the decision to do away with the child trust fund is one of the most heinous things in this £6 billion package of cuts. It takes away the future assets of young people who would be able to stand on their own feet, and it reduces the propensity to save, which the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has extolled over the past fortnight. He is right to do so. In the next breath, however, his Government are cutting at a time when the subsidy from the public purse for tax relief on individual savings accounts is twice as much as the amount that it would cost to maintain the child trust fund, which has a 100% take-up, involving 5 million children, compared with a 30% take-up for ISAs among the adult population.

In the end, we have to ask ourselves three questions. First, who got us into this mess? Was it politicians and politics, or was it the international financiers and bankers, and international capital, that created the situation that the Chancellor of the Exchequer wants to place on the shoulders of the outgoing Government? Of course, it was not the Labour Government's doing but a result of the problems that we have had to deal with over the past three years in terms of saving ourselves from the banks and avoiding the collapse of our economy.

That brings me to my second point. If we should be doing more, more quickly—cutting faster and more deeply—is it because we need to mirror what is taking place in the rest of Europe and the world, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer has enunciated? If that is true, how is it that all these other countries that we should be emulating came to be in the mire in the first place? I presume that it is the Labour Government in Britain who have brought Spain, Italy, Greece and the Republic of Ireland to their knees. That is why public sector workers are having their pay cut; that is why the Chancellor in Germany is cutting £65 billion; and that is why, across the world, we are seeing this retrenchment: it is all down to my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown) and my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor. Everybody in this country who has a brain knows that that is nonsense.

Thirdly, if we are not careful, we will exacerbate an existing problem. Of course we know that there are going to be public expenditure reductions. We do not need to be told that—we had agreed it before the general election—but we wanted growth, an increased tax yield and a reduction in outgoings on benefits and unemployment to help us to bridge that gap. If we are not careful, then Sir Alan Budd, with the difficult job that he has been given in the Office for Budget Responsibility, will predict lower growth to the point where the Chancellor then tells us that because lower growth is projected, we will need to cut services and investment still further to take account of that. If we do that, we reduce the likelihood of growth and of tax yield and redemption without having to cut the essential services of the people we represent. Fourthly, we need to think imaginatively about how we can combine services nationally and locally, so that we do not have to make draconian cuts. We can genuinely reduce the cost of providing the same services.

Under the current shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the Cabinet Office produced an excellent document that I recommend to the new Government. That document showed what is being done around the world and I wish we had given it greater publicity and made more of it at the time. We can use what is now called the Total Place initiative and engage local people. However, we cannot do that if massive draconian decisions to cut centrally are made and local government and local people are blamed for the cuts being made and the pain being inflicted. I shall give one example: aggregate external funding for local government. In the Prime Minister's Oxfordshire constituency, there is 1.7% of unrestricted expenditure, but that figure is 18.5% in my city. We know perfectly well that the cuts will fall on those who are least able to bear them, and that is why we should oppose them.

5.1 pm

Lorely Burt (Solihull) (LD): It is a strange feeling to be standing here today—not only am I on this side of the Chamber, but I am speaking on Government proposals that incorporate the vast majority of policies that we, the Liberal Democrat business, innovation and skills team, produced as part of our general election manifesto. I know that many of those policies were in the Conservative manifesto as well, but it would be churlish to quibble about who thought of them first.

Both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats see themselves as being the party of business, so it is unsurprising that many of our policies chime together. I want to speak briefly about my hopes for the implementation of some of those policies, but first I want to mention two policies that did not make it into the agreement. Access to capital has been a great problem for business for some time, and with the banks taking a more cautious—ultra-cautious some might say—approach to lending, we thought up a couple of creative ideas to use equity as opposed to capital as a mechanism to fund growth. For start-ups, we devised a policy of local enterprise funds, which would be a tax-efficient way for local companies or individuals to plough capital back into their area in return for equity. They could also have offered added value by offering advice if appropriate.

In order for established companies to fund growth, we looked at the idea of having regional stock exchanges, which would be based on the same principles as national ones, but would be localised and geared up for smaller companies. They could use the regional stock exchanges to get cash for equity without the long-winded and exacting due diligence that would otherwise preclude

[Lorely Burt]

them from entering the big boys' national stock exchange league. I hope that the new coalition will still consider those ideas at some point.

There are great things in the agreement that, if properly implemented, will make a huge difference to the ability of business to do what it wants and needs to do, which is get on with the job. On regulation, I am greatly looking forward to seeing a system of one-in one-out, sunset clauses and an enforcement regime that seeks to help business meet regulatory requirements in a speedy and efficient way. I am glad to see that the Government will create a Star Chamber to bring those policies into being. Having been a member of the Select Committee on Regulatory Reform for three years, I know how easy it is for civil servants to focus on the smaller issues, and for the regulators and the regulated to cosy up in mutual congratulation. The star chamber must work on the plank, not the mote, in the regulatory eye.

Other welcome policies are simple but very important to those they affect, such as IR35, which has been an issue for micro-businesses for a long time. We will not let business avoid tax, but we will make the system simpler and more straightforward, and take away the anxiety of someone not knowing whether they are covered by the rules or not. We welcome the automatic rate relief for small businesses, as it will bring relief to the very businesses that will benefit most: those least conversant with the system.

One coalition Government policy—our plan for local enterprise partnerships—has been met with dismay by the regional development agencies, but RDAs that have done a good job can continue to work for enterprise in their regions. However, the policy will mean that we will have a form of organisation that is more accountable to the region that it serves and more flexible to its needs. Obviously, there are cuts in the proposals, but business knows what it means to cope with changing, more difficult circumstances and has been dealing with those since the beginning of the recession. RDAs must now deliver service to business more efficiently than ever before.

Mr Love: Is this not simply another fudge by the coalition? The Liberal Democrats wanted to keep RDAs and the Conservatives wanted to get rid of them, and what we have got is a hotch-potch.

Lorely Burt: The hon. Gentleman is entirely mistaken. In fact, the policies of the two parties were almost identical. They were so similar, I wondered whether someone had been talking to someone else. We are at one on that.

Procurement is a big issue affecting the ability of businesses to survive and grow, and it was great to hear in the debate on the Humble Address the aspiration to contract 25% of Government procurement to small business. That will take some enforcing, and we must first get the bodies that spend our taxpayers' money to take account of the size of companies from which they procure. While they are doing that, would it not be great to get them to have a look at whether the people from whom they are procuring look like the people they supply? Are we utilising the rich diversity of supply that we could utilise, including businesses owned by women and ethnic minorities?

I come from the west midlands, which is possibly the UK region that has been hardest hit by the recession. However, we in the west midlands do something special, and we do it well: we make things. We are very clever at making highly technical, high value-added products, many of which we export to the world. Although our car industry has suffered badly, not only do we produce two of the most iconic marques in the world—Jaguar and Land Rover—but they are thriving, both in the export and home markets.

I shall conclude on this point: for far too long, financial services—I understand that they are important—have held the Government in thrall. If I have anything to do with it, that will no longer happen. Despite the fact that manufacturing has been allowed to wither, the UK is still the sixth largest manufacturing country in the world. The time has come to talk manufacturing up, create a climate in which it can thrive, allow it access to finance, which is the lifeblood of business, and create a fair regulatory playing field. Then, we should get off the pitch, and let team Great Britain compete on the world stage.

5.8 pm

Frank Dobson (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): At the recent general election, the Tories gleefully asserted that under the Labour Government, inequality had increased. That was true, and it was a major embarrassment to Labour candidates and supporters, but in fact, the gap widened despite the Government's introduction of the national minimum wage and tax credits, and their targeting of health, education and pre-school resources on the most deprived areas and families. The gap widened not because the Labour Government ignored the plight of the worst-off, but because the best-off kept paying themselves more and more.

The Prime Minister has said that his Government's proposals will change our way of life, but they are very unlikely to reduce inequality. His Tory-Lib Dem Government are positively drooling at the prospect of slashing public services, when we all know that the living standards of the poorest in society are, as they always will be, the most dependent on public funds and public services. Cutting pay and pensions and slashing public services will not narrow the inequality gap, but widen it.

As we all know, increasing the share of national wealth going to the worst-off is not of itself sufficient to narrow the inequality gap. We must at the same time reduce the share going to the wealthy. The principal target for such a reduction must be the bloated finance sector, which has been taking an ever greater share of the nation's wealth while devoting a great deal of talented effort on tax avoidance to benefit the people who work in it. Indeed, in the recent banking crisis, far from being a wealth creator, the financial sector proved to be a wealth destroyer. Its record was deplorable. Today, KPMG has given us the benefit of its wisdom on how to improve efficiency in the public sector. I do not know why we give any credence to KPMG, however; after all, it was the auditor of HBOS and Bradford & Bingley and it did not spot that anything was going wrong when those outfits were going bust, even though that was its primary task.

Banks are supposed to act as a conduit between savers and borrowers, providing capital for individuals and firms who want to produce useful goods and services

for the rest of us. Over the years, that function has increasingly taken a back seat to speculation that is referred to, in deferential terms, as "the market". These markets, both national and international, often have nothing to do with supply and demand, however. Fluctuations in the price of oil are a good example. In July 2008, the price of Brent crude reached $146 a barrel; by December that year, just five months later, the price had fallen to $36 a barrel, almost exactly a quarter of its top price. That was not the product of changes in supply and demand; it was the product of speculation.

The price of rice shot up from about $280 a tonne to $1,015 a tonne in April 2008. Apologists for "the market" denied that that was the product of speculation. They said it was because the Chinese were eating more rice. If so, the Chinese must have started eating something else since then, because the price of rice has halved to $500 a tonne today. Such speculation always hurts the worst-off and lines the pockets of the people who are already rich. The G20 should be taking concerted action to tackle such speculation, because while it does not do so everybody else in the world will be vulnerable.

Of course, the main sources of wealth for the finance industry are the costs it imposes on the rest of us for its services—its handling charges and transaction costs, or what would be referred to in any decent above-board casino as the "croupier's rake-off". All large financial transactions involve a host of advisers, consultants, lawyers, fund managers and the like, all pocketing a percentage. Let us consider the recent abortive effort by the Prudential to buy part of AIG at an original estimated value of £25 billion. If the scheme had gone through, the transaction costs had been expected to total about £1 billion, or about 4% of the value. Although the proposal has fallen through, it has still cost the Pru approaching £500 million, including a lot of fees for expensive City advice—presumably bad advice.

The current proposal to sell off the channel tunnel rail link and St Pancras station illustrates how the finance industry failed in its self-proclaimed task of providing private capital yet is now creaming off some of the value. No City institutions were prepared to invest in the channel tunnel link, so the taxpayer had to step in and take the risk. Now that it is operating successfully however, the private sector is sniffing a profit, and it is to be sold off. Citigroup and UBS are involved. They did not design the link, transform St Pancras or manage the building project, and they certainly did not take any of the risk, but they are now advising on the sale and will pocket substantial fees for that advice. One can only hope, on behalf of taxpayers whose assets are being sold off, that those two firms will do a better job than they did in the banking crash, when Citigroup lost $55 billion and UBS lost $44 billion. We need to ensure that the drain of finance and of talented graduates into the City is stopped, so that the money can be devoted, and those people can devote their lives, to doing something a lot more useful and promoting British industry. That is what we all want to see.

5.15 pm

Mr James Clappison (Hertsmere) (Con): This is my first opportunity to make a contribution in this Parliament, and it is a pleasure, as always, to follow the right hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson), although I will not go down the same route as him. I wish to say a little about the work and pensions side of this debate, but before I do so may I deal with a subject that is somewhat associated with it: the proposal in the Gracious Speech for a limit on economic migration from outside the European Union? I warmly welcome that sensible proposal. Strangely, it was part of the Opposition amendment to yesterday's motion, although it was not mentioned in the speech of any Opposition Member, including the Front Benchers. One can only speculate as to the internal problems in the Opposition on that matter.

Although I welcome the proposal, I note that the coalition agreement says that it is to be subject to consultation on the "mechanism" by which the limit is achieved. I urge my hon. colleagues to bear in mind that an important consultation has just taken place; call me old-fashioned, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I think that the most important consultation takes place when the voter goes into the voting booth and puts his or her cross on the ballot paper. Therefore, I respectfully invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to take account of the considerable concern expressed about immigration during the campaign.

It is right to engage in some consultation about implementation and, doubtless, the Government will have a queue of employers come before them. When I served on the Select Committee on Home Affairs we examined this very question. We heard from restaurant owners, farmers and people involved in the IT industry, and they seemed to be under the impression that the resident working population of this country was incapable of working on a farm, in a restaurant or in the IT industry. I suggest to my hon. Friends that when they hear such submissions from employers they gently point those employers towards the unemployment statistics, particularly those relating to young people in this country.

Those statistics show one of the most baleful inheritances from the previous Government. Given the speeches that we have heard today, Labour Members seem totally oblivious of the plight that they have left so many young people facing. We have heard a lot about child trust funds, but we have not heard so much about the lack of opportunities for young people who are about to enter their working lives and find themselves facing the prospect of the dole queue. After 13 years of a Labour Government, almost 1 million young people are out of work and there is a structural problem of youth unemployment. I say that because the level of youth unemployment was rising long before the recession took hold. All that has occurred under a Government who had promised at their outset to reduce unemployment among young people by 250,000.

A further 1.5 million older workers are out of work, and standing behind them, although not of course recorded in the formal unemployment statistics, are the many millions of people of working age who languish on out-of-work benefits. We cannot expect some of them to work because of the nature of their condition, but many of them are capable of work and indeed want to work but under the current system they are not receiving the help that they need, be it medical help, encouragement or training, to enable them to work.

In many cases—this is an important part of the problem—such people also lack the incentives to work. We talk a lot about providing incentives for better-off people to work—I am all in favour of that, because I support enterprise and hard work, seeing it as the way

[Mr James Clappison]

forward, unlike some Labour Members, whose view is to rely on the state for everything. However, we must consider also providing incentives for poorer people on benefits to get into and remain in work. All too often, the poorer person on out-of-work benefits, who may not have many skills and may have a patchy previous employment record, can find only low-paid employment. Under the current system, a large part of their money—their housing benefit and council tax benefit—is withdrawn from them the moment they start work. The moment a poor person who has been on out-of-work benefits gets into work they, in effect, face a marginal tax rate of 80% or 90%. They then find that out of the meagre proceeds left for them they have to pay the normal costs involved in getting to work, being prepared for work, dressing for work and so on. In addition, they have the fear of not being able to rely on the benefits system in the future for housing and all their other needs.

Mrs Anne McGuire (Stirling) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman recognise that the previous Government implemented a proposal that meant that people could move into work from receiving benefits and still retain for two years their right to move back to receiving benefits? He is misrepresenting the current situation.

Mr Clappison: I am not misrepresenting it in any way. Labour Members were prepared to have a system in which 80% or 90% of income was withdrawn from people who went into work, through the withdrawal of council tax and housing benefit, and not very much has been done about that. I recognise that some Labour Members were aware of the problem, including the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) and some who have now left the House such as James Purnell and John Hutton. They were aware of the problem, but I suspect that they were blocked when they wanted to do something about it. The result is that 2 million people now say that they want to work but are on out-of-work benefits and are not included in the formal unemployment statistics, which amount to 2.5 million.

Labour Members have presided over a welfare system that is incredibly effective at trapping people on benefits once they get on to them, and it is a challenge for my hon. and right hon. Friends to devise a better system that will get people off welfare and into work. They are having to undertake radical action on this front at a very unpropitious time, when we are facing, as we all know, the appalling deficit that has been inherited. I urge them to turn their hands to this task, because it is too important to fail or to put in the drawer marked "too difficult to undertake". It has to be undertaken, particularly for the sake of the younger people who are languishing on out-of-work benefits and are formally recorded as unemployed. This is a challenge for the future for my right hon. and hon. Friends; it is a challenge that has been neglected by the Labour party and so left for us to take up. It will contribute to solving the problem of the deficit, but we have to take the bold action that has not been taken for far too long—for 13 years of wasted opportunities, which have led to wasted lives and people who have been left, after a Labour Government, languishing on unemployment and out-of-work benefits.

5.22 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I am hugely proud to be giving my maiden speech this afternoon as the new Member for Stretford and Urmston. I think that mine is the first maiden speech today. My constituency is, of course, very special. I am deeply privileged to represent it and I hope to serve my constituents well.

My first act in Parliament must be to pay tribute to my predecessors, starting with the right hon. Beverley Hughes. Hon. Members will be aware of Bev's tremendous contribution to public life as a Minister, and I especially want to acknowledge her contribution as children's Minister and her achievement in bringing forward the implementation of the Sure Start programme. Bev was immensely respected locally as a first-rate constituency MP, and I think that mattered more to her than anything she achieved as a Minister, despite her many successes in that role. I am delighted, as I know all hon. Members will be, that she is to remain in Parliament as a Member of the House of Lords.

I should also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Tony Lloyd). He first entered the House as the Member for Stretford in 1983, and he retains the great respect and affection of my constituents to this day.

My constituency is special for many reasons. It typifies what is best about our country, such as hard-working, neighbourly people who are determined to do their best for their families and their community—people who are down-to-earth but who have ambitions, hopes and dreams. Old Trafford is world-famous well beyond the constituency boundary as home to both Lancashire county cricket club and Manchester United football club, whose stadium will be known to many hon. Members as the aptly named "theatre of dreams". To us locally, Old Trafford is just as exceptional for its success as a vibrant, friendly, welcoming and supportive multicultural community. I believe that it is a real showcase for the strengths that we gain from different cultures and communities living, working and enjoying life together, celebrating their distinct identities, values and cultures but in doing so creating an exciting, caring and diverse neighbourhood where people live in harmony and peace.

The local neighbourhoods of Flixton, Urmston, Stretford, Partington, Ashton on Mersey and Carrington are also well settled, stable and tight-knit. They too foster dreams and aspirations and share pride in local success. Just the other day, Urmston resident Danielle Hope was chosen as the BBC's new Dorothy, to the delight of local people who had cheered her on.

The constituency has a proud tradition of public service. It was to what is now Trafford general hospital in Davyhulme in the heart of the constituency that Nye Bevan came in 1948 to announce the birth of the NHS. That bold and unapologetic commitment to our public services remains important in the constituency to this day.

We are pleased too that the Imperial War museum has its northern base in the constituency—a reminder, as our troops show great courage today in seeking to bring peace in some of the most troubled parts of the world—of the proud tradition of military service.

Importantly too, the constituency has a proud working tradition as the home of Trafford Park, once the largest industrial estate in Europe and still home to many local

and global businesses, and the Trafford Centre, with its many retail jobs. My constituents are proud of the contribution that we make to the UK and the regional economy, and they know the value and the dignity of work.

In the thousands of conversations that I have had with local people, they have repeated the importance of young people gaining the skills that they need, and getting into good jobs, as they start out in life. I was proud to be able to answer that, thanks to Labour's investment in employment and skills, unemployment in this recession has up to now been lower than in the past two recessions, and that our future jobs fund would guarantee every young person training for a job.

Some hon. Members are perhaps a little younger than I am, and they may not have experienced growing up with the fear that there would be no work. My grandfathers knew that fear. My generation began our adult lives at the beginning of the 1980s facing the same fear. I am deeply concerned to prevent young people from facing the same fear today. A robust economy, a thriving business sector and an enabling welfare state are certainly part of the answer, but if work is to be a secure route out of poverty, we must both protect jobs and pay attention to dismantling the barriers that prevent people from taking up paid work.

My challenge to the Government, as they take forward their welfare reforms, is that they must guarantee that there will be adequate support. If they want to ensure that work pays, my challenge is that they must lead the way in the public sector, where a quarter of low-paid workers are employed, by adopting the living wage.

I ask the Government now to invest in the future. Good jobs, investment in our young people, a sustainable recovery and fairness in the economy are what my constituents want. I am determined that I will always speak out for them, and I hope that they will hold me to that.

5.28 pm

Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to make my maiden speech. I speak with a particular sense of humility after so many hon. Members have given such admirable maiden speeches, including that just made by the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green).

I have some worthy predecessors. My immediate predecessor was Miss Julie Kirkbride. She was first elected in 1997, and she was a fine constituency MP. I will never forget the spontaneous tributes that people paid to her, when I knocked on their doors during the campaign, for all the work that she had done on their behalf. I should also like to express my gratitude to her two most recent predecessors, Mr Roy Thomason and Sir Hal Miller, who both helped me in my campaign with great advice.

Bromsgrove is a beautiful, traditional beacon of middle England. I know that many hon. Members have described their constituencies as beautiful, but Bromsgrove truly has breathtaking countryside. It is an old market town which was originally a bit of an industrial hub for the west midlands industrial complex. It still has a very active, traditional court-leet, with lovely traditions.

In the east of the constituency we have many beautiful picture-postcard villages, including the glamorously named suburb of Hollywood.

Over the centuries, we have had many heroes from Bromsgrove. I should like to pay tribute on this occasion to two of the most recent—both teenagers, both soldiers in the 2nd Battalion, the Mercian Regiment. The first, Private Robert Laws, was aged 18 when he lost his life fighting for our country in Helmand province last year. He had passed his training only six months previously. The second, Private Alex Kennedy, also aged 18, earlier this year became the youngest soldier since the second world war to receive the military cross. He fought hard to save the life of his commanding officer during a fierce battle with the Taliban. We must never forget the sacrifices that our soldiers—those who have served and those who are currently serving for us—make on our behalf.

A notable person from Bromsgrove was A. E. Housman, whose stirring prose reflected the rural beauty of the heart of England. In Bromsgrove we have a wonderful heritage in the English countryside, and that is why I want to make sure that it is the people who are most affected by planning decisions who make those decisions. That is why I welcome the recent announcements of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on that issue. They have been most welcomed by my constituents.

Perhaps at this point I should say something about my own background, as hon. Members may be able to tell from my appearance and my name that I can hardly be of traditional Worcestershire stock. My parents were both born in British India. Although my father was just six years old in 1947, he remembers full well the tragedy that occurred upon the partition of India—12 million people were displaced and almost a million lost their lives. If we need an example of how political failure can lead to great human tragedy, surely that is one of the most heart-wrenching, and an example of how politics can really make a difference. That is what I say to people who ask me why I gave up a lucrative career in finance to enter this House.

To the dismay of the right hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson), I have to tell him that for 19 years I have been an investment banker. In my case, this is one brain that was sucked up by the City and has now come to serve the people in this Parliament. I worked in London, Singapore and New York. I readily admit that being seen as an investment banker was not the most useful thing on the campaign trail, but it helped prepare me for a profession not well liked by the general public. Let us hope that all of us, on both sides of the House, can work together over the coming years to help restore the nation's respect for our great Parliament.

In view of my background in finance, I am particularly pleased to give my maiden speech during this debate on economic affairs. There are many global economic uncertainties at the moment, and they have potentially grave consequences for our economy. First, the euro is only just beginning to have problems. It was always a political contrivance that had virtually nothing to do with economics. Secondly, the world's largest emerging market economies, which have buttressed global demand since the onset of the credit crisis, are about to go through a period of monetary tightening, and we can no longer rely on them for global growth.

Thirdly, industrialised nations, including our own, that have issued vast amounts of sovereign debt over the past three years in particular can no longer go on

[Sajid Javid]

that way. We have to make sure that when we look at these issues, we never forget the traditional disciplines that have stood Britain in good stead—sound public finances, low and simple taxation, and light and flexible regulation. It is when we forget these disciplines that we put our future prosperity at risk.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me this opportunity, and thank you to the people of Bromsgrove for allowing me to serve them in this Chamber.

5.35 pm

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for letting me speak in the House for the first time. I would like to say well done to the previous speakers, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) and the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid). Both made excellent contributions.

Today I want to talk about three things: some of my predecessors from Blaenau Gwent, my constituency in south Wales; what a visionary place it is; and why the constituency needs a fair deal from the Government, to provide the economic growth that our people deserve.

It is often said that we stand on the shoulders of giants. If you are the MP for Blaenau Gwent, that is definitely the case. It was one of my predecessors, Nye Bevan, the former Labour MP for Ebbw Vale, who set up our national health service. Michael Foot also represented the constituency. Just before he died, I told Michael that I would do my very best to win the constituency back for Labour at the general election. I am proud to have fulfilled that promise. I will do my best to continue the Welsh Labour tradition of Nye and Michael, to serve in my own way with communities for whom they did so much. I also pay tribute to my immediate predecessor in this place, Dai Davies. Mr Davies is a strong trade unionist and a long-standing advocate for modern, high-quality apprenticeships.

I am honoured to be the MP for a wonderful valleys constituency such as Blaenau Gwent. We are Welsh radicals who put our values into action. I was born in Cardiff, and my family are long-standing valleys people who worked in coal and steel. Tredegar, the valleys town where I grew up and went to school, is the cradle of the national health service. The Tredegar Medical Aid Society was Nye's model for the health service. In 1948 he said:

> "All I am doing is extending to the entire population of Britain the benefits we had in Tredegar for a generation or more."

His politics were based on the vision of local men and women—a combination of radical debate and a determination to run things themselves, and provide better services for local people.

Blaenau Gwent also played a vital role in the development of British democracy. It was from the villages and towns of north Gwent that the Chartists marched on Newport in 1831.

Blaenau Gwent is a proud constituency. While not rich in money terms, we have a very rich environment and culture. Our choirs and town bands have won national awards down the years; in a few weeks, the acclaimed blues festival takes place in beautiful Abertillery park; and now, in the digital age, film making has taken off too. Indeed, a recently produced local film called "A Little Bit of Tom Jones" won best picture at the BAFTA Cymru awards. I recommend it. This July, we will celebrate this creative contribution when the Welsh National Eisteddfod comes to Ebbw Vale.

Over the past 13 years the Labour Government did an excellent job rebuilding the local economy and infrastructure in Blaenau Gwent. Transport links have been improved, with the new train line from Cardiff to Ebbw Vale. The foundations of a new, splendid valleys learning campus are in hand, and our brand new hospital, named after Nye Bevan, is about to open.

But no one coming to the constituency can ignore our industrial legacy. There is still much, much to do. Too many of my constituents are unemployed. In Blaenau Gwent, unemployment stands at 11.8%. In Witney, the Prime Minister's constituency, it is 1.9%. Also, life is too short for many. Average male life expectancy in the constituency is just 75.3 years. In Witney, men live nearly five years longer—an average of 79.4 years. In the Queen's Speech there were fine words about fairness and reducing health inequalities. My constituents will be measuring the new Government closely on these policies.

Unfortunately, I believe this Government have got off to a very bad start. The cuts announced for the future jobs fund and child trust funds are not welcome. I deplore the cuts that slash the numbers of young people able to go to university. As I know from personal experience, one of the best routes out of poverty is a good education.

I am a former director of policy for the Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists and campaigns manager for the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. I will use my campaigning skills to stand up for families whose children suffer from communications disability. Our Speaker and the shadow Secretary of State for Education, my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls), showed great leadership on that topic in the previous Parliament. I would like to help take forward that important work.

In his maiden speech in 1929, Nye Bevan warned of

> "collusion between the Tories and the Liberals".—[*Official Report*, 16 July 1929; Vol. 230, c. 338.]

Nothing changes, does it? He called for Labour to have its eyes on the needs of people. Our needs are for more jobs, and a reduction in poverty and health inequalities. There are huge issues of inequality in my constituency. The chronic diseases of the legacy industries of coal and steel must still be overcome; heart disease and lung cancer in particular must be reduced. Public health should be at the centre of our investment and policy changes. Unpopular though it may be with some, I support the campaign for minimum pricing for units of alcohol. Although health is now an issue for the Welsh Assembly, as a local MP I will concentrate on that.

Employment must be another priority. The confidence and aspirations of young people must be supported. The new learning campus in our valleys must be delivered, so that good, well-paid employment is their future. We are a constituency that helped build this country. The railways and factories were made with our steel, and fired with our coal. Now though, we must invest in tomorrow's jobs. Alongside manufacturing, we should nurture green jobs as well as jobs based in science and

the digital economy. We must get over the country's massive digital divide. We must have fast internet access in Blaenau Gwent.

To boost the economy of Blaenau Gwent, our generation must build on the vision of my predecessors, learn from the socialist history of Blaenau Gwent and invest in industrial, education and transport infrastructure to boost our economic regeneration. I will pour my energy into that work. I will do it with a smile on my face, as working well with people usually gets the results needed. I will pursue our jobs, health and anti-poverty agendas with tenacity, too. My constituents deserve nothing less. I thank the House for listening to me today.

5.42 pm

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech during this debate, which is addressing a critical part of the new Government's future programme. I congratulate the previous speakers, particularly those who have made their maiden speech and set the bar very high for the rest of us.

It is an honour to speak as the first female Member of Parliament for the Loughborough constituency. I pay tribute to my two immediate predecessors. One, my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr Dorrell), is still a Member of the House. Unsurprisingly, I have been researching previous maiden speeches and it would appear that he made his maiden speech during the Budget debate following the 1979 election. Little did he think that one of his successors, 31 years later, would be speaking as the Conservatives were preparing another emergency Budget after a change of Government.

My immediate predecessor, Andy Reed, worked tirelessly for his constituents following his election in 1997. He was respected as a man of principle and resigned as a Parliamentary Private Secretary over the Iraq war. He was a committed Christian and—I hope that he will not mind my saying this—a well-known sports fanatic. Several Members on the Government Benches have already asked me whether I am going to take his place on the parliamentary rugby team. For the record, the answer is no. I hope that I will be able to serve the people in the Loughborough constituency as well as he did.

Loughborough is a wonderful mix. It sits, as my two immediate predecessors said in their maiden speeches, between Nottingham, Derby and Leicester, and that has clearly not changed. Loughborough is a town of about 50,000 people but it expands by 12,000 or so during term times thanks to our world-famous university, which is back on the map, as the football to be used at the forthcoming World cup was designed there.

Just across the M1 is the town of Shepshed, which, as I have discovered since the beginning of my candidacy six years ago, feels ignored by every tier of government. I hope that I will be able to put that right during my time as its Member of Parliament.

Finally, a number of smaller villages make up the constituency, including Hathern, Sileby, Quorn, Barrow upon Soar, Mountsorrel Castle, and some picturesque Wolds villages. The fact that I have villages in my constituency raises interesting rural issues that I hope to be able to take further forward in the House.

We have a sizeable ethnic community, and it has been my pleasure, in my six years as a candidate in the constituency, to meet and learn more about them, and to visit the Shree Ram Krishna centre, the gurdwara, the Geeta Bhawan and our two mosques.

At one time, Loughborough was renowned for its textiles and hosiery manufacturing. Now, we are known for pharmaceuticals, research and engineering, and for manufacturing bells—Taylor's is one of the last remaining bell foundries in the country. The bells have been exported worldwide, and even hang in St Paul's cathedral here in London.

I want to touch on the importance of supporting the manufacturing sector, as other Members have done. Much has already been said—and, I am sure, will continue to be said—about spending cuts and tax rises, but more needs to be said about supporting private sector businesses, which are the backbone of our economy. We rely on our private sector businesses to provide employment, to train apprentices, to give people skills and, of course, to supply exports.

In March in Loughborough, just before the election campaign started, we received the devastating news that AstraZeneca is to close its Charnwood site, with the loss of at least 1,200 jobs locally. I hope that I will have the opportunity in future debates to raise a number of issues relating to the closure. I am proud to be part of the taskforce, of which my predecessor Andy Reed was a vital part, that is working to fill the site and plug the gap. I hope that we will end up not with a black hole in the middle of Charnwood, but with a site that new businesses and many other industries can use, so that we can still have a full manufacturing sector in the town.

We need to support strong manufacturing businesses, particularly with regard to research and development. Although manufacturing accounts for only about 20% of our economy, it accounts for about 75% of research and development in this country. The services sector is important, but manufacturers take on apprentices and give people new skills in a way that the services sector does not necessarily do. We need both. I am delighted to see that, in the coalition agreement, the Government mentioned the need for a more balanced economy; in fact, that was mentioned earlier today, too.

With a background as a solicitor advising companies large and small on raising finance both in the City of London and outside, I hope that I will be able to use my time in the House to ensure that we have a truly business-friendly environment in Britain. That would be good for my constituents, for Loughborough, for the east midlands, for Leicestershire and for the country. I hope that we can replace the jobs that have been lost, and can ensure a burgeoning manufacturing sector by the time that this Government leave office.

5.47 pm

Mr Michael Meacher (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): We have heard some wonderful speeches; there have been four very good maiden speeches today from my hon. Friends the Members for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) and for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith), and from the hon. Members for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), and for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan). I congratulate them, and I am sure that we were all impressed by the rich quality, the powerful confidence, and the wit and

[Mr Michael Meacher]

humour of all their contributions. I am sure that we will hear a great deal more from all of them.

More than once in his speech, the Chancellor threw down a challenge on how the deficit issue should be handled, and in seven short minutes I want to try to take up that challenge. The Prime Minister, in a speech yesterday, said that the whole way of life of Britain's entire population would be drastically disrupted by the most severe spending cuts for a generation, but the Government have also made it clear that they want to have a debate on how the matter should be handled. I welcome that, because I do not believe that the issue of spending cuts—or the alternatives—has yet been systematically explored.

Nobody doubts that a budget deficit of £156 billion is far too high, and of course it has to be reduced, but that still leaves open three fundamental questions: the timing, who should pay and, most importantly, the mechanisms for reducing the deficit. On timing, as has been repeatedly said, and as was said again today, making drastic cuts this year, when the economic recovery is so extremely fragile, is surely taking far too great a risk of precipitating a second collapse—a double-dip recession. Nothing that the Chancellor said today gives me much confidence that that will be avoided. That was exactly the experience of Japan in the 1990s, and of the US in the 1930s. We should learn from historical experience, not repeat it.

As for the question of who should pay, it is monstrous for any Government to shift the burden of the financial crash away from the perpetrators—the banks—on to its victims: public services and public sector jobs, perhaps 100,000, or even, as the papers have said, 300,000. It is outrageous that the banks whose greed and recklessness caused the crash—I do not think that anyone doubts that—should be let off virtually scot-free. They are not subject to a levy to pay back all the bail-out moneys, nor have they been made to restore bank lending to small businesses and homeowners to pre-2007 levels, which was the ostensible reason for the bail-outs in the first place.

The really big question is why so much emphasis has been put exclusively on public spending cuts, when there are alternative ways of cutting the deficit, which would be much fairer, as well as economically more productive. Those alternative mechanisms are economic growth and taxation. The Government's latest growth forecast for the next year is a modest 2%, although it is expected to rise slightly in future. However, even Sir Alan Budd, the new head of the Office for Budget Responsibility, has said that he expects growth in the next year to be at least 2%. On that basis, as Britain's gross domestic product is about £1.5 trillion, a minimum 2 per cent. growth over the next four years would increase the country's income by about £120 billion. If, as usual, Government tax revenues take 40 per cent. of that, the Government will have available an extra £50 billion over that period, without any cuts or increases in taxation.

If the goal now, as for the previous Government, is to halve the deficit within four years, that means that there is still a gap of about £28 billion. I believe that this debate, which the Government want to encourage, should focus far more closely on how that remaining gap could be met by a mix of taxes on the banks and on the hyper-rich—a group that accounts for less than 1% of the population, and whose wealth has risen staggeringly over the past decade. While the average real incomes of the rest of the population in this country have remained flat over the past half decade, the wealth of the super-rich—and I am talking about just 1,000 multi-millionaires, who are listed in *The Sunday Times* rich list, issued only a few weeks ago—has almost quadrupled since 1997. In money terms, which is what matters, their wealth has apparently grown by an eye-watering £337 billion. In the last year alone, when the rest of the country has had to pull in its belt pretty tightly, their wealth grew by a cool £77 billion—a 30% increase in a single year.

Against that background, the banks, many of which are turning in record profits, and, above all, that rich elite, to whom the director general of the CBI referred as an alien class apart, because of their excessive executive pay, should certainly be expected to make a contribution proportionate to their increase in resources in the nation's time of need, particularly as many of them were directly involved in causing the crash in the first place. The Chancellor no, less, is on record as saying at a recent party conference:

"We are all in this together."

If that is true, and the rich are not a race apart, exempt from the privations of the rest of the population, I certainly think that they can contribute at least £7 billion a year over the next four years—a minuscule fraction of their recent increase in wealth.

I welcome this debate, but there are alternatives, which the Government need to take seriously. The question that I want to ask is: are the Government seriously listening?

5.54 pm

Andrew Bingham (High Peak) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to deliver my maiden speech in the House. May I compliment preceding speakers from across the country who have given their own maiden speeches today? The right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Mr Meacher) did not make his maiden speech, but I compliment him on a speech he made in the House some time ago on post offices, and on speaking against the then Government.

I begin my speech by acknowledging and paying tribute to my predecessor, Tom Levitt, who was MP for High Peak for 13 years from 1997. In my seven years as a candidate in High Peak, he always treated me with the courtesy befitting a Member of the House. A steadfastly loyal Member of Parliament, and an assiduous attender of debates, he took the decision late last year not to stand for re-election—an action to which he referred in his maiden speech 13 years ago as "the chicken run".

I am especially proud to represent High Peak, not just for its beauty and its many attractions, but as someone born and bred in the area. As we move towards the summer recess, I would like to recommend High Peak to fellow Members as a wonderful place to take their summer holidays. It is a large constituency covering over 200 square miles and containing some of the most beautiful countryside in Britain. I have listened to many maiden speeches over the past few days: everyone proclaims that the represent the most beautiful seat in Britain, but they are all welcome to challenge for second place.

In Buxton, we have numerous architectural delights, including the crescent, the Devonshire dome and the renowned Buxton opera house, which is a fabulous example of a Matcham theatre—one of the finest in the country—and the venue for the Buxton festival, which is an opera and literary festival to rival anything Glyndebourne has to offer, and one graced only last year by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Buxton is also the home of the world famous water, which is oft seen being consumed at major sporting events across the world, and more recently by President Obama. If he continues to consume Buxton water and benefit from all its life-giving properties, he may well live up to his election slogan, "Yes we can."

In the north of High Peak, the town of Glossop has a different character from Buxton, but it is its equal in every way. With its industrial architecture, it shows a different face of High Peak, and one that tourists all too easily miss. The neighbouring village of Tintwistle gave us Vivienne Westwood. It has distinct problems with traffic—something to which I shall return before I conclude. Glossop has the proud distinction of being the smallest town to have a team in the highest level of English football. At the time, Glossop North End—last year's Wembley finalists in the FA vase championship—was owned by Mr Samuel Hill-Wood, a former member of the House and predecessor of mine, who eventually left the town to concentrate his efforts at Arsenal, where his family still retain a considerable interest.

I would add at this stage, for those Members who are fans of "The League of Gentlemen", that that television programme is filmed in Hadfield in my constituency, so therefore I assume I am by default the member of Parliament for Royston Vasey. The Hope valley covers a large area, arguably the most beautiful area of all, against very strong competition, all of it contained in the Peak District national park, which is the oldest national park in the country, and reputedly the second most visited in the world after mount Fuji.

The caves of Castleton, which are the source of Blue John stone—unique to those caves and mined since Roman times—and the southern end of the Pennine way in Edale are particular delights. It is an area in which the farming community plays a crucial part in making High Peak what it is. They have suffered much in recent years, and they are a group whom I hope to stand up for in the House. I could go through High Peak village by village, as they all have their own attractions, but the tradition is to be brief—I am conscious of that, and there are lots of other nervous people trembling in the wings—so I will just mention that my home village of Chapel-en-le-Frith is the birthplace of Ferodo brake linings, and that New Mills is the home of Swizzels Matlow, which makes the famous loveheart sweets. Containing messages such as "Want you", "Need you", and "Be mine", they are very much the flavour of the new coalition.

It would not be right to mention High Peak without reference to its famous limestone, which is quarried in great quantities in the south of the constituency, providing jobs and economic benefit for the whole community. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions remarked on the vastness of the quarries on his visit to the constituency several years ago.

As we move into the stormy waters ahead caused by the deficit left by the Labour party, I commend to the House the actions of the local High Peak borough council which, when it entered a strategic alliance with the neighbouring Staffordshire Moorlands district council, has driven out over £1 million of saving, yet managed to maintain and improve front-line services for its residents. The strategic alliance continues to make strides forward under the leadership of Councillor Tony Ashton, together with his team of Conservative councillors and supported by the excellent and determined staff of that council. This small borough council has shown the way to us all. The savings are there to be made, and we should heed its example.

As the coalition embarks on this Parliament, and as I embark on my first but I hope not last term as the Member for High Peak, we are aware of the tough times ahead. I am and always will remain aware of the problems facing my constituents. In Glossop and Tintwistle, the Tintwistle bypass is an issue that has meandered on for many years. It was promised by my predecessor 13 years ago but has still to be built. It is a difficult issue. There are difficult environmental consequences to be considered but something needs to be done to alleviate the traffic problems suffocating Glossop. Tintwistle shudders and resounds to the thundering of wagons as they cross the Pennines. I know that money is tight and will be for some time, but if money becomes available a workable solution may be achieved.

Both Buxton and Glossop have health service issues. In Glossop, where the Tameside and Glossop primary care trust prevails, my residents are reliant on Tameside hospital, the subject of much debate locally. In Buxton and the remainder of the constituency, Derbyshire County PCT is responsible for provision. I will meet the PCT to discuss provision for hospitals in Buxton and care outside the hospital in the central area.

I shall deal quickly with another issue—pensions. I have made many efforts over several years to help the members of the Turner and Newall pension scheme and I will continue to make those efforts, as it is still in assessment for the Pension Protection Fund. I have met the PPF and will meet the independent trustee, and I hope to get the best result for my residents.

In summary, the High Peak is a beautiful place to live, and I hope that I can make the residents of the High Peak as proud of me as their MP as I am of them and the constituency.

6.1 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech. I thank hon. Members for their speeches beforehand—including the hon. Member for High Peak (Andrew Bingham). We look forward to visiting High Peak as a holiday destination. If we go to all the places that hon. Members have spoken about in the House, we will not have to go abroad this year to get the sun. I thank the right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Mr Meacher) for his comments on the social politics. There are many bread and butter issues there to interest us, I thank the hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan). We have something in common. I am a Leicester City football supporter and have been for umpteen years. I do not know whether that is a good or a bad thing, but it shows how loyal I am anyway.

[Jim Shannon]

One of the things that I wished to speak about in the Chamber was my Ulster Scots. I did get permission to do this, so I hope hon. Members will bear with me.

Thaur is monies a guid thang at A cud sae aboot tha fowk o mi Baille-Wick bot yince an firmaist A coont it a muckle oaner tae spake oot oan thair ahauf in tha Hoose O Commons. Tha Strengfird fowk ir tha satt o tha grun, an in thenkin thaim fer thair support A wud promis thaim at A'll wrocht an dae fer thaim aa at A caun.

For those who did not understand me, and there may be some here who did not, I will translate that for them. There are many good things that I could say about the people of my constituency, and first of all is that it is a great honour to speak on their behalf in the House of Commons. The Strangford people are the salt of the earth and in thanking them for their support, I also assure them that I shall work and do for them the best I can.

A hard-working MP is nothing new to the people of Strangford. My predecessor, Iris Robinson, was known for years as a conscientious worker. John Taylor was the MP for many years before that, and I had my first meeting with him and his wife Mary in the House of Commons some 20-odd years ago. Before that we had Jim Kilfedder, who represented the area of Strangford within North Down. We have been blessed over the years to have a number of good MPs. I can remember placing my X for the first time ever next to Jim Kilfedder's name many years ago.

Those former MPs all had one thing in common—a love for Strangford and its people. I represent a new constituency of Strangford as the boundaries have changed. Whether it be from Portaferry to Carrowdoor, from Comber to Crossgar, Ballynahinch to Ballywalter, Newtonards to Grey Abbey, I would urge any of those in the Chamber to see the unparalleled beauties of my constituency and I defy them not to fall in love with it, as I have.

Today's debate focuses on the economy and on work and pensions, and I wish to outline a number of opportunities to build the economy of Strangford and the whole of the United Kingdom in areas such as tourism, manufacturing and agriculture. Since 2008, unemployment in Northern Ireland has risen by 18,000 and too many able-bodied people are out of work. I urge the Government to do something about that. The solution requires a cross-sectoral and cross-Government approach.

Tourism offers a first clear opportunity. It is my belief that Northern Ireland will be able to carve out a niche in the global scene in tourism. The Lonely Planet tour guide praised Northern Ireland as

"abuzz with life: the cities are pulsating . . . and the people"—

the people are very important—

"the lifeblood that courses through the country, are in good spirits".

Ulster, and Strangford in particular, has the unique combination of a beautiful landscape and coastline, a land steeped in history and a welcoming and diverse people who cannot help but draw others to our shores. Yet it seems that the only people who are fully aware of all that Strangford has to offer are those who are blessed enough to have been born there or passed through it. This is a loss not only to the people of my constituency, but to the people of the United Kingdom. I am in the business of changing that impression.

If Strangford was marketed to its full potential it could deliver significant benefit to local and visitor alike. For the cyclist, the walker and the nature lover, there is abundant bird and wildlife along the coast and lough shores. Short-break visitors can shop, be pampered and enjoy our excellent restaurants and entertainment. Strangford is the perfect base for those who wish to explore towns, the countryside, the coast or all of them together.

One sector which clearly demonstrates this is country sports. The game fair at Ballywalter attracts a record number of people, and this is an area in which Strangford has the potential to excel. For example, five American shooters came to the constituency on a five-day trip to Northern Ireland. They spent some £50,000 in the local economy—high-value tourism. I understand that country sports in Northern Ireland employ some 3,000 people. Again, there is opportunity. When I was elected, the people of my constituency were glad to have me in the House of Commons to work for them. It is also rumoured that the pheasants and the ducks of Strangford were looking forward to at least two free days a week when I would not be about. That is probably good news as well.

Northern Ireland's private sector is underdeveloped but at its core is the manufacturing sector. It contributes around 25% of the gross value added to the Northern Ireland economy. Therefore, the Government's recent commitments to bolster regional economies and manufacturing are of deep interest. However, the lack of detail is concerning, especially in comparison with their clearer plans to cut public expenditure. I want to put my concern about that on record.

The urban and rural mix of my constituency also means that the farming and agri-food sectors are a key component, possibly more so than in other parts of the United Kingdom. I am well aware of the push that there has been to encourage local Northern Ireland businesses to compete on the global stage. We have various international exporters in the constituency. I want to plug the humble Comber potato and the Portavogie prawn, because they are world leaders. Many people enjoy them as delicacies.

The family farm is important to us in the constituency. There are those who have diversified into the ice cream business or adapted unused barns and land for quad bikes and crazy golf, all of which are advertised in our local paper, the *Newtownards Chronicle*. Commercial fishing is also important, a once proud industry. Fishing boat numbers have been halved, due to EU regulation and scientific information. The common fisheries policy needs to be right for the people of my area. It needs to restore confidence and give people viability and jobs. I hope the Government will work towards that.

In conclusion, Winston Churchill is one of my heroes and always has been. He had a good grasp of the English language, and he was a good historian and also a good soldier. He said:

"This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

I stand in this place humbled and honoured at the fact that the voters of Strangford have elevated me from the Northern Ireland Assembly to the House of Commons.

The Assembly was my beginning, but my election to the House is certainly not the end of the matter. That quote from Winston Churchill reminds me of another of his. I have made it to the end of my maiden speech with no heckling from Irish Nationalists or anyone else, something that I am exceedingly grateful for. I hope this will be the first of many speeches in the House.

6.8 pm

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech. After sitting in the House for seven hours yesterday, I can say that there is only one thing more nerve-wracking than being called upon to make a maiden speech—sitting on the Bench for seven hours and not being called to make a maiden speech.

Before I pay tribute to my constituency, Aberconwy, I must say that I am proud to stand here as the first elected Member for the constituency, which is a new construct for this Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House came up to Aberconwy during the election campaign to offer me support. I am sure that hon. Members from both sides of the House have had the experience of a senior politician coming to support them. We were walking along the promenade in Llandudno, which is the most beautiful promenade in Wales, and probably in Britain, and my right hon. Friend asked me about the arithmetic in the constituency. When I informed him that Aberconwy had 44,000 electors, he immediately said, "Oh well, your seat will be abolished, won't it?" That was before I had won the election. If that is how prominent politicians are supposed to help candidates, then I am not sure that was the case in that instance. He left me dumbfounded and went off on the cable car that takes people up from the promenade to the Great Orme, a visit that I would recommend to anyone.

Aberconwy is built upon two constituencies—the Conwy constituency and the former Meirionnydd Nant Conwy constituency. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my two predecessors in those constituencies. Mrs Betty Williams was the Member for Conwy and she served the constituency with distinction for 13 years. Even though I stood against her in 2005 and disagreed with her time after time, on every doorstep in Conwy I was told that if I was as good a constituency MP as Mrs Williams, I would do well. I will aspire to ensure that I do serve the area as well as Mrs Betty Williams did.

More importantly, Mrs Betty Williams has recently published her memoirs in Welsh, and, being a first language Welsh speaker, I have had the pleasure of reading them. What shines through is the fact that she embarked upon a political career for the right reasons. She was a quarryman's daughter, and she served local communities on district and county councils and stood for Parliament on four occasions before she won. Throughout, her commitment was for the right reasons. She wanted to serve her people and she wanted to make sure that her Labour party views were expressed in the House. For that, I respect her very much indeed, and I hope that I will be able to do as good a job on behalf of my constituents as she did.

The Meirionnydd Nant Conwy part of the constituency was extremely well served by the now hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd). Despite the fact that we have had our disagreements—viewers of Welsh language television can attest to that—I would also like to pay tribute to him. When I canvassed in the Conwy valley, people said that Elfyn Llwyd was always approachable and always served his people very well, and, again, I would hope to do the same. I follow in the footsteps of two hard-working Members and I am aware of the responsibility and privilege that I have in serving.

Aberconwy is a diverse constituency. It is dependent on tourism, with Llandudno, which I have mentioned, the queen of Welsh resorts, in the centre of the constituency, and locations such as Conwy with the castle of Edward I, Llanfairfechan and Betws-y-Coed in the Snowdonia national park. There is no doubt that tourism is an important industry within the constituency. Agriculture, on the other hand, has seen a decline during the past 10 years. The agriculture industry, which is centred on the market town of Llanrwst in my constituency, is in need of support. While I am in the House, I will try to support the tourism industry and ensure that it is not seen as a Cinderella industry. In our part of Wales it is crucial to creating employment and retaining young people in the area. In the same way, we need to develop the food sector and the food industries by working with farmers and the agriculture sector. I would like to see the development of real opportunities for businesses to be created in the food sector in my constituency.

The other thing that I need to say about Aberconwy is that it is an historic constituency. I have already mentioned the castle in Conwy that was built by Edward I, but in many ways the history of Wales is apparent in Aberconwy by the fact that we have Conwy castle on the coast, but we also have the castle in Dolwyddelan, which was built by the Welsh princes. Those two castles are a snapshot of the history of Wales. One thing that causes me immense regret is that the history of the building of Conwy castle is well known to most people in the House, but the history of the Welsh princes and the castle at Dolwyddelan is not as well known. Our education system should deal with that, because it is important to know our history—British history and Welsh history.

The Welsh language is a living, breathing language in Aberconwy. Around 40% of my constituents are first language Welsh speakers, and the Welsh language still survives basically because of the work of two people who are associated with my constituency. The first is Bishop William Morgan, who was commissioned by Queen Elizabeth I to translate the Bible into Welsh in 1588. He created a work of literature, which is much better than the recent Welsh Bible translation. I suspect that the fact that I prefer the old version shows that I am a natural conservative in many ways.

The other individual associated with my constituency is Wyn Roberts, now Lord Roberts, who served the Conwy constituency for 27 years. In his time in this House he played a huge part in ensuring that the Welsh language had the opportunity to survive into the 21st century. Wyn Roberts was in many ways responsible for ensuring that we have the fourth television channel in Wales, S4C. He was responsible for the Education Act 1986, which ensured that the Welsh language had a proper place in our education system, and, just as crucially, he was responsible for the Welsh Language Act 1993. He is a hard act to follow.

Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to give my maiden speech.

6.16 pm

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this important debate, particularly as employment was one of the central themes of my campaign.

It is an amazing privilege to be standing here as the Labour MP for Bethnal Green and Bow, a place described as the heart and soul of this great country, of which I am incredibly proud to be a citizen. I feel just as proud to be one of the first three Muslim women MPs ever to be elected to this Parliament, and the first person of British-Bengali heritage to be elected to this House.

I thank the people of Bethnal Green and Bow for giving me the honour of representing them. At a time of great national scepticism about this institution, I can assure the House that for millions of people in Bangladesh, where I was born, this Parliament has always been a beacon of democracy and self-determination. The power of this House to inspire and to do good is undimmed.

It is customary to pay tribute to one's predecessor—in my case, the inimitable George Galloway. Where do I begin? Perhaps I should begin with his long service in this House, and his rather shorter stay in the other house. His great oratory was admired by many, even when they passionately disagreed with him. While the people of Bethnal Green and Bow chose unity over division, and while my politics could not be more different from Mr Galloway's, we have one thing in common, which I know that the House passionately shares—a deep commitment to a lasting settlement in the middle east. For me, that is impossible without ending the blockade of Gaza and a viable independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel.

I would also like to pay tribute to my Labour predecessors. Oona King was a hard-working, dedicated MP for almost a decade, who fought for people who suffered enormously from the appalling housing conditions in the east end of London. She fought relentlessly to tackle poverty and inequality, both in this country and in developing countries.

We remember the late Lord Shore of Stepney who worked tirelessly for the people of my constituency. He has a special place in the hearts of Bengalis, especially among my parents' generation, for the way in which he led Members on both sides of this House to speak up for the fight for democracy in the war of independence in 1971 in Bangladesh. I am only sorry that he is not here today to see someone born in the country he supported, brought up and educated in the constituency he represented, elected to this Parliament.

My passion for Bethnal Green and Bow is about the place, the people and our political heritage. I would urge hon. Members to go east and visit places such as the Whitechapel gallery, Columbia Road flower market, and Spitalfields market near Brick lane. Brick lane has iconic status in this country, both for its vibrancy and cultural activity and for its extraordinary history: for being the place that provided a home for many waves of migrants, including the Huguenots, Jews, Irish, Pakistanis, Bengalis, Somalis and many others, manifested poignantly in the Brick lane Jamme Masjid, which was built by the Huguenots for Christian worshippers, later became a synagogue and is now a mosque, reflecting the different contributions of so many to our great country.

In other parts of my constituency I come across people who remind me of the courage and determination of so many in the east end. I think of the elderly lady who survived the blitz but overnight lost her family, and the many other stories of sacrifice and loss, such as the Bethnal Green tube disaster, when 173 people lost their lives seeking shelter from air raids in 1943.

We owe it to those east enders never to forget that freedoms are never easily won. For me, it is an honour to stand here, as a successor, I hope, to the great social reformers of the past, who took ideas born in the east end, developed them and changed this country for the better. It is no exaggeration to say that the east end inspired men and women to make history and fight for social justice. I think of the trade union movement, the suffragettes and the welfare state.

My constituency sits between the glittering towers of the City of London and Canary Wharf and is a stone's throw away from the Olympic village. The Olympics have the potential to deliver huge opportunity and a sea change in attitudes towards our country, our pride and our sporting ability, yet many in my constituency remain unconvinced that they will benefit. I hope that the job opportunities and the legacy that we wish to create will benefit them, and I am acutely aware that it is an extraordinary opportunity for an historically poor part of London.

I want to speak on behalf of those who face the rough few years ahead. Already, unemployment is incredibly high in my part of London. The east end has been in that situation too many times before, and for us wasted talent is never a price worth paying. In the recessions of the '80s and '90s I saw families, friends and neighbours lose their homes, jobs and livelihoods overnight. That was the time when the Liberals controlled the council and the Conservatives ran the country. Any community that does not provide useful work for its people risks falling apart.

It is not that people in the east end lack resourcefulness; on the contrary, it is impossible to walk the streets without seeing the energy, dynamism and drive that take whatever resources are available and turn them into success. But when programmes such as the future jobs fund are shut down, the Government send a message to thousands of people, saying, "You're on your own. We wash our hands of you." That is why I shall fight to create jobs in the east end and work hard and tirelessly to serve the people of this great constituency.

6.23 pm

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): I am very grateful for this opportunity to address the House for the first time. Today's debate and the excellent speeches of so many hon. Members have done nothing to reduce the awe with which I approach this task, and I commend the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) for her passionate speech and associate myself with her views on the blockade of Gaza and the importance of creating employment. I share in the salute of my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid) to the brave soldiers of the Mercian Regiment, who have laid down their lives for our country.

My first thanks are due to the electors of Worcester, who have sent me to this Chamber, and I am conscious that I shall be forever in their debt. I intend to repay

that debt by working tirelessly on their behalf and being Worcester's man in Westminster. I must thank also my predecessor, the former Member for Worcester, Michael Foster, who for 13 years was a fierce advocate for his party, a tireless campaigner for animal rights and a distinguished supporter of his Government. As a Whip, a Parliamentary Private Secretary and a Minister, he did much to further the interests of peace in Northern Ireland and international development, and for that he deserves the approbation of this House.

It would be remiss of me not to mention some other former Members for Worcester. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Peter Luff), who is now an Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, served the city well until boundary changes took him from us. He is a friend and a mentor, the first MP for whom I ever had the privilege to vote, and now one who has the dubious privilege, shared by my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr Dorrell), of having voted for me. I know that every Member will join me in wishing my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire success in providing the best possible equipment to our gallant armed forces over the years to come.

Before my hon. Friend's time there was, of course, another Member for Worcester with whom I am very familiar, but as my hon. Friend spoke so eloquently on his behalf in his maiden speech, I shall say only that, as many thousands of constituents have reminded me on their doorsteps, he is a hard act to follow. I owe that Member, my father, my lifelong knowledge of, and deep love for, my constituency and its history, not to mention my support for the once and future premiership rugby team, the Worcester Warriors, and my support—shared with the Governor of the Bank of England—for the cricket team, which has the most beautiful ground in the country.

The task of representing Worcester, made so enjoyable by those factors, is made all the more daunting by the fact that the city has been represented in Parliament since the 13th century. Empires have risen and fallen and royal houses have come and gone in the time that MPs have spoken for Worcester, but I do not intend to go on for that long. The city, of course, played its own major part in the civil war. The first shots of that war were fired beyond the boundaries of my constituency, near Powick bridge, and its last slaughter took place at the Sidbury gate, now in the heart of modern Worcester, as Cromwell finally crushed the King's army and took the faithful city. That war started after an arrogant Government had overspent and oppressed the people of the country with unfair taxes.

At the end of the battle of Worcester, the parson of the parliamentary army addressed the troops and said to them:

"Say you have been at Worcester, where England's sorrows began, and where happily they are ended."

I hope that, given the alleged role of Worcester woman in bringing Labour to power over the past 13 years, the same might be said again today.

The civil war was one of the historic events that gave us the evolved constitution that we have today. Respect for that constitution is one of the things that inspires me in politics, and, despite much tinkering over the past 13 years, there is still much to be defended: the unique position of the Crown; the privileges and stature of this mother of Parliaments in holding the Government to account; the powerful ties that bind Members to their constituencies; and a system of election that is simple, effective and allows for the removal of failed Governments. All those are worth fighting for with the same passion with which our ancestors fought on the battlefields of Worcester.

As I am passionate on that subject, so also I am passionate about opportunity. My party has always been the party of opportunity. In the Gracious Speech and in this debate, we have set out plans to support opportunity for British businesses, for young people, and for those on welfare to escape the traps of unemployment and dependency. Opportunity in business, and that unleashed by the national insurance reforms that we propose, will benefit Worcester Bosch and Yamazaki Mazak, innovative manufacturing companies that, between them, employ thousands of people in my constituency.

The coalition Government have set out exciting plans to support green technology, and I support those initiatives. I believe that they will benefit companies in Worcester, but I am concerned that there has so far been no mention in Government statements of the renewable heat incentive. Given that homes are responsible for 21% of the carbon emissions generated in this country, and that 73% of energy in the home is used for heating or hot water, supporting renewables for heating should be given as high a priority as support for the renewable generation of electricity.

Worcester has a range and diversity of businesses, great and small, that reflects the range of topics covered in the Gracious Speech. The breadth of our economy ranges from engineers to health care companies, industry associations, recyclers and housing associations. I have visited firms, such as Craegmoor Healthcare, Skills for Security, the Remarkable recycling company and Sanctuary Housing, which are all headquartered in Worcester and, as an MP, I want to ensure that Worcester remains a place to which businesses want to come, maximising the opportunities for my constituents.

To maximise opportunity, we need the best education to be available to all, and that is why I welcome the exciting reforms proposed by the Secretary of State for Education. We have already seen how academies can turn around the fortunes of failing schools and, in Worcester, the Tudor Grange academy is a shining example of that trend, so I welcome the decision to open up the opportunity of freer education to more schools in the area.

Supporting opportunity means careful nurturing of further and higher education. I shall support both, and I am very proud that Worcester boasts the country's fastest-growing university. The university of Worcester, which I congratulate on its recent Ofsted report, was rated "outstanding" for its training of teachers at primary and secondary level, and the principal of Worcester college of technology was recently elected president of the Association of Colleges.

For opportunity to thrive everywhere we need fair funding in education. Today the average pupil in Worcestershire receives £370 less than the national average and a staggering £762 less than children in the neighbouring authorities of Birmingham, despite the fact that some parts of my constituency are among the 10% most

[Mr Robin Walker]

deprived areas in the country. I have high hopes for the coalition Government's pupil premium policy in addressing that issue.

The last Walker to speak for Worcester began his maiden speech by saying,

"I hope that if, in the course of my remarks...I make what are considered to be constructive criticisms of the Government's economic policy, this will not be considered indicative of a person representing a constituency noted throughout the world for its production of sauce."—[*Official Report*, 20 April 1961; Vol. 638, c. 1433.]

I shall be equally ready to make constructive criticisms and to place my constituency at the forefront of my parliamentary career. In the interests of Worcester, I commend the Gracious Speech.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir George Young): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. At half-past 6, you will leave the Chair for the last time. May I endorse what Mr Speaker said earlier and, on behalf of the whole House, thank you for your impartial, firm but courteous service over 13 years?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. *[Laughter.]* I am not sure that that was not grossly out of order.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I add congratulations and warm support from this side of the House. We are grateful to you for your many years of kind consideration for all Members of the House, Back Benchers and Front Benchers, and for your fairness over the years.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I fear that this is getting worse. *[Laughter.]*

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. May I add congratulations from the Liberal Democrat Benches on your service to this House? Perhaps your early education in my constituency contributed to your excellent and impartial service to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am extremely grateful for those very kind words and the way in which they were supported. It has been an exciting and privileged 13 years, certainly in my memory, and I hope that I can continue to serve the House in other ways.

6.31 pm

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): I hope that the clock has not yet started, Mr Deputy Speaker; as the last person whom you will call to speak in your current role, I want to pay tribute to you. You have always been extraordinarily kind and generous to those on my party's Benches.

Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, it is a pleasure to follow two totally different maiden speeches, one from the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) and the other from the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali). They are different people from different constituencies and different backgrounds, but they have a shared determination to see an end to the blockade of Gaza. Many in the House share that determination, and I hope that we will see proper progress in the middle east during this Parliament.

Today's debate is fundamentally about the economy and I am delighted to take part in the debate on the Gracious Speech today. I should like to comment on much of what the Chancellor said. His description of the economy left to the new coalition Government is well known and the numbers that back it up are equally well known. The deficit was forecast last year to be £173 billion, but this year it is forecast to be £156 billion—still 11%-plus of gross domestic product. UK national debt is sitting at £1.2 trillion on the treaty calculation and is forecast to rise to £1.6 trillion, approaching 90% of GDP by 2014-15.

We know the last Labour Government's response to this recession—to make real-terms cuts of £500 million for this year to the Scottish budget, before recovery was secured. Against everything that they professed in public, they began cutting the budgets early and weakening the ability of the Scottish Government and others to secure the recovery.

Mrs McGuire: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the current Administration's budget in Scotland is double what Donald Dewar's was when he became First Minister of the Scottish Parliament in 1999?

Stewart Hosie: I am delighted to confirm to the right hon. Lady that she seems again to fail to understand what real-terms increases and real-terms inflationary costs mean over the period of the Scottish Parliament. There have been real-terms cuts to the Scottish budget this year.

The Chancellor also confirmed that tackling the deficit and debt was the most urgent issue facing this Government, and they have started with £6 billion of in-year cuts. I am delighted that the Scottish Government have taken the opportunity to defer those cuts this year to avoid in-year cuts, which are extraordinarily damaging as they require budgets to be ripped up and jobs to be shed. What have worried me, however, are the comments and criticisms from Labour's Scottish Parliament finance spokesman, who criticised the decision to postpone the cuts. Clearly, Labour will condemn the Tory Government here while its finance spokesman in the Scottish Parliament seems to want the Tory cuts this year in Scotland. That is wholly wrong.

The new coalition Government said in their programme that they would

"significantly accelerate the reduction of the structural deficit"

in this Parliament and that the main burden of deficit reduction will be borne by reduced spending rather than increased taxes. I question the logic of that whole approach. The previous Government promised cuts that were deeper and tougher than Margaret Thatcher's. They promised to take £57 billion out of the economy in a single year—2013-14. They also promised £20 billion or so of tax rises and £40 billion or so of cuts. The accelerated attack on the structural deficit and the

smaller contribution made by tax increases clearly indicate further public sector cuts—cuts well in excess of the £40 billion that the Labour Government planned to take out by the time we reached 2013-14.

Labour's plans for taking £57 billion out of the economy represented approximately 3% of GDP, but this Government's plans are likely to go very much further. I was concerned that reducing consumption in the economy in a single year to the tune of 3% of GDP would tip the economy back into recession, but I am more concerned that stripping yet more consumption out of the economy and doing it more quickly—before we have properly secured the recovery—would be even more damaging than Labour's plans.

Remember that at the time of the last Budget, it was only Government consumption, up 2% on the year, that kept the economy afloat. Household consumption was down by 1.9%, business investment was down by 24% and gross fixed capital formation was down by 14%. Even now, following the statement today, we know that household consumption is down by only 0.5% on the year, but business investment is still down by 11% and gross fixed capital formation is down by half that, at 5.7%. This is not the time to cut Government consumption, given that it was up by 3% over the last 12 months and kept the economy afloat.

I do not want anyone to misunderstand me. I was a critic of the deficit and the debt before the recession. I am arguing about how we tackle it now and I believe that we should not go down the route of the Canadian model, which involved 20% cuts in public services over three years. We should look again at the New Zealand model, which gave the flexibility to tackle the deficit and the debt over the medium term. That way we could at least benefit from the huge £50 billion-plus medium-term savings from scrapping Trident and its replacement. I am delighted that Mr Speaker has allowed our amendment covering that matter to be put to a vote later today.

There were, of course, a number of other matters economic in the Gracious Speech—the financial services regulation Bill and the plan to introduce a bank levy, for example. Although it is self-evident that there must be depositor protection and that we must protect against systemic risk from bank failure, not least through the application of proper capital ratios, that is what pillar 1 of the Basel II accord was meant to do. Given that the banking crisis commenced in summer 2007 and that Basel II is not meant to be fully implemented until October-November 2012, I would have thought that it would have made more sense for the incoming Government to push for the early international implementation of Basel II rather than unilaterally implementing a domestic banking levy now. The consequences of such a levy are not at all clear.

The coalition's programme also said that they would reform the regulatory system and give the Bank of England control over macro-prudential regulation. But that would leave the Financial Services Authority fundamentally in place, and I remember many criticisms from Conservative and Liberal Democrat Front Benchers about the FSA. Surely the Government will continue to recognise that failure of supervision by the FSA was as important as the weakness of the underlying regulation.

There were many other matters economic in the Queen's Speech and the programme for government, and we will come back to them. I have one final question, and it is about the decision to scrap the child trust fund. Between 2004 and 2008, savings ratios were half those when Labour came to power in 1997. Why ar this Government planning to scrap a savings scheme with a 71% voluntary take-up rate?

6.40 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): It gives me great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) and to be able to speak for the first time in this Chamber as the Member for the new seat of Rugby. I often have to explain to people that I represent a town, rather than a sport. As an enthusiastic former player, it seems appropriate to have joined today the all-party rugby union group. Rugby is unique as the only place to have given its name to an international sport. It already receives many overseas visitors, particularly from rugby-playing countries, who make their way to the close at Rugby school, where William Webb Ellis picked up the ball and ran. Much work has already taken place in the town to capitalise on our association with the game, and I look forward to a new visitor attraction in time for the 2015 world cup.

The seat of Rugby includes villages to the north and west of the town, including Binley Woods, where I grew up and attended primary school. It has since become famous as the location of Hyacinth Bucket's bungalow in the sitcom "One Foot in the Grave". The constituency also includes the village of Bulkington, which was familiar to the author George Eliot, who referred to it as Raveloe in her book, "Silas Marner".

I should like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the immediate past Member for Rugby, who is at my side and has been returned as the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Jeremy Wright). Having made a very big impact here in his first term, he has now taken the sensible option of a safe seat.

Previous Members include Andy King and, before that, someone well known to me, since that person is my father—James Pawsey, who was first elected for Rugby in 1979. I know that it is not unusual for a son or a daughter to follow their father here, and there are many examples in the current intake. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), who spoke just before me, as a son following a father into the same seat. My father still has an excellent reputation in Rugby as a hard-working constituency MP. Throughout the time that I was seeking to be elected, many potential constituents spoke to me about how much he has done for the people of Rugby. I have heard many similar tributes from people here since I arrived—colleagues and staff who remember his contributions, particularly in the field of education. Like my hon. Friend, I feel that I have a very tough act to follow.

I am a product of Rugby's grammar school, which was founded by a locally born grocer, Lawrence Sheriff, who, when he established Rugby school, set aside a sum of money for the education of boys from the town. From an intake of 90 boys at that school in 1968, two of us sit here today; my former school friend and now my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat), was also elected in May.

[Mark Pawsey]

Rugby changed significantly in the 19th century with the coming of the railways, and our station is familiar to many; it is on the west coast line, with a journey time to London Euston of just 50 minutes. In Rugby, we welcome the Government's commitment to new high-speed rail lines but are anxious to ensure that fast services will remain on the original network once the new lines are in use. Indeed, Rugby's transport links are the most important feature of our town. Rugby is at the heart of the UK's motorway network. That makes Rugby an attractive location for business in general, and for freight and logistics businesses in particular. Despite the current pressure on the public finances, we believe that it is vital to continue true investment in our network in order to continue to improve it.

Rugby has also had an impact in the field of communications through the Rugby radio site, the masts of which have for many years been visible from the M1. Almost all those masts have now been removed in preparation for a massive housing development, which will be the most important issue facing the town over the next 20 years.

Rugby has experienced major growth before. In the early 1900s, heavy engineering came into our town and Rugby became a major industrial centre. We have a history of producing gas and steam turbines at a company known as British Thomson-Houston, which went on to become GEC and AEI—now amalgamated to form Alstom, a leader in power generation. Rugby is also home to Converteam, a worldwide specialist in power conversion that is building electric engines for the new Queen Elizabeth class of aircraft carriers. Rugby had a pioneering role in other forms of propulsion. In 1937, Frank Whittle built the world's first prototype jet engine in Rugby. I have a personal connection with Whittle's work, because I established a small business in Rugby in a rented unit adjacent to where Whittle carried out his work.

I have spent 25 years starting, running, managing and building up a business, and I have a good understanding of the challenges that businesses face. We need to recognise more effectively those who create wealth and jobs. Small business is ready to make its contribution, but it needs a work force with the skills and the attitude to roll up their sleeves and play their part. Too often, regrettably, there is insufficient incentive for jobseekers to do that, and I welcome the changes in our welfare system that will put incentives to work firmly back in place. I make no apology for putting the case for manufacturing and for business, particularly small business, and I look forward to doing so in the House over the coming years, in addition to representing all the electors of Rugby, with whom I believe I have a special bond.

6.46 pm

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): I would like to thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to make my maiden speech. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) and other new Members of this House, who have done their constituencies proud today.

It is a huge privilege to have been elected as the Member of Parliament for Leeds West and to succeed John Battle, who represented us here for 23 years. John's work for Leeds West touched the lives of so many people: fighting for, and getting, compensation for the victims of asbestos poisoning in Armley; supporting the Kirkstall festival in the grounds of our beautiful 12th-century abbey; and working with West Leeds debt forum and Bramley Credit Union to drive loan sharks out of our community. It is those, and John's many other achievements—I have mentioned only a handful—that are his legacy.

At a constituency surgery recently, a lady took my hand and said that as long as I was half as good as John Battle, she would be happy. I later received a letter from a constituent who asked that I only be a quarter as good. I hope to exceed both their expectations, but I know that in John Battle I have a fantastic role model and a very tough act to follow. I will fight tirelessly for my constituents to be the champion for local people that John was before me.

Most of all, I will fight for jobs, growth and prosperity—the subject of our debate today. Leeds has a proud economic heritage. Leeds West was built on engineering and on textiles. From my home in Hawksworth Wood, people used to be able to hear the hum of the Kirkstall Forge Engineering plant at work. The forge, originally set up by the monks of Kirkstall abbey, continued in operation until 2002. The industrial revolution transformed Leeds, as well. The Leeds-Liverpool canal brought to our city wool spun at the mills that still stand tall in Kirkstall, Armley, Bramley and Rodley. Of course, Leeds was the birthplace of Montague Burton and of Marks and Spencer—a proud industrial, and retail, heritage. The economy was transformed once again under the previous Labour Government. The city centre is now packed with new businesses, shops, museums and galleries.

More than all that, however, under Labour every single person—most of all, every young person—has been given opportunities to recognise and fulfil their potential. It was my own experience of education under the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and 1990s that motivated me to get involved in politics. When I was at school, there were never enough textbooks to go round. There was no money for new school buildings, so our sixth form was a prefab hut in the playground and our library was turned into a classroom. It is therefore with immense pride that I tell the House that my old secondary school is now a specialist college with two new, modern buildings.

Such investment has been seen up and down the country, in all our constituencies. In Leeds West, every single primary school has been rebuilt or refurbished since 1997. In September last year, the new Leeds West academy and Swallow Hill community college opened their doors—proud achievements, transforming lives and communities.

In his maiden speech in 1987, John Battle spoke of his visit to the Bramley jobcentre. Back then, there were just six jobs on offer in the window, with wages ranging from £2 to £2.28 an hour. No parents can bring up a family on £2—not in 1987 and not on today's equivalent—and no one should be made to work all hours of the day and night and yet remain in poverty. It was that belief and sense of justice and fairness that brought the national minimum wage—one of Labour's proudest achievements—to the statute book.

Throughout the recession, Labour has not abandoned its commitment to social justice. The future jobs fund helped more than 8,000 young people in Yorkshire to get back to work during these challenging economic times and, under Labour, a generation of young people were not condemned to the scrapheap as happened in the recessions of the 1980s and 1990s. However, the economic recovery is fragile and cannot be taken for granted. We need the passion, enterprise and determination that built the Leeds economy of the past to build the economy of the future. For that to happen, the people of Leeds will look to the Government to be on their side and build a future for Leeds based on high skills, new technologies and new industries, with better transport links—including high-speed rail—and a banking sector that supports industry and small businesses, rather than just being out to make a quick profit. The new Government are right to make the budget deficit a priority, but that must not be at the expense of the recovery that Labour has secured.

I started my career as an economist at the Bank of England and focused on Japan at a time when its economy had been in and out of recession for a decade. Today, debt in Japan is 190% of gross domestic product, which is 2.5 times the level in the UK. Japan's debt is so high precisely because its Government did not take swift action to ensure that its economy emerged from recession with strong growth. I urge this Government to learn those lessons from history, because the very worst thing for Leeds West and for Britain would be another recession caused by hasty and unfair spending cuts. I fear that the Government are making those mistakes and putting the recovery at risk. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is reducing industrial support for businesses and universities, watering down the regional development agencies and abolishing the support that Labour introduced to get young people back to work. If the Government really are serious about ensuring the recovery, they must put in place policies for jobs and growth.

We know that the causes of this crisis are global, but the pathways out must be local and regional, so I will fight for Leeds West with determination, and I will do so in a responsible way. It would not be responsible or sensible to oppose every spending cut or tax increase. I will encourage this Government when they get it right and acknowledge that, but when they get it wrong and put the economic future of my constituents and the country at risk, I will hold them to account. John Battle showed us that politics can make a difference and that the right values and policies can transform people's lives. Today more than ever, we need the ambition for justice, equality and fairness that drove John. It is a real honour to serve as the Member of Parliament for Leeds West and, in doing my duty to my constituents, I will act with the hopes, dreams and aspirations of Leeds West as my guide.

6.52 pm

Gavin Williamson (South Staffordshire) (Con): It is a great honour to be called and to follow so many fantastic maiden speeches: when the bar is set so high, it is often easier to duck under it. It is a great honour to serve South Staffordshire. It is traditional for hon. Members to pay tribute to their predecessors, and that is easier for some than it is for others.

It is easy for me to pay tribute not only to my predecessors for previous constituencies, such as Cannock and Brierley Hill—for example, Sir Fergus Montgomery and Jennie Lee, who were great parliamentarians—but to my immediate predecessor, Sir Patrick Cormack, a great parliamentarian whom we all greatly admire. Sir Patrick believed in and fought passionately for his constituency and constituents, but he also believed passionately in this House—in its traditions and its importance in our national life. He also believed in the importance of a strong House of Commons in holding the Government to account and ensuring good government. Those principles were close to Sir Patrick's heart and will be close to mine.

Over the weeks following my selection, Sir Patrick and I became good and close friends. We enjoyed spending a great amount of time campaigning together, and although our styles were sometimes a little different, that made it all the more enjoyable. I remember campaigning in the former mining village of Great Wyrley, where many constituents rushed up to Sir Patrick to wish him well in his retirement and thank him for the work he had done for them. They shook his hand and said, "Mr McCormack, Mr McCormack." After about the 10th person had done so, I said to Sir Patrick, "Don't you ever correct them?" He said, "Dear boy, after 40 years, it hardly seems worth bothering, don't you think?" It is an honour to step into Sir Patrick's very large shoes, but I hope that, over the years, I will gain some of his panache and style, which graced this Chamber, and that I will be an asset not only to the people of South Staffordshire but to this House.

South Staffordshire is one of those constituencies about which so many people say, "Where is it? Which town is in it?" People probably travel through it many times when they go up the M6 or up the west coast main line. It is a beautiful constituency that does not have a single major town, but is built up around many small, and some large, villages scattered across the South Staffordshire countryside. Many of those villages were born out of the industrial revolution and coal mining traditions, and have settled in some of the most beautiful, pretty and gentle English countryside that one can imagine.

The people are straight talkers, which, as a Yorkshireman, is comforting to know. As a straight talker myself, it is nice to have it blunt from others. South Staffordshire is a beautiful constituency that is criss-crossed by many canals and beautiful fields. However, it has its problems and issues. In South Staffordshire, compared with the national average, twice as many people work in manufacturing. That is important to me, because I have worked in manufacturing since I left university. I think it is fair to say that I am one of the few potters who sit in the House today. It is that experience of manufacturing that I hope to bring to the House, because far too often Governments of all colours have believed that we can build a strong, stable and vibrant economy on the twin pillars of financial services and coffee-shop economics. I have a great deal of respect for anyone who works in coffee shops and I even grudgingly admit that we might need bankers, but we cannot have a vibrant British economy without a strong and vibrant manufacturing sector.

Far too often, young people who go into manufacturing or engineering are seen as taking a second-class career, whereas we reward and sing the praises of people who

[Gavin Williamson]

go into accountancy, the law or public relations. We do not sing enough the praises of our designers, engineers and manufacturers. We need to change that ethos and have a similar one to that of Germany or Japan. We will have a truly vibrant economy only when we recreate the Victorian spirit of ingenuity and inventiveness that made Britain such a vibrant country, as I am sure it will be again.

I truly welcome the Prime Minister's comments about the importance of manufacturing and I hope that the Treasury team listen well to his comments and do not spend all their time listening to bankers. They should also listen to manufacturers, because we often have a lot more common sense than bankers. I hope I can play my part in representing South Staffordshire and the people of a beautiful and lovely constituency, and that I can ensure their voices are heard loud and clear in this Chamber.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Hugh Bayley): I call Jonathan Edwards.

6.59 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Diolch, Mr Deputy Speaker. I congratulate the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson) on his excellent maiden speech, and I am delighted to have the opportunity to make mine in this debate. The way in which we respond to the longest-lasting recession since records began, and the support structures we put in place to deal with the human cost of the recession, will be the overriding domestic issues of this Parliament. I will close my contribution today by talking about an issue that is of huge importance to me—fuel poverty—but first I should like to use this opportunity to talk about my home constituency, which I now have the ultimate honour of representing as Member of Parliament.

Carmarthen East and Dinefwr consists of four valleys. Two rural valleys—the Teifi and Tywi to the north—are based on two majestic rivers that provide among the best salmon and sewin fishing in the British isles. Agriculture provides the backbone of the economy, and I am committed to fighting to preserve the traditional Welsh family farm and the traditional Welsh rural way of life.

There are also two post-industrial valleys—the Amman and Gwendraeth. As a son of the Amman valley, I can claim without any prejudice that the anthracite coalfield there contains the best coal in the world. The industrial half of my home communities—a producing economy—has suffered at the hands of a UK macro-economic policy obsessed with financial services and the negligence of manufacturing.

My constituency is probably most famous for its production of Welsh sporting icons. Some of the greats of Welsh rugby come from the area—Carwyn James and Barry John—and current Welsh and British Lions greats Dwayne Peel, Stephen Jones and Shane Williams are sons of Carmarthenshire. Carmarthen East and Dinefwr is also famous for its many castles, some of conquest, some of defiance. The three Deheubarth castles—Dryslwyn, Dinefwr and the imposing Carreg Cennen—are symbols of Welsh resistance, and of our determination as a people to preserve our identity and defend our freedom.

The north of my constituency was the home of a real life Robin Hood. Twm Sion Cati earned his fame by robbing from the rich to give to the poor. I consider myself a redistributive politician very much in the same vein. His arch-enemy was the sheriff of Carmarthen, a post I once held—although I must admit it was somewhat confusing for a Welsh nationalist such as me to hold that office. I look forward to campaigning for a tax on international currency transactions in honour of Twm.

Carmarthenshire is the home of great Welsh political radical minds. Llandybie born DJ Davies formed the Independent Labour party in Ammanford before the first world war, but then became a founding member of Plaid Cymru in the 1920s. He began working in the mines at the age of 14, served in the US navy, and was a formidable boxer. He lived in Denmark, and became convinced that the advancement of the Welsh working class could be secured only in a free Wales. Heavily influenced by the syndicalist movement, he wrote the masterpiece "The Economics of Welsh Self-Government" in 1931, which formed the basis of the decentralist socialist vision that guides my party to this very day. His vision of a mutual approach to economic development is one that I believe areas such as Carmarthenshire must embrace if we are to meet the challenges we face.

Jim Griffiths was a son of Betws. A Labour politician, he was the co-architect of the modern welfare state with Aneurin Bevan, and helped to deliver the first measure of Welsh devolution with the creation of a Minister for Wales. That political victory for the first time enshrined Wales as a political nation, and set in motion the chain of events that led to the creation of our own Government and legislature.

Carmarthenshire was also the constituency of the greatest Welshman of our time, Gwynfor Evans. His historic victory in 1966 marked the election of the first Plaid Cymru MP. Gwynfor's legacy has been to inspire generations to the cause of our country.

I should like to say a few words about the man I replace, Adam Price. After less than a decade in front-line politics, he has already established himself as one of the greatest figures in the history of the nationalist movement, and one of the most significant political figures of our time in Wales. When he returns from his studies in the USA, his destiny is clear: to serve our people in our own Parliament in Cardiff, and to lead our people to our political freedom.

Adam will be remembered for unearthing the Mittal scandal and for leading the opposition in this House to the invasion of Iraq. He was a local champion in fighting for compensation for miners suffering from terrible respiratory diseases and securing a pension compensation fund for steelworkers who had seen their life savings disappear. Wales can ill afford to lose politicians of the stature of Adam, and I hope he returns ready to continue his work on behalf of our people and our communities.

In the time that is left, I should like to talk briefly about an issue that is very close to my heart: fuel poverty. In a modern country, it is a disgrace that more than a quarter of all Welsh households live in fuel poverty. It is one of the greatest failures of government that people in Wales and throughout the UK must continue to make daily choices between heating and eating. In the last year alone, average heating bills have increased by 33%, leaving people on fixed incomes

terribly exposed, and energy prices in Wales are higher than anywhere else in the UK.

We need action at international, UK, Welsh and local government level if we are serious about eradicating the blight of fuel poverty from our communities. First, international oil prices must be stabilised to avoid price fluctuations. That could mean a long-term agreement between oil producer and consumer countries, as advocated by the French Government, and—arguably—the use of a more stable trading currency. The UK Government need to raise incomes and ensure that available benefits and tax credits are claimed by those who are entitled to them. That package should include the extension of winter fuel payments to all vulnerable groups. Secondly, energy-efficiency measures should be targeted primarily at the fuel-poor, and, thirdly, we need greater regulation of the energy market, and in particular a mandatory social tariff for the fuel-poor so that they are removed from a competitive market that simply does not work.

The Welsh Government must ensure that Wales gets its fair share of the UK Government's energy efficiency schemes and create a package of support and advice for people living in fuel poverty. They must also promote off-grid, decentralised local energy systems, backed up with smart metering, so that communities can develop their own solutions to the twin challenges of global warming and energy poverty. I would also like a statutory duty on Welsh local authorities, which could include the retrofitting of vulnerable homes with the latest air-to-heat technology.

I have little doubt that the social justice agenda and the growth of Welsh political democracy and sovereignty are intertwined. During my time here in this place, I look forward to working with those across the political divide who believe in building a modern, just and prosperous Wales. Diolch yn fawr.

7.6 pm

Stephen Gilbert (St Austell and Newquay) (LD): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak here today for the first time. I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), and I share his determination to secure a Robin Hood tax on international financial transactions. As it happens, I had the pleasure of knowing his predecessor from my time studying in Aberystwyth, and I am sure he will be a worthy successor.

St Austell and Newquay is a new seat that stretches from coast to coast across the heart of Cornwall; it is a unique constituency. It includes many places that hon. Members will have visited. St Austell and Newquay are Cornwall's largest towns, but they are sharply contrasting, and the villages at the heart of my constituency could not be more different from those along the coast. It is a diverse seat: rural, urban, coastal, industrial and agricultural. I was born and bred in the constituency and I am proud to call it home.

Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced a boundary review. It seems that as well as being the first Member of Parliament for St Austell and Newquay, I may also be the last. In the context of today's debate—I say this tongue in cheek to the Conservative Whips—perhaps it is only the sizes of our constituencies that will be increased by the Government rather than cut. However long I am in this place, it will be the privilege of my life to represent the people with whom I went to school and grew up, and with whom I live and work.

Members will be familiar with the picture postcard image of Cornwall, but they may be less aware of what lies behind that. We have by far the highest water bills in the country, yet some of the very lowest incomes. We do not have enough jobs, and those we have tend to be low-paid and seasonal. Thousands of people cannot afford a place to live in the communities in which they grew up. Indeed, I may be the only Member who was still living with his parents when he was elected.

Those are the challenges that face the people whom I represent, and my predecessors—Matthew Taylor, Colin Breed and my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Dan Rogerson)—made a huge effort to tackle them. Matthew Taylor's review of affordable housing is the best route map out of the housing crisis that we face in rural areas; my hon. Friend's work to secure the Walker review on water charges has led to a real-terms cut in water bills in Cornwall; and Colin Breed helped to develop the tax policy that will be implemented by this Government and will lift millions out of poverty. All three of my predecessors have shown a record of action in the best tradition of the first Liberal MP for Truro and St Austell, David Penhaligon. If anyone in this place doubts the impact we can have, they should knock on doors in my constituency and hear people talk about Mr Penhaligon almost 25 years after his untimely passing.

I do not mind admitting that that is a lot to live up to—as with other hon. Members, the bar in my seat is very high—but I welcome the opportunity to continue to tackle the problems we face in Cornwall from the Government side of the House and with the principles that underpin the Government's agenda: freedom, fairness and responsibility. People who are trapped in poverty cannot be free. The need to work day in, day out just to make ends meet erodes the freedom to have a quality of life to which we should all be able to aspire.

I therefore welcome the Government's commitment to raising the threshold at which people pay tax to £10,000 over the course of this Parliament. That will take many thousands of my constituents out of tax entirely and give hard-earned money back to everybody else. It will increase the freedom of those I represent, and by spreading the tax burden more evenly across our society, it will be fairer. I also welcome the re-establishment of the link between pensions and national average earnings. That is the fair thing to do and it is a step towards ending the pensioner poverty that blights Cornish communities.

The first step towards people being able to lead a responsible life is for them to have a place of their own in which to live, so I welcome the moves the Government will be making to bring empty homes back into use. There are 8,000 empty homes across Cornwall, and 1,400 in St Austell and Newquay alone. These homes should not be standing empty while so many people are in housing need.

I welcome the scrapping of the absurd regional spatial strategy, which would have led to so much of Cornwall's countryside being concreted over with little gain for those in real housing need. Other measures, such as the promotion of shared ownership and community trusts, will do much to ease the housing crisis in Cornwall. I

[Stephen Gilbert]

would like this Government to go further, however, by allowing local authorities to set a limit on the number of second homes in a community. Local needs should come first. Following recent announcements, councils now urgently require clarity about the criteria they will use to determine future housing provision.

I was the first person in my family to go to university. In fact, I enjoyed it so much I went twice. Statistically, I should not be here. My grandfather was a clay worker, my parents are separated and my secondary school was in the state sector. I am a gay man from an average working-class Cornish family. Access to education changed my life chances, and I have come to this place to extend to others the social mobility and opportunities that have so benefited me. If we are to tackle the poverty that bedevils parts of Cornwall, we have to give people the chance to make the very best of themselves. We cannot have a fair society if people do not have the chance to make the most of their talents, and it will not be a free society if people cannot use their abilities to achieve their dreams.

The community I grew up in and now represent understands the values this Government are promoting; indeed, they are summed up in Cornwall's motto "One and all". However, the people who sent me here will be keen to make sure that the burden of addressing the problems facing Britain, which were caused by the Labour party, falls on those most capable of carrying it.

This debate has highlighted some of the difficult choices we face. We in Cornwall have been let down by successive Governments, and in playing my part in making those difficult choices I will never forget that we need a fairer funding deal for Cornwall. I hope that now my party sits on the Government Benches, the issues I have touched upon this afternoon, and that my predecessors have campaigned on for decades, can finally be addressed, not "drekley", as we say in Cornwall, but today.

7.13 pm

Mrs Anne McGuire (Stirling) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Stephen Gilbert). My family has spent many holidays in his constituency, and I think VisitBritain could do worse than collect together all the maiden speeches of the past few days and use them to promote some of the most wonderful parts of our country—indeed, there are bits of our country I would not have recognised at all from the descriptions. I congratulate all Members who have delivered their maiden speeches. I was going to say that my contribution would be an older maiden speech, but one of those adjectives would not quite be appropriate. I shall now launch forward while leaving Members to work out the meaning of that remark.

First, I want to welcome the comments of the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about the principles that will underpin his approach to welfare reform. He said in a recent article:

> "Tattooed across my heart is that I didn't come here in any shape or form simply as a cheeseparer."

That is a robust comment to make, certainly for a Conservative Secretary of State for Work and Pensions—and, frankly, it would not be at odds with many of the comments of previous Labour Secretaries of State.

I am also delighted that the new Secretary of State had his road-to-Damascus moment on the road to Easterhouse in Glasgow. I know the area well as I grew up there and my father represented it as a councillor during some of the worst periods of the Thatcher era, when a large community that was essentially made up of aspirational working-class people found itself in an economic desert. It was a period in which intergenerational unemployment and the poverty that the Secretary of State saw took root, and the aspirations of individuals and communities alike were crushed by the lack of jobs. There are similar examples to that in my constituency, where the mining industry was destroyed. Frankly, these communities started on the road to recovery only as a result of the massive investment in economic renewal by Labour Governments in both Westminster and Holyrood.

The absence of any detail in the Secretary of State's programme so far—apart from the loss of the future jobs fund, which has already been dealt with by others—means that I could refer only to the coalition programme for government to see if any further light could be shed on the new approach. We should have some sort of cross-House consensus on how we move forward on welfare reform. Indeed, one of the new Ministers has strongly promoted a consensual approach, and I will be interested to learn whether he sees that consensus being continued now that he sits on the Government Benches.

The coalition wants to have a single work programme, and I think there is some room for rationalisation, subject to the demands, which have changed over a matter of years. I am not yet convinced, however, that a single work programme is necessarily the way forward. We have also heard much from the coalition about "decentralisation" of decisions and "individualisation" of provision. How will a leviathan single work programme respond to the specific needs of individual unemployed people? How will such a programme respond to someone who has a fluctuating mental health condition or a physical disability, or who is a carer or a recently unemployed bank worker? Some may require minimum support for a short time between jobs, but others will require a significant amount of longer-term help. There is no detail of how the initial assessment for support will be made. I assume that the programme will be cash-limited in spite of the Secretary of State's ambitions, so how will the initial financial decisions about who needs more support and who needs less be made? Will Jobcentre Plus continue to have a significant role to play in this, or will people have to refer themselves to some other local or national organisation? If someone is disabled and needs additional help, will they have to compete with others on the programme?

Where does the access to work programme, which daily supports thousands of disabled workers in employment, fit into the new uniform approach? I know that the coalition has said it will reform access to work and I welcome that, but will the coalition Government commit themselves to doubling the access to work programme as the previous Government did, or will this just be rolled into a single approach that is not ring-fenced and that becomes a victim of cuts? On realigning contracts, will that be 100% output-based? In short, how is the whole thing going to work?

Perhaps the Secretary of State can provide answers to questions on his own sanctions policy. What will the level of sanctions be? Who will enforce them? What will

happen to children if benefits are taken away from their parents? Where are the safeguards? Will people be forced to take any job, or will there be flexibility within the programme? Will the unemployed people in my constituency be taken off benefit if there are no jobs, or no valid opportunities?

May I briefly comment on the "work doesn't pay" issue, which the Secretary of State repeatedly mentions? I understand and appreciate his sentiments. The coalition document says that it supports the national minimum wage, but I have to ask this question: in terms of the "work doesn't pay" issue, is the Secretary of State proposing to increase individuals' incomes through a mixture of benefits, credits and earnings or, as many of my hon. Friends and constituents fear, to go back to the old tried and tested Tory solution of salami-slicing benefits?

The two Ministers currently sitting on the Government Front Bench—the Exchequer Secretary and the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Thornbury and Yate (Steve Webb)—can smile knowingly to each other if they want to. However, given the history of welfare reform, which causes a shudder through many communities, certainly in Scotland but also in many other parts of the country, these are serious questions and the coalition must answer them before its welfare reform programme will have any credibility among Opposition Members.

7.20 pm

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): It is a privilege to have the opportunity to make my maiden speech in the debate in response to the Gracious Speech, and it is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mrs McGuire). I congratulate the Ministers on their appointments and look forward to supporting them in tackling their challenges between now and the next general election.

I wish to pay tribute to my immediate predecessor as MP for the Vale of Glamorgan, John Smith. His campaigning efforts, which were primarily on tackling deep vein thrombosis and latterly in favour of the defence technical college proposed for St Athan, were recognised by those on both sides of the House. I strongly support his approach on both issues, and he is very much respected in the constituency. I also recognise the contribution of the previous Conservative Member for the constituency, Walter Sweeney, who will be remembered for, among many things, having the smallest majority in the House of Commons following the 1992 general election—it was a majority of 19. Thankfully, I am not in that position, but I do not take any vote for granted and I aim to keep my majority somewhat larger than that.

I also take pleasure in referring to the late Sir Raymond Gower, whom many senior hon. Members will recall with great fondness. He served the Vale of Glamorgan's constituents from 1951 until his untimely death in 1989. His reputation for responding to and serving constituents is still recalled affectionately in the constituency, and his prolific letter writing to and on behalf of constituents came long before modern technology made such communication relatively straightforward. His efforts were extraordinary. I hope to be able to follow the principles of Sir Raymond's approach to constituency work with passion and conviction, and to stand up, here in the Chamber, for equality of opportunity irrespective of background. It is ironic that Sir Raymond Gower's maiden speech was about devolution to Wales and his call for greater "home rule", as it was referred to then, because a commitment to such a referendum has been made by this Government.

It really is a privilege to represent the Vale of Glamorgan, my home constituency. It contains rich farmland, three main towns, numerous villages and hamlets, and a magical coastline. It has a fantastic history and I am confident that, with the Government's support, it has a great future. It contains areas of prosperity and pockets of deprivation. I am confident that the policies announced in the Gracious Speech will go a long way to help overcome the deprivation, to meet the need for regeneration and to help to protect the fantastic environment.

The constituency's three prime towns are Cowbridge, Llantwit Major and Barry. The Romans built a small fort in Cowbridge in the 1st century. In 1254, Sir Richard de Clare, the Lord of Glamorgan, granted the town its first charter and in 1886 Cowbridge was the last recipient of a royal charter given by Queen Victoria. David Lloyd George and Iolo Morganwg have strong links to the town, which was the birthplace of Sir Leoline Jenkins, who was the principal of Jesus college, Oxford. He endowed the town's grammar school and formed its long-standing association with Jesus college.

Llantwit Major came to prominence with the foundation of a monastery, which was established by St Illtud in the late 5th century. It became a seat of learning and religion, attracting royalty and St David himself. It is the nearest town to St Athan, with its significant RAF base which is the proposed site of the £13 billion defence technical college—I strongly support that policy.

Barry, too, has a great history. The name derives from St Baruc, who was drowned in the Bristol channel and buried on Barry island. The rapid expansion of the town dates back to 1884, when a group of colliery owners built a railway line and a dock, but interestingly the original Barry Dock and Railway Bill was defeated in Parliament in 1883. By 1913, Barry had become the largest coal-exporting port in the world, and the railway line also brought millions of tourists to Barry island to enjoy one of Wales's most spectacular beaches.

Latterly, the town has become well known because of an Essex boy and a Barry girl—Gavin and Stacey. Even a former right hon. Member of this House, John Prescott, has appeared in an episode with Nessa, Smithy and the other characters. Stacey and Uncle Bryn live on the steepest road in my constituency, and the Essex home in the programme is actually located in Dinas Powys, in my constituency. I apologise in advance, Mr Deputy Speaker, should I ever ask, "What's occurring?" or should I thank you by saying, "Tidy". The new interest in the town, combined with the regeneration efforts of the local authority, mean that Barry has an exciting future ahead of it.

Although the Vale of Glamorgan's gross domestic product is at or slightly above the UK average, there are great differences between its communities. The overall headline masks the deprivation, which has its roots in the change from the former industries, and because the GDP of other parts of Wales is lower, areas of deprivation in my constituency are left wanting. I want to fight for equality of opportunity. I was contacted last week by a constituent who had been made unemployed and did

[Alun Cairns]

not qualify for training support to enhance his prospects because he lived in the Vale of Glamorgan. Had he lived in the neighbouring authority area, he would have been eligible for projects that receive European aid.

I wish to conclude my remarks by returning to the issue of the proposed defence technical college, which is the largest private finance initiative scheme. I recognise that the strategic defence review needs to take place and that the Government also face financial challenges, but this project would use money that is already committed and is already being spent by the Ministry of Defence, and it would spend it more efficiently and effectively. We owe this to our armed forces; it is important to Wales and the Welsh economy, but it is most important for our brave men and women who serve in our armed forces, because it will give them the world-class training that they most desperately need and deserve.

7.26 pm

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): I am grateful to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my first contribution in the House, especially as today's debate has particular resonance for me and my constituency. I shall talk about that shortly, but before doing so I must congratulate all hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today, because they were all excellent and are a hard act to follow. In particular, I am delighted to follow the maiden speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) who, like me, is one of the first Muslim women to be elected to this House. As we are joined in that achievement by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi), I can only remark that Muslim women in the Commons are rather like buses: there are none for ages and then three come along at once.

My predecessor, Clare Short, was very well known for being unafraid to speak her mind. When making her maiden speech in 1983, Clare said:

> "I intend to follow tradition and speak about my constituency. However, it is impossible for me to follow the tradition of not being controversial". —[*Official Report*, 29 June 1983; Vol. 44, c. 623.]

That was a sign of things to come, but it was also indicative of her honesty. Clare had a distinguished career as a Labour MP but following differences over the Iraq war she ultimately resigned the Labour Whip in October 2006, choosing to sit as an independent MP. She was not the first Labour MP from Birmingham, Ladywood to have disagreed with the Labour party over policy, because our predecessor, Victor Yates, who held the seat from 1945 to 1969, had the Whip withdrawn from him twice. That meant that he, too, sat as an independent in this House for a period of time. This is not a Ladywood tradition that I hope to continue, but I will strive to emulate the passion and fearlessness of my predecessors in standing up for the people of my constituency. In every part of Ladywood, Clare is remembered with pride, warmth and gratitude for her hard work, and that is the best and most fitting tribute that I can give to this most outspoken of MPs.

I am a Brummie born and bred, so the fact that I now represent a constituency that is the heart of Birmingham is a source of great honour and it is a privilege. My constituency consists of four extremely diverse and different wards: Aston, Ladywood, Nechells, and Soho. Between them, they are home to the Grade I-listed Aston hall, the historic Jewellery quarter, the Star City entertainment complex and the Grade II-listed Soho house, home of the manufacturer Matthew Boulton. I am also lucky to have both Aston Villa and Birmingham City football clubs in my constituency, but as both are in the premier league I will have to learn new skills of football diplomacy when the two sides play each other.

Birmingham, Ladywood is one of the most multicultural areas in the country. More than 50% of our population is non-white and we have a proud multicultural tradition. I have been privileged to meet many people from all race and faith backgrounds during my time as a candidate and now as a Member of Parliament. Each such meeting has reiterated to me that while the people of my constituency might have come from different places, the destination they seek is the same—a place of greater opportunity and the same chance as everyone else to succeed.

That brings me to why it is so important to me to begin my parliamentary career by speaking in this debate and focusing on the labour market. My constituency has the devastating and unwanted distinction of having the highest rate of unemployment in the country. Our figures for unemployment have been too high for many decades. In researching my maiden speech, I noted with dismay that unemployment was a theme in the maiden speeches of many of my recent predecessors. My constituency is particularly blighted by long-term intergenerational worklessness, which is the legacy of previous recessions which devastated my constituency so much that it has never really recovered. I was pleased, therefore, when the Labour Government announced in December 2007 that £1.5 billion would be provided through the working neighbourhoods fund specifically to tackle the problem of long-term worklessness, and allocated more than £100 million of that money to Birmingham.

I wish that action had been taken earlier in our term in office. However, I have real concerns about the effectiveness of the working neighbourhoods fund in Birmingham, where the partnership tasked with delivering the fund is controlled by Birmingham city council, which has been run by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in coalition since 2004. To date, the fund has not been adequately used for the express purpose for which it was created by the Labour Government—to help to reduce unemployment in Birmingham's most deprived communities such as my own. Two facts are evidence of that. First, mid-way through the three-year programme, of the £30 million that had been spent, only £2.5 million had actually been spent on projects to tackle worklessness. Secondly, and just as controversially, £14 million of working neighbourhoods fund money was diverted to help to bail out the Tory-Lib Dem council's budget overspend on social services. I believe that cash for jobs should be spent on jobs, and I hope that what is left of that money is spent in the way intended by the Labour Government—to support the long-term unemployed in areas such as mine in getting the skills and confidence that they need in order to get and retain a job so that they can transform their lives.

I wish to make a related point on youth unemployment. In 1983, Clare Short warned that school leavers in Ladywood in the 1980s faced unemployment not only in

ever greater numbers, but for ever greater periods of time. In 2010, I find myself warning that the children of that generation might be in the same boat, because of the new Government's plans to cut the future jobs fund. That fund created 200,000 jobs and arose from our guarantee of a job, or training or a work placement, for anyone who was under 25 and out of work for six months. I am disappointed that the new Government are getting rid of the fund. Once again, a Conservative Government—this time helped by the Liberal Democrats—are walking away from the young unemployed in our country. I implore them to change course. When we damage our young people, we damage us all, because they are our future. If the Government walk away from them and break their hearts and spirits, they truly will create a broken Britain.

I conclude on a personal note and with a pledge to the people of Birmingham, Ladywood. My grandfather came to this country from Pakistan in the 1960s. He worked long hours on a low wage and made sacrifices so that his family could access greater opportunity. He died when I was six years old and did not live to enjoy the fruits of his labour. He could not have known that his decisions and his hard work would one day lead to his granddaughter being elected to this House. I pay tribute to him and to the successes of the Labour party and the Labour Government, who created the opportunities that made my family's journey and that of so many ordinary hard-working families possible. I believe that opportunity and the chance to fulfil one's aspirations is the birthright of every one of our citizens, and I pledge to the people of Birmingham, Ladywood that I will devote myself to eradicating the misery, hopelessness and sheer waste of long-term unemployment so that my constituents can have what they deserve—the same chance to succeed in life as everyone else. For however long I am their Member of Parliament, I will never settle for anything less. I thank the House for listening.

7.34 pm

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): Thank you for allowing me to catch your eye, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is an enormous privilege to address the House for the first time. The trepidation that I had already has been greatly enhanced by having to follow so many of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members.

I begin by expressing my appreciation for my predecessor, the right hon. Michael Mates. On his election in 1974, as MP for the then Petersfield constituency, he was about the age that I am now, but he had already served Queen and country for 20 years in the Army. He went on to serve in the House for a further 36 years. His well deserved reputation as a champion of the people of East Hampshire and his service as a Minister of the Crown and as a Select Committee Chairman cast a very long shadow, in the penumbra of which I stand rather hesitantly today. If ever, in this House, I can be half as good as he was, I shall be not half bad.

I very much hope to emulate Michael Mates's long and close relationship with the people of East Hampshire, and there are many people whom I have the privilege to represent now who have been transported into my constituency, courtesy of the Boundary Commission, having taken no decision of their own to do so. They have been served well by my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot). The House will be familiar with his exemplary service and so I shall not affront his modesty now. Suffice it to say that I aim to ensure that the residents of Bordon, Liphook, Grayshott, Selborne, Headley and Headley Down will not be found gazing wistfully across the constituency boundary. I shall do my best to serve them as well as they have rightly come to expect.

The constituency of East Hampshire is England at its very best, with its varied and enchanting landscape, historic market towns and many beautiful villages. One such village is Chawton, where Jane Austen found such inspiration and created most memorable characters and images that show our country at its most cherished. But that tranquillity has at times been rather violently disrupted. Should I ever require a reminder of the need to remain in harmony with my constituents, it is there in the bullet holes in the door of St Lawrence's church, close to our family home in Alton, for that was the site of the civil war battle of Alton. On that occasion, it took 5,000 parliamentarians to match up to the local men.

Today, East Hampshire is, I am pleased to say, once again a harmonious place, but challenges still exist. We need houses that local people can afford, but we need to resist the sort of overdevelopment that can spoil the character of an area. It is vital to provide jobs locally and to keep the micro-economies of our towns and villages vibrant for our local heart and soul. Looking forward, the opening of the Hindhead tunnel, the various options for the future of Bordon and the advent of the South Downs national park all present both new opportunities and new challenges.

In my constituency, particularly in Bordon, we are proud to be home to so many who serve in our armed forces. They are a constant credit to our nation and our commitment to them in this House must measure up to their commitment to serve our country. I welcome the Government's pledge to renew the military covenant and I look forward to seeing that as a priority in the business of the House.

After the defence of our country and our security, perhaps the biggest battle we face is ensuring that we further define and bolster Britain's place in the new world economy. As the new powerhouses of China, India, Russia and Brazil loom ever larger, we must rise to the challenge they set. Fundamental to that must be ensuring the very best education for every child to enable them all, regardless of background, to fulfil their potential. That is a theme that many hon. Members have touched on already. Striving for excellence is not just about bringing all up to scratch or setting the bar at an acceptable standard. It must be about encouraging all to stretch themselves, from wherever they start, to be all that they can. That should be true both for schools and for the students in their care. In education, as in industry, when people feel ownership, empowerment and responsibility, they are much more likely to go the extra mile and make a success of their venture—hence the great attraction of the academy model, even for schools that are already very successful.

Those same principles need not mean going it alone, as they can extend beyond the school gate, with schools working in partnership with others. In my constituency, the 44 schools and colleges already work co-operatively, choosing to pool resources in the pursuit of shared goals. The potential advantages of that kind of approach are manifold. It can enable smaller village schools,

[Damian Hinds]

which we value very highly in my area, to derive scale benefits that they otherwise would not have. It can provide new stretch opportunities for particularly gifted and talented youngsters, and also a forum for governors to share best practice.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has outlined bold plans to help tackle the problem of people being trapped in the welfare system, but I am sure that he would agree that even better than cure is when we can go for prevention. The oft-quoted number of NEETS—people not in education, employment or training—is such a bland statistic, but it masks so much wasted potential. It is often said, too, that one can spot the people likely to end up adding to that statistic from a very early age. That is too often remarked on, but too rarely acted on.

We must have ambition for all our young people, and the pupil premium that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education is putting forward will be a big part of that. I hope too that more areas will follow the model of the East Hampshire Partnership, for which a key focus is identifying the people who may be at risk of falling into that group, and working together across the age groups for their benefit.

Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for allowing me the chance to speak.

7.41 pm

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Thank you for calling me, Mr Deputy Speaker. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to make my maiden speech in a debate about economic affairs, and in particular about the services and assistance that we provide for our most disadvantaged and vulnerable citizens. It is an honour for me to follow the hon. Members for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood).

The subject of today's debate is one close to my heart, not least because until very recently it was part of my responsibilities as the Minister for Social Development in the devolved Administration in Northern Ireland. In addition, concern for the disadvantaged and the vulnerable has always been top of my political agenda and that of my party. The Social Democratic and Labour party is here to serve.

No one better personifies dedicated public service and a lifelong desire to improve the lives of fellow citizens than my predecessor Eddie McGrady. He has been an exemplary contributor to making Northern Ireland a better place for all its people, across a career spanning 50 years of steadfast public service. Unlike others, his leadership style has not been bellicose or loud. Instead, he is a member of that elite group of statesmen and politicians who make progress for everyone through their wisdom, dedication, patience and hard work. For me personally, he has been a role model and a true friend. I am proud of what he has done for the constituency of South Down. The evidence of his endeavours is there for all to see throughout that beautiful constituency.

I said that South Down was beautiful, and it is. Located in the south-eastern corner of Northern Ireland, it boasts at its heart the magnificent Mountains of Mourne, which play host to Northern Ireland's highest mountain peaks and cradle the crystal-clear waters of Silent Valley that sustain our capital city of Belfast. South Down also has an extensive and charming coastline, stretching from Carlingford lough at the Irish border to the south, through the bustling harbour towns of Warrenpoint and Kilkeel and on to Newcastle where, famously,

"the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea."

The coastline curves northwards beyond that again, to the historic town of Downpatrick—the place that I call home.

Although there is some vibrant manufacturing industry and commerce in the area, the main industries in South Down are agriculture, fisheries and, increasingly, tourism. Regrettably, South Down also has its own pockets of deprivation. It is a very good example of a place where, if the kind of welfare-to-work initiatives envisaged by the Government are to have any success, there needs to be an accompanying concentration on job creation. For the House can rest assured that there are very few people I know, especially in South Down, who do not want to work.

As a former Northern Ireland Minister, I told the previous Government that a policy of pressing people into work when there are few jobs to go to could not prosper, and I repeat that message to the new Administration. I share the Government's desire to help more people enjoy the dignity and self-sufficiency that comes from gainful employment but, in Northern Ireland, a policy of hounding people away from benefits when there are few new opportunities for employment will cause only hardship and resentment.

But let us be positive: I believe that we in Northern Ireland have it within us, now that all the pointless violence has ended, to make our economy take off for the first time in generations. We are attracted to the possibility of devolving tax-varying powers to the Stormont Executive—powers that will allow us, for the first time, to compete as equals in the quest for foreign direct investment. I very much welcome the indications from the Government that they will help us harmonise corporation tax on the island of Ireland.

We can do more for ourselves in many other areas, too. Northern Ireland has potentially a very rich renewable energy resource. It can be at the centre of our plans to develop the green economy. We also have huge potential in our agriculture and food industries to drive for higher added value. We have a well-educated and trained work force, and a world-class broadband infrastructure that can be the platform for the growth of our tradable sectors. We must get all of this moving if we are to be credible in offering work to everyone.

I also think Northern Ireland can harvest a major expansion of its tourism industry. We offer a well-priced and absorbing tourism product that is enhanced by high-quality hospitality and a genuinely friendly and welcoming people. The potential for tourism development is, I believe, at its most enticing in my own constituency of South Down.

In the Downpatrick area, we hold the authentic heritage of our national saint, Patrick, and that is something very special. The whole world celebrates his anniversary on 17 March, yet that same world has limited understanding of his story. It is a powerful and compelling story of bringing Christianity to Ireland and allowing it to blossom

in a land of saints and scholars at a time when it was threatened with extinction in Britain and the rest of Europe.

Patrick transcends all our historic quarrels in these islands and in particular within the two traditions in Northern Ireland. He is a unifying figure and his message is one of reconciliation. He was a Roman Briton, and as such was our greatest ever import. He is, and can be even more, our greatest ever export. In special parts of South Down, we hold the sites where Patrick first landed in Ireland and where he built his first church, the healing wells where he bathed, the place where he breathed his last, and the grave where he now rests.

I am confident about the future and the ability that we have to improve the economy and the living standards of our people. I will work positively here to achieve those objectives, but each week I know that I will be returning to a special place. I invite all Members here to visit South Down, and Downpatrick in particular, where they can walk in the footsteps of Patrick.

7.48 pm

Elizabeth Truss (South West Norfolk) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr Deputy Speaker, and may I congratulate the hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie) on her passionate advocacy of the economic development of her constituency? I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) on his advocacy of the importance of education programmes.

I am very grateful to be called in today's economy debate, as I believe that addressing the deficit and powering economic growth are the two most important things that this Government can do. I believe that South West Norfolk, and Norfolk as a whole, have a lot to offer in helping us to achieve those objectives.

The people of South West Norfolk are not afraid of hard work. Indeed, we are a forward-looking and self-reliant county. We are part of the east of England, which is one of the three regions in the country that puts more in the tax pot than it takes out of it. To carry on being a net contributor, however, we need to make sure that we have the necessary infrastructure and skills in our county, and that is what I am going to talk about today.

My predecessor, Christopher Fraser, worked hard on those issues—to secure further funding for the A11 and to protect Swaffham community hospital. He spoke out frequently on the issue of flood defences, which are important for members of our community, some of whom can use their road for only 200-odd days in the year because at other times it is closed due to flooding.

South West Norfolk is famous for some strong characters. Thomas Paine was born in Thetford—a man who started off revolutions on two continents. Boudicca was reputed to have had her base in Thetford as well. She led an uprising against the Romans. Sadly, when she left the county of Norfolk and moved on she was strategically outmanoeuvred at the battle of Watling street. That is not a fault that afflicted one of my other predecessors Gillian Shephard, now Baroness Shephard, who successfully steered many reforms through this House as a Minister for Agriculture and as Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

Agriculture is a huge part of the economy in South West Norfolk. We have the world's biggest sugar factory in Wissington; we also have some amazing arable production and pig production, and we are still enjoying the bounty of the asparagus crop. I have just been enjoying asparagus in the Tea Room and I hope that it was Norfolk asparagus. If it was not, I will certainly be working to make sure that it is in future. Agriculture faces problems, not least the Rural Payments Agency, which I want to work to reform, particularly the mapping exercise, which has caused many farmers in South West Norfolk utter consternation.

We have two other key market towns in South West Norfolk—Swaffham and Downham Market. I do not know whether hon. Members have heard of the pedlar of Swaffham. He came to London to look for treasure, but he found out that the treasure was in Swaffham all along. I can tell the House that there is much more treasure to be unearthed in Swaffham—its tourism industry and its energy industry. Downham Market is another fine town that used to boast orchards. It is still a centre for agriculture, and now has a number of commuters living in the constituency, who travel to Cambridge, Kings Lynn and London. I shall be wanting to make their lives easier by seeking improvements to that train line.

The constituency stretches from the fens to the brecks and right down to the Suffolk border. In all those areas various business are tucked away. We have innovative businesses producing fuel from cooking oil, high-tech lasers and airport scanning equipment. It is amazing the things one finds. All those businesses tell me the same thing. They are frustrated with dealing with too many Government agencies, a plethora of initiatives, and too much red tape. They also want action on the creaking infrastructure in Norfolk and say that we need more specialist skills. That is why, together with my Norfolk colleagues, I shall be fighting for dualling of the A11 from the fiveways roundabout to Thetford.

I notice that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor mentioned earlier that he wanted to put money where there was a high-level economic return. I can tell the Minister that there is a benefit-cost ratio of 19 for this project, so it is of high value. It will unlock more growth in Norfolk. We also want to see a successful conclusion to the train franchise agreements, and of course broadband rolled out across the county.

The other thing that I will be pushing for is an overhaul of our qualifications system. Like everywhere else in the country, the economy of South West Norfolk has changed. With increased automation, we now have more highly skilled jobs. A typical farm now employs an eighth of the employees that it did 40 years ago, but those employees are in highly technically skilled and business management roles. We need to ensure that we educate people for those jobs. That is why I want to look to our great universities to lead on academic qualifications. I have previously called for maths and science to move from geek to chic. Never has this been more important, and I will be pressing for that.

I also want to see employers lead in on-the-job skills, because people get a passion for work and a sense of craftsmanship from watching someone who cares about it doing the job. I will be fighting for that to make sure that those people, not bureaucrats, are in charge of setting our qualifications.

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech today. I am truly grateful. I know that we have the right policies and that the will is

[Elizabeth Truss]

there among those on our Front Bench. We can make not just Norfolk a powerhouse but the whole of Britain a powerhouse for the future of our economy.

7.55 pm

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech. I congratulate other hon. Members on their maiden speeches. I have learned a lot; I have enjoyed them much, but I particularly look forward to a supply of that asparagus.

After 30 years living in my constituency, I am proud to be an adopted Teessider, and even more proud to represent the people of Billingham, Norton, much of Stockton and the surrounding villages. My Stockton North constituency has a long history as an industrial hothouse, with engineering, chemical manufacture and shipbuilding. Work with metal for building ships and some of the world's most famous bridges has always been at the centre of our community. Even just two weeks ago, we saw the world's largest marine pipe-laying machine loaded on board a ship and exported to the far east. Built in my constituency by IHC Engineering, it will subsequently be deployed in the Gulf of Mexico and off the Brazilian coast, laying pipe lines for, among others, BP, Exxon-Mobil and Shell.

The metal work also has its links with the Houses of Parliament. Every time I hear Big Ben strike, it reminds me of home. The original bell was cast in Calf Fallow lane, just 400 yards from my back fence. The history books say that the people of London cheered the bell through the streets, but sadly it never took its place in the Clock Tower, as it cracked under testing. I hope, Mr Deputy Speaker, that the same does not happen to me.

We have seen many changes in our local economy. Substantial investment by the regional development agency One NorthEast has helped business and industry in Stockton not just to play to its strengths but to diversify into all manner of things from financial services to 21st-century digital businesses. Investment in education and training has also brought big dividends, and I only hope that the investment continues, and that the new Government's plans to change the RDA do not render it useless.

My constituency is famous for many other things. Stockton is home to one end of the world's first railway line. The town boasts the widest high street in England. John Walker invented the friction match in his high street shop, and the town is home to one of Europe's premier arts festivals, the Stockton international riverside festival. We are also celebrating the 700th anniversary of our market charter this year.

Billingham developed from a small village to a large town during the ICI era on Teesside. It also boasts a festival of its own—the international folklore festival, now in its 46th year. The people of Billingham are also famous for taking on the might of the nuclear industry in the shape of Nirex, which wanted to dump hundreds of thousands of tonnes of medium-level radioactive waste under their homes in a disused anhydrite mine. Their campaign "Billingham against the nuclear dump" was successfully led by my predecessor Frank Cook, then a new MP himself. It was the biggest constituency campaign he was involved in during his 27 years as the Member of Parliament for Stockton North. Many hon. Members will remember Frank Cook as a Deputy Speaker in Westminster Hall, and for his work with NATO. I will remember him as a dedicated champion of genuine asylum seekers, helping to protect many of them from torture or death, which they would have ultimately suffered if they had returned to their home country.

Education is my particular interest, and I am extremely proud of the success of many schools in my constituency. They have delivered outstanding success for our children and young people. Much has been achieved, but much remains to be done. As Stockton borough council lead member for children and young people, I was privileged to oversee the work to develop the Building Schools for the Future programme across the borough. Opposition Members share my anxiety that the biggest single investment in education ever is now subject to review and could be cut. I remain hopeful, however, that the new Government will soon end the speculation over BSF and help us transform teaching and learning in the kind of facilities of which we can all be proud.

A co-ordinated approach to delivering integrated services for our children and young people is essential as we go forward. The safeguarding of our children must be central to that work, yet there has been little mention of it from the new Government, except for a statement promising a review and a cut in bureaucracy. We have seen the high-profile cases of recent years, and they illustrate the need for safeguarding of our children to remain one of the highest priorities for national and local government alike. While every failure is a disaster for a child or a young person, we must not lose sight of the daily work of our local authorities and social workers, often working against the odds to deliver success in the most difficult of circumstances.

Much of our talk these days is about reducing spending, but I hope the Secretary of State for Education and the Chancellor will deliver real resources in developing education in our schools on budgeting. It is a critical area in which support is needed for young people and many families, to help them manage their income and not fall into the hands of loan sharks, both legal and illegal. There are people in my constituency who pay for their television £1 at a time through a slot meter, and end up paying for their television several times over. There are others who, believing that there is nowhere else to go, take out loans with extreme interest rates, and often struggle just to meet the interest payments. I will work here to put an end to that "legal loan shark" practice, which devastates so many lives, and help people find affordable credit through credit unions or other means.

Higher education is also important to my constituency, and Stockton boasts of being a university town. Durham university on the south bank of the River Tees falls in the Stockton South constituency. I know, however, that the university harbours an ambition to expand student numbers and move across our new Infinity bridge and on to the north shore and into Stockton North. I hope that ambition is realised.

I firmly believe that a healthy community can be a learning and economically vibrant community that can achieve great things in developing an exciting future. In recent times, we have seen improvements in the health of some of our neediest communities across the country, and in my own constituency. I hope we will see that

improvement continue, with our planned new hospital given the go-ahead. I also hope that the new Government will recognise the huge benefits that continued investment in integrated education, social care and other services for children and young people can bring. Many children and adults in my constituency still face the toughest of circumstances, and could suffer most under the cuts proposed by the Government. I hope I can serve them well by highlighting the issues affecting their lives, and persuading all who will listen that people like them need us in their corner.

8.2 pm

Nick Boles (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and for giving me the opportunity to address this House for the first time. I start by congratulating hon. Members who have just concluded their maiden speeches. I hope that, after six hours here, they enjoyed the experience, and I hope the House will forgive me if the microphones pick up the mild rumbling of my stomach at this late hour in the evening.

I should like to thank my predecessor, Quentin Davies, for his long record of service. He worked hard for the people of south-west Lincolnshire, and played a crucial role in securing the future of Grantham hospital when it was under threat. It is therefore with a heavy heart that I report to the House the shocking truth about Mr Davies's recent ordeal. Three years ago he was kidnapped by a brutal and unscrupulous gang. As a political prisoner, he was spared no indignity. He was even forced to sign a statement hailing the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown) as

"a leader, who is entirely straightforward, who has a towering record, and a clear vision for the future of our country".

Last week, Mr Davies suffered the final humiliation—exile to the House of Lords. We can only imagine his anguish as he protested his belief in a fully elected second Chamber and his scorn for titles and other baubles. I hope that the House will join me in sending our condolences to the newly ennobled Lord as he starts his life sentence on the red leather Benches.

I feel immensely lucky to be representing south-west Lincolnshire in Parliament. Nowhere in the country is there a town more lovely than Stamford, but living in a place of ancient beauty creates its own challenges. Stamford's residents have to work out how to preserve their town for future generations, while finding a way to live and work and have fun in the 21st century. I would not presume to tell them how to strike that balance—but I can think of no place better equipped to run its own affairs without interference from regional commissars in Nottingham and planning gauleiters in Bristol.

North-east of Stamford is Bourne, a small town that boasts two great secondary schools, Robert Manning technology college and Bourne grammar. Together, they demonstrate that selective education, where it is well established and accepted by parents, can provide children of all abilities with superb teaching. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education has also invited outstanding selective schools to become academies.

At the northern tip of the constituency is Grantham. The first thing one sees on approaching the town is the magnificent spire of St. Wulfram's, but it is not church architecture that has made Grantham world famous. It is not even Sir Isaac Newton, who grew up nearby in Woolsthorpe manor and discovered gravity while snoozing in its orchard. Grantham achieved global celebrity because of Margaret Thatcher. Thirty years ago, she smashed through the glass ceiling in this House, and gave us all a master class in true grit. I pay tribute to her today.

Traditionally, Grantham was an engineering town. I believe it can be so again if we learn from the mistakes of the past. In 1905, Richard Hornsby and Sons of Grantham invented the revolutionary caterpillar track. By 1914, Hornsbys had only sold one caterpillar vehicle, so they transferred the patent to the Holt Manufacturing Company of California for $8,000. Thanks in part to this patent, Holt became Caterpillar Inc. and went on to dominate the global market in construction and mining equipment. What haunts me about that story is that none of us is surprised by it. We have ground-breaking research, brilliant design, even watertight patents, yet the conversion of that technological potential into orders and jobs often passes us by. If we are to restore our economic fortunes, we must change that. I spent the best part of 10 years running a small business, making paintbrushes and rollers. I will not pretend that I made a huge success of it, but it did help me understand the challenges facing modern manufacturing. I am determined to help others who make a living by making things.

Thank you for your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like to conclude with a few words to Labour Members. We disagree about much and will have fierce battles in the years to come, but I will never forget what they, and their recently departed colleagues, did for gay women and gay men such as me. I would not be standing here today if they had not passed legislation to extend full equality and respect to everyone in Britain—and thereby entrench a change in culture and attitudes that my own party has now embraced. This was the Labour party at its best: brave, principled and humane. I thank and salute it, and hope that some day in this place I will have the chance to do something as good.

8.8 pm

Naomi Long (Belfast East) (Alliance): Thank you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am honoured to address the House for the first time, on behalf of my constituency of Belfast East, where I have lived all my life. I want to thank the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) for his speech, particularly his words about the importance of equality and respect, and I congratulate all those Members who made their maiden speeches today. I only wish that they had set the bar slightly lower for those of us who have to follow.

In preparing for today I read the maiden speech that my predecessor, Peter Robinson, delivered here in 1979, when the troubles in Northern Ireland were at their height—a fact that was reflected in his remarks to the House on that occasion. While our political perspectives are distinctively different, I want to pay tribute to him for his 31 years of dedicated service to the constituency as Member of Parliament, and particularly for his contribution in recent years, as First Minister, to making Northern Ireland an immeasurably more stable and peaceful place than the one to which he referred in his maiden speech. I wish him well as he continues in that important role.

It is a convention to introduce one's constituency to the House in a maiden speech, but perhaps I could also briefly introduce my party, as the first Alliance party

[Naomi Long]

member to be elected to the House. Alliance was formed in 1970 by people from across the traditional religious and political divide who were committed to healing the deep-seated sectarian divisions in our community. They recognised that there was much more that united the people of Northern Ireland than divided them; that any change to the constitutional position of Northern Ireland required the consent of those who live there; and that power sharing would ultimately form the basis of any political agreement.

Unfortunately, it was an idea ahead of its time and the past 40 years have been marked by failed attempts to realise those aspirations. However, now, with a functioning Assembly, based on those same principles and endorsed by the overwhelming majority of people, the quality of the original idea has been proven. Importantly, however, those people also offered a vision of a better future for all the people of Northern Ireland. In doing so, they gave hope to people such as me, growing up in circumstances where both vision and hope were in short supply.

The work of tackling prejudice in all its forms is still critical if we are not only to maintain progress but to create an open, welcoming and diverse community in which diversity is respected and celebrated, and in which we can fully realise our potential, both economically and socially. I thank my constituents for endorsing that commitment to a shared future when they elected me. I look forward to serving them in this new role and will endeavour to live up to the trust that they have placed in me.

Stretching from the River Lagan, through the terraced streets of the inner city of Belfast East, outwards to the suburbs and the beautiful Castlereagh hills beyond, my constituency is home to Parliament Buildings and so has provided the backdrop for many dramatic moments in political life in Northern Ireland. It is also a constituency with a rich cultural, sporting and industrial heritage and, as a result, there are many famous names associated with it, such as C.S. Lewis, Van Morrison and George Best, to name only a few.

Perhaps the most famous name of all associated with Belfast East is not that of a person but that of a ship, the Titanic, the ill-fated White Star liner that was at the time the largest and most luxurious ship ever built, and is surely now the most renowned. She was constructed at a time when Harland and Wolff was the largest shipyard in the world. Gustav Wolff was a partner not only in Harland and Wolff but in the east Belfast-based Belfast Rope Works, one of the largest rope works in the world. Among his other enterprises, Gustav Wolff also found time to serve as a Member of Parliament for East Belfast, so I have quite a lot to live up to.

That industrial heritage marked out the east of the city for many years, but with the decline in shipbuilding and manufacturing it also cast a huge shadow over my constituency. Our experiences in that respect were not dissimilar to those of many industrial cities. However, our difficulties were compounded by the ongoing violence and political instability, which hampered the economic rebalancing that was required. Thankfully, with the changed political fortunes of Northern Ireland, there are huge opportunities for regeneration and growth and the site of that shipyard remains a significant economic driver. Once fully occupied by the shipbuilding industry, it is now the largest waterfront redevelopment site in Europe: Titanic Quarter. When completed, it will transform the 185-acre site into a new mixed-use maritime quarter, with the potential to create upwards of 25,000 new jobs over the next 15 years. The Titanic signature project, set to open ahead of the centenary of the Titanic in 2012, will allow east Belfast to showcase and celebrate its linkage with Titanic to the growing number of tourists visiting the area. That anniversary offers my constituents something more significant than merely an opportunity to reflect on past glory—it offers inspiration and opportunity for a future generation.

What made the constituency a world-class centre of industry, innovation and imagination was not its factories, its rope works or its shipyard, but its people. Their creativity, resourcefulness and hard work remain our most important resource today and are the key to unlocking the potential of the constituency, particularly for those young people growing up in disadvantaged communities.

Today's debate about economic issues and challenges is a fitting context in which to introduce my constituency to the House, as it was once an economic powerhouse, which I believe it has the potential to be again. The challenge that faces us is how we realise that potential in the current economic difficulties. A very sizeable proportion of my constituents are employed in the public sector and severe cuts to public expenditure will have a disproportionate effect there. That is of concern not only to those directly employed in the public sector but to the many others whose small businesses depend on it to stay afloat.

The Government have indicated that they do not want to divide the country or to target the most vulnerable with the cuts that are ahead. However, to a degree the country is already divided economically, with regions such as Northern Ireland lagging behind others, despite our best efforts. To avoid widening that gap, we must be sensitive to regional differences, and to the particular challenges faced by Northern Ireland as we emerge from years of conflict. To do otherwise would risk the best opportunity for growth that we have had for a generation. If the proposed cuts are too deep and too swift, and are not balanced by job creation, there is a serious risk of simply moving many of my constituents out of productive public sector employment into the welfare system, which will do nothing to protect public services for the vulnerable, to generate growth in the private sector or to raise aspirations, dignity and confidence.

In closing, I fully recognise the enormity of the challenges ahead. I believe that my constituency has the potential to play a significant role in the economic recovery not just of Northern Ireland, but of the UK as a whole. I simply ask that the Government, as they formulate their plans, exercise caution and wisdom, so that we in Belfast East have the necessary support, space and opportunity to play that role to the full.

8.15 pm

Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to give my maiden speech. Some Members may know that I am a skydiver. I am happy to tell the House that this is far more terrifying than two miles of air and a hardstop.

I congratulate those hon. Members who have spoken before me. I was particularly encouraged by the words of the hon. Member for Belfast East (Naomi Long). When I served in the Royal Air Force, Belfast was a name perhaps to strike terror into our hearts, but I am very encouraged that today, with the Alliance party, the hon. Lady is healing divisions and has a positive story to tell.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) on a very charming speech, and I am sure that he suits his constituency very well. Having lived there for a number of years, I know that it is a charming place and I congratulate him on his win.

It is a great honour to enter this House and I am grateful to the people of the historic constituency of Wycombe for sending me here. I very much look forward to serving them. Throughout my campaign, I was strictly forbidden to quote Disraeli, as he fought the constituency at least three times I think, and lost. Today, as we are in coalition, it is my great pleasure to use this perhaps well known quote from a campaign speech in High Wycombe:

"I am a Conservative to preserve all that is good in our constitution, a Radical to remove all that is bad. I seek to preserve property and to respect order, and I equally decry the appeal to the passions of the many or the prejudices of the few."

In representing Wycombe, I well understand Disraeli's sentiments and his reasons for writing "Sybil or The Two Nations".

Wycombe is a constituency of astonishing diversity and contrast and yet unity in adversity. From the wealth and beauty of the Hambleden valley, through the tougher areas of the town—some Conservative Members do represent constituencies with pockets of severe deprivation—to the affluence of Tylers Green and Hazlemere, from the stoic Buckinghamshire traditionalists of old Wycombe to our large ethnic communities, Wycombe is a microcosm of contemporary Britain. I am proud to represent an area that defies expectations and encapsulates contemporary Britain.

The most consistent theme of my candidacy was, above all, the tribute to my predecessor, and I feel I can scarcely do him justice. Paul Goodman enjoyed the respect and admiration of all sections of the community, his parliamentary colleagues on both sides of the House and his party. He set out aspiring to Sir Ray Whitney's qualities of shrewdness, courtesy, unselfishness and kindness. I know that Paul surpassed his own aims and that this House will miss him. Paul's top priority was Wycombe hospital, and I have to say for the benefit of the *Bucks Free Press* that it will be my top campaigning priority. I mean that sincerely; no other issue compares to it, in terms of its ability to create anxiety and concern.

As a trustee of a charity for economic education, I would like to give what is perhaps an alternative perspective on the cause of the banking crisis; I hope that Members will indulge me. I should like to put to them a proposition that is uncontroversial: around the world, the system of money is a product of the state. Our monetary system is characterised by private banking, with a fractional reserve controlled by a central bank, which determines monetary policy and has a monopoly on the issue of legal tender. A Monetary Policy Committee sets interest rates.

The banks have the legal privilege of treating depositors' money as their own. In the words of Irving Fisher,

"our national circulating medium is now at the mercy of loan transactions of banks".

In the other place, in the Banking Bill debate of 5 February 2009, the Earl of Caithness explained eloquently the base of 19th-century judicial decisions—and yes, our system of money has evolved since then—that enabled that situation to take place. He called it

"the fault which has led to every major banking and currency crisis during the past 200 years, including this one."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 5 February 2009; Vol. 707, c. 774.]

The Bank Charter Act 1844 ended the practice of banks over-issuing notes, but it left them virtually unmolested in their ability to issue deposit currency to be drawn by cheque. That loophole haunts us today. Unlike the situation in respect of any other commodity, in the case of money, price controls do not drive the product off the market. Artificially lowered interest rates increase the demand for credit, and decrease the supply of savings, but the legal privilege granted to banks means that they can meet demand by extending credit that is unbacked by real savings. There is a good argument to say that that causes the boom-and-bust cycle, the misdirection of resources in the capital structure of production, and over-consumption by consumers. That is the biggest problem that we face today.

We could talk about the moral hazard of having a state-backed lender of last resort and state deposit guarantees, and of the socialisation of the cost of failure; I only wish that I had time to touch on the accounting rules on derivatives. Perhaps that is for another day. My political hero, Richard Cobden, spoke on the subject. He held

"all idea of regulating the currency to be an absurdity",

but I see that time is short; I shall have to save the rest of the quote for another day.

Today, money is a product of the state. The Bank of England controls the price, quantity and quality of money. Perhaps if we were talking about any other commodity, there would be far less confusion over and questioning of the cause of the crisis. If money is a product of the state, we should ask ourselves, "Is this a good idea?"

In the coalition, we have a Government ideally suited to be conservative to preserve what is good, but radical to change all that is bad. If we are to have a once-in-a-generation, fundamental review of the role of government, let us also examine government's role in the system of money and bank credit.

8.23 pm

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Congratulations on your tenure in your post, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker) on his lesson; I am sure that those in the financial services across the world will read *Hansard* with interest tomorrow. I particularly congratulate the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles). The equality issues that he raised at the end of his speech are ones on which the House is stronger when it works together, and I will welcome the opportunity to take those matters forward with him.

It is an honour and a privilege to stand in this great Chamber of democracy and represent the people of Edinburgh South. My constituents have placed tremendous faith in me, and I will certainly be putting their views, hopes and aspirations forcefully.

[Ian Murray]

Edinburgh South is a diverse constituency stretching from the old mining villages of Gilmerton to the leafy suburbs of Morningside and beyond. Some literary geniuses that hon. Members may recognise live in the constituency—Ian Rankin, Alexander McCall Smith and, of course, J.K. Rowling lived but a stone's throw from each other in the heart of the constituency. Those literary geniuses are complemented by a large student population, people in academia, public service workers and people in the professions.

The southern part of what is called the Athens of the north was represented in this House for over 100 years by the Conservatives. The area has had many distinguished Conservative Members of Parliament, including Sir William Darling, the great-uncle of the shadow Chancellor. The seat was last held for the Conservatives by the right hon. former Member for Devizes, the Earl of Ancram, who, in 1979, defeated a certain Gordon Brown.

The Earl of Ancram lost Edinburgh South to my predecessor, Nigel Griffiths, and I am delighted to be given this opportunity to pay tribute to him. Nigel was without doubt one of the most hard-working constituency MPs in this House. His dedication to serving his constituents was second to none, and his mantra that everyone knew someone he had helped is certainly true. He leaves behind a long legacy of how a Member of this House should serve, and a couple of other things, too. If anyone has had the unenviable pleasure of campaigning with Nigel and his infamous megaphone, they will know legendary megaphone phrases such as, "Don't leave it to the folks next door," and "We are knocking on your door now," the latter said just as his finger reached the bell. Those are aspects of campaigning that I hope Nigel will continue to employ for many years to come. Nigel was also well known for championing the cause of the disabled and the most vulnerable, and I know he will continue to do that outside this House.

Edinburgh was one of the major centres of the enlightenment, led by world-famous institutions based in south Edinburgh. One of them was the university of Edinburgh, a research-led university with an international reputation. It has long held a principal place in science and engineering research, which is based in King's Buildings. It has world experts in biological science, chemistry, engineering, geosciences, informatics, mathematics and physics. The university of Edinburgh and the other fine academic institutions in Edinburgh hold much of the intellectual property for what could be a modern enlightenment in science, innovation and green technology, and that must be wholeheartedly supported by Government. The Chancellor's announcement that he will cut 10,000 university places as part of his £6 billion of so-called efficiencies will do nothing to help our universities to flourish and our economy to grow. There will be a significant knock-on effect for universities in my constituency.

The royal observatory in Edinburgh South houses the UK's national centre for the production of state-of-the-art astronomical technology. I recently visited it to see the people there making lenses for the most technologically advanced telescopes in the world. They are training them now on the Liberal Democrats to see if they can find anything left of the principles that they stood on in the election.

Edinburgh South also boasts the new Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, a state-of-the-art teaching hospital built by Labour, and now the centrepiece of plans for the largest biomedical park in Europe. For 150 years, the Royal hospital for sick children has been caring for children in Edinburgh and beyond.

This week is Erskine week. Erskine has provided nursing and medical care for former members of our armed forces for over 100 years, rebuilding shattered lives, restoring dignity and providing first-class care to ex-servicemen and women, both young and old. The Erskine facilities in my constituency are well worth a visit.

I am fortunate to have been elected Member of Parliament for a constituency that boasts some of the best state schools in the country, with the most dedicated and dynamic head teachers and staff. Added to that, there is a plethora of faith and charity groups, which contribute so much to our community.

My constituents are well informed by the wonderful *Edinburgh Evening News*, a bastion of all that is truth in the Edinburgh journalistic community since 1873. I know that because one of their journalists wrote this paragraph for me.

Many of my constituents work in financial services—banking has been part of Edinburgh's economic life for over 300 years. The devastation to the Edinburgh economy if our banks were left to collapse, as championed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, would be incalculable. Time after time, issue after issue on the economy, the Tories called it wrong, and put my constituents at risk. The intervention by the Labour Government, led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Mr Darling), laid the foundations for a worldwide economic turnaround that saved many thousands of jobs for people in my constituency while protecting their savings. The Conservatives have been in government only a matter of days, but we have seen a massive £6.2 billion cut—what they describe as efficiency savings.

Ultimately, this is not a real Tory-Lib Dem coalition; this is a personal relationship between the Prime Minister and his deputy. The coalition is held together by the unnatural empathy and their deep, deep comfort in each other's personalities, politics and background: two peas from the same pod. In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher claimed that the Liberal Prime Minster William Gladstone would have felt very much at home with the dominant ideology of the Conservative party. I am convinced that the Deputy Prime Minister would fit in very well, too.

I would like to conclude by paying tribute to my mother, who taught me the values that I hold dear. I was born and brought up on the Wester Hailes council estate in Edinburgh. When my father died suddenly at the age of 39 from a brain haemorrhage, my mother was left with my 13-year-old brother and me, aged just nine. She was written off by the Conservative Government of the day. My mother and many others like her who lived around us were left to fend for themselves, through no fault of their own, when they needed their Government most. I saw first-hand communities ripped apart to the resonance of cheap political soundbites. The first few weeks of this Conservative Government show that they have not changed, and I will fight tooth and nail to ensure that the communities I represent in Edinburgh South do not suffer the excesses of Tory ideology again. I owe that to them, and I certainly owe it to my mother.

8.30 pm

Mike Crockart (Edinburgh West) (LD): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech. I want to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker) for his considerable knowledge of the banking industry. I cannot wait to hear more about that in future debates. It is slightly difficult for me to follow the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray)—we are starting to become slightly Edinburgh-centric, with the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Sheila Gilmore) hopefully still to make a contribution this evening—because I can no longer mention the *Edinburgh Evening News*. The journalist mentioned by the hon. Member for Edinburgh South wrote the same paragraph for me.

My predecessor, John Barrett, is taking a well-deserved rest after more than quarter of a century of public service, having represented the many people of Edinburgh West on community councils, city councils and, latterly, as its MP for nine years. He was a local business man and entrepreneur. In that spirit, he sold this job to me as being the best in the world. It has certainly been the most exciting in the first four weeks—even more exciting than my first few weeks as a green probationer in Lothian and Borders police.

In his time, John met many interesting people, including the Queen and Dolly Parton. I will let the House into a secret—it was the photograph of Dolly Parton that hung on the wall in the office. The seat has a well-established Liberal history, and I join a select but growing group, including my hon. Friends the Members for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) and for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) by being a third—or perhaps even more—generation Liberal MP. We are joined, too, by my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Stephen Gilbert). That Lib Dem legacy is established through the quality of service given to our constituents, in my case in Edinburgh West, and an absolute commitment to them.

I have deliberately chosen this debate on economic affairs in which to make my first contribution. My constituency is immensely diverse, taking in areas of great affluence as well as areas of great poverty. Historic villages such as Corstorphine, Davidsons Mains and Cramond are now subsumed in the Edinburgh sprawl, as well as modern housing estates such as Muirhouse. Residential Barnton as well as rural Ratho and Kirkliston. The constituency is a key player in the powerhouse that is the Edinburgh economy, boasting within its boundaries some of Scotland's most iconic and important brands and businesses, which have brought prosperity to Edinburgh and, indeed, to Scotland. Some of them, however, have been at the centre of the catastrophic events of the past two years and that has resulted in many thousands of people losing their jobs in Scotland.

There are many, many community groups in Edinburgh West, from those conducting community litter picks in South Queensferry or on Cramond beach to those fighting to protect the integrity and boundaries of Corstorphine hill. The Carrickvale community centre provides services to older and young constituents, and the Gylemuir Community Association does a similar job. Thousands of people are actively improving their communities all over Edinburgh West.

I am in the middle of the summer gala season—for the benefit of the English in the Chamber, I should explain that is a fête. On Saturday, along with thousands of others, accompanied, surprisingly for Scotland, by the sun, I attend the Corstophine fair—the largest community-run event in Edinburgh, and perhaps in Scotland. In it was a programme bursting with entertainment, kids' activities and community displays, as well as the usual stalls to give people a chance to meet those behind the many community groups across the constituency. At the end of that, I officiated at the tug-of-war event, where two teams battled it out for victory. There was much name calling, shouting and huge efforts in blood, sweat and ultimately tears before both teams claimed a moral victory, at the very least. It reminded me a great deal of the past four weeks on this side of the House.

Edinburgh West is also a centre for many varied Scottish, British and internationally renowned companies. I have already found that across the business sector too, there is unity and solidarity in the adversity that we face, and I am immensely lucky that in these difficult times, Edinburgh West has a shared aim and a sense of team spirit. So as we rightly place more emphasis on industries such as biotechnology and the engineering of exciting new marine energy solutions, we should not forget two other priority industry sectors in Scotland, which have contributed significantly to the success of the Scottish and UK economies in the past decade. I refer to tourism and the financial services, two sectors in which my constituency has flourished.

Edinburgh airport, the gateway from mainland Europe not only for Edinburgh but for Scotland more generally, has 320 flights a day and 20,000 passengers, and those numbers are climbing. It is opening up new routes all the time—for example, to Marrakesh and many others announced in February. This is to be commended, as the more direct routes we have, the less wasteful travel we have through the London hubs of Heathrow and Gatwick. Add to this the potential for a much-needed high speed rail link with London, and we will see a continuing healthy picture for Scottish tourism and business, boosted by the year-round reputation of Edinburgh as a festival city.

I must not forget Edinburgh zoo when talking about tourism. In his maiden speech my predecessor joked about representing more penguins than any other Member in the House, and I am proud to say that that is still the case, but I can now add to that list of animals and say that I am the only MP in the UK to represent koalas. Should present plans come to fruition, I hope to be standing here in five years' time as the only person representing pandas.

The financial services sector is a major sector in Edinburgh West, employing many people, but I shall move on as time is defeating me. Understandably, many of those working in the financial services sector and banking in particular fear the banking reform that must surely come. They should be reassured that the aim of that reform is to make their jobs more secure, not less. I will work closely with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills to ensure that that happens.

I conclude by quoting my Conservative opponent during the recent contest, who said—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That was a fine maiden speech, but we must move on to the next maiden speech. I am pleased to call Chi Onwurah.

8.37 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the honour to follow so many excellent maiden speeches.

I would like to start by paying tribute to my predecessor. To be able to say on the doorsteps of Newcastle upon Tyne Central that I was the new Jim Cousins was a huge asset. Perhaps one in five constituents knew him personally, and had a tale to tell about how he had helped them. As a constituency MP, he could not be bettered. He was also a champion of Newcastle and the north-east, and his long service on the Treasury Committee was of great benefit to his country and his city. His role in saving Northern Rock will be long remembered.

In the boundary review, Newcastle Central gained the wards of Elswick and Benwell and Scotswood from the old Tyne Bridge constituency. I want to thank David Clelland for his dedication to his constituents in those historic areas of my city.

The Romans chose Newcastle as the lowest bridging point of the Tyne, and later built Hadrian's wall, which runs through the constituency. In the centuries that followed, we guarded England from the attacks of Scottish raiders. How times change! But as a port, we were ever open for trade. Newcastle played a huge part in the major industries—wool, salt, shipbuilding, coal and engineering. We were at the leading edge of the first industrial revolution.

If history is merely the story of great men, I need mention only some of Newcastle's favoured sons to prove our place: Earl Grey, who has found such favour on the Government Benches; Armstrong, the great industrialist and founder of Newcastle university; and my own hero and fellow engineer, Stephenson, who built the railways.

But I believe that it is the contribution of those whose names are not recorded that it is most important to remember. It was the unnamed, ordinary men and women of Newcastle who built the ships that enabled this small island to wield global influence. My own grandfather worked in the shipyards of the Tyne. The men and women of Newcastle built the trade union and Labour movements, to which we owe so many of our working and voting rights. They built the co-operative and the Fairtrade movements, which combined the best of international idealism and local realism. Closer to home, they fought to protect the unique environment that is the heart, or rather the lung, of Newcastle.

Newcastle's town moor is justly famous—a vast expanse of open moorland, kept in common and grazed by herds of cows. In London, cows in the centre of the city are considered installation art. In Newcastle, our councillors debate the future of our city within spitting distance of cowpats, an arrangement that I recommend to the House as ensuring a grass-roots sense of perspective.

With this history and community, it is no wonder that I felt a huge sense of privilege growing up in Newcastle. Yes, we were a one-parent family on a poor working-class estate, North Kenton, but good local schools, great public services, great housing and the health service meant that I could fulfil my ambition of becoming an engineer. But just as I was deciding to enter engineering, the country was deciding to leave it behind. We were going to become a service economy. I believe in a strong service sector, but time has shown that an exclusive focus on services left our country weaker. Certainly, I had to spend much of my career abroad. Still, I saw first hand the devastation brought about by the loss of the great northern industries of mining, shipbuilding and steel—whole communities robbed of a purpose. Let us be clear, that loss was not just a north-east loss; it was the country's loss. Although we remain the sixth largest manufacturing economy in the world, building and making things is no longer a part of our culture. That has to change.

I know that I should not touch upon controversial subjects, which is why I am so glad that what I am going to say is entirely uncontroversial. During the election, all parties were in agreement that the economy needs to be rebalanced in favour of manufacturing. Newcastle, with our great universities, specialising in medicine, design and engineering, our industrial heritage and strategic assets, has an essential role to play. We can help the UK to meet two of the great challenges that face us—securing sustainable energy resources and supporting an ageing population. These sectors need to be part of the new economy. We need to build up our science and manufacturing base and foster the spirit of innovation that led George Stephenson to invent the steam engine and make his fortune.

I know from my own experience that building a business takes vision, courage, blood, sweat and tears. But manufacturing is particularly difficult. It needs long-term investment. I recently visited BAE Systems and Metalspinners, two engineering firms in my constituency. I saw 60-tonne pressing and cutting machines that cost millions of pounds and are expected to last for decades. We must continue to help these companies invest. They need a strong public sector. They need apprenticeships, good transport links, a strong regional development agency and tax allowances for manufacturing and innovation.

We are a small country and it is no longer our ships that set the boundaries of the world. But even as a small country, we can set the direction of the new industrial revolution if we equip ourselves to grasp those opportunities, and I will fight to make sure that the Government do just that. My career in Parliament will be dedicated to ensuring that Newcastle upon Tyne Central is an economically and culturally vibrant contributor to the UK and the world.

8.45 pm

Joseph Johnson (Orpington) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me this evening. The six hours that I have been waiting have truly passed in a flash, such has been the quality of previous maiden speakers, including just now the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah). I should particularly like to associate myself with the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), who is sadly no longer in the Chamber, about the equalities agenda and gay rights.

At the outset, I should make a declaration, as we do a lot of that at the start of Parliaments. Anyone hoping that I will enliven proceedings in the manner of one of my elder brothers, the former Member for Henley, is likely to be disappointed. *Private Eye*, in the issue on

newsstands at the moment, has helped me to set expectations appropriately low. It quotes an unnamed Oxford contemporary, in the first of a series that it is doing on new Members, and that friendly Oxford contemporary of mine says:

"He could not be more different to Boris. It's as though the humour gene by-passed Jo altogether and he inherited only the ambition gene."

It is an absolutely fair comment, but I do not really apologise for the humour-ectomy, nor, indeed, for any hint of ambition that the House might detect, because these are serious times and politicians need to be ambitious when the country is in such a mess. History will not forgive us if we flannel around in the House over the next five years and fail to pick the economy up off the floor, where it is at present.

Orpington, the constituency that I am fortunate enough now to represent, has not troubled the House with a maiden speech for 40 years. I am tempted to give Members a double helping, but time will not allow it. That lengthy interlude has arisen because my distinguished predecessor, John Horam, began his parliamentary career not in the idyllic glades of northern Kent, but in the gritty Gateshead West area of Newcastle.

John Horam has the distinction, as many Members will know, of being the only Member to have served in all three parties. He was originally of course a Labour MP in Gateshead, but, disillusioned with Labour's leftward drift, he dallied with the Social Democratic party in the early '80s before eventually donning Conservative colours and becoming the MP for Orpington in 1992. By the time he came to give his maiden speech that year, he was of course no maiden, but as a liberal Conservative long before the genre became fashionable, he was at least ahead of his time.

That John's political journey—his odyssey, in some ways—culminated in Orpington of all places is entirely appropriate. After all, it was in Downe, one of the constituency's most picturesque villages, that the father of evolutionary biology propounded the earth-shaking theory of natural selection—the most important scientific breakthrough of the past 150 years. It is no surprise to me at all that the people of Orpington inspired Charles Darwin to come up with the concept of the survival of the fittest: meet them and one sees the very best that evolution has done with homo sapiens over the millennia.

Orpington is famous for much more than the man who debunked creationism. I shall not dwell too long on the "Buff Orpington" chicken, admired by poultry breeders for its gentle contours, colourful plumage and succulent breast meat; suffice it to say that they are easy layers, go broody very often and make great mothers. Would it be too much to expect the local Tesco superstore to stock it and support the breeders of that fine bird? I shall keep the House informed of my progress, but my office called Tesco this morning, and it does not currently stock that chicken.

If Orpington's contribution to science is beyond question, its place in the footnotes, if perhaps not the chapter headings, of British political history is no less assured. In 1954, for example, the constituency almost snuffed out the career of a young Mrs Thatcher. Having fought unwinnable seats in neighbouring Dartford, she sought the nomination for Orpington. In The Croft Tearoom in St Mary Cray, one of the more hard-on-its-luck areas of the constituency, can be found a fine photograph of the young Mrs Thatcher buying her daily milk from a horse and cart in an attempt to impress her local credentials on selectors. She was unsuccessful. Bitterly disappointed at how leading local Tories reckoned her candidacy incompatible with her role as a mother of twins, she wrote to central office to say that she was abandoning all thought of Parliament for many years. Needless to say, British politics would have been very different had she not relented.

I shall not dwell on counterfactuals, but one thing is certain: Orpington would not have gone on to become the totemic seat for the Liberals that it did in 1962 had Mrs Thatcher become our MP. The man who defeated her for the nomination resigned unexpectedly, triggering a famous by-election. A good Balliol man by the name of Eric Lubbock, representing the Liberals, scored an historic victory by overturning a very substantial Conservative majority and chalking up a Liberal gain in an area far away from his party's traditional heartlands in the west country and the Celtic fringe. The birth of Orpington man sparked a revival that marked the end of the Macmillan era and made Orpington a permanent fixture in Liberal folklore.

I come back to the present and the subject of this debate. The scale of the Conservative victory on 6 May, with its 60% share of the vote, was a resounding endorsement of the Conservative party's economic programme. The priority now is to achieve an accelerated reduction of the £156 billion deficit and it is one that I wholeheartedly support, as I support the creative and compassionate ways that I know the Government will use to go about that difficult task. The £6 billion of cuts already announced is barely a start in the process. I look forward to the emergency Budget on 22 June and the public consultations on the role of the state, which will follow.

As one who recently spent four years working in one of the fastest growing parts of Asia, with a ringside seat on the emerging economy that is India, I am fully aware of the challenges that globalisation presents to the British economy. I would like to use the time that I have in Parliament to help this country and Orpington constituency meet those challenges.

8.52 pm

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I congratulate hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches, particularly the hon. Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson), who should not be so self-deprecating. If it is in fact true that he has no sense of humour, someone has written him a great speech.

It is a great privilege to be only the fifth person to represent the Chesterfield constituency in Parliament in the past 80 years. The most recent of my predecessors was Paul Holmes, and I should like to start my maiden speech by reflecting on some of the strengths that he brought to the House in the nine years during which he served it. He was a diligent constituency Member of Parliament and a determined fighter for council housing, particularly through his membership of the Defend Council Housing group. As a former secondary school teacher, he was also an outspoken advocate of comprehensive schools and the teaching profession. As MP for an area that suffered a great deal from firms that went into liquidation with failed pension schemes, he consistently added his voice to those calling for a fair deal for those pensioners.

[Toby Perkins]

As a guide to the history of Chesterfield and as a commentary on the times, I also want to reflect on the maiden speeches of some of my other predecessors. Sir George Benson was a stalwart member of the Government who is still remembered fondly by some of Chesterfield's most experienced citizens. His first major address to the House was in 1931, when he controversially called for the end of flogging with the cat o' nine tails. I am pleased to inform the House that on the basis of an informal survey that I conducted during the recent election campaign, Sir George's stance against corporal punishment still enjoys some support.

In Eric Varley, a local miner's son who rose to the Cabinet and was posthumously given the freedom of the borough of Chesterfield, my constituency had a famous son who is fondly remembered across the borough. There is also, of course, Tony Benn, one of the greatest political figures of the 20th century, a man who bestrode the politics of his time as few can. I am mindful of those who have trodden this path before me in Chesterfield's name.

Chesterfield has made its mark in other ways than through political history. Despite the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), George Stephenson was actually from Chesterfield. Thanks to the vision of Bill Flanagan, the council leader for 27 years, an innovation centre now stands on the Stephenson family's former estate; new firms grow in new industries, overlooked by the grandfather of innovation.

Football fans will know of the town as the home of goalkeepers, with legends such as Gordon Banks, the England World cup-winning goalkeeper, before him Samuel Hardy, the England goalkeeper for 14 years at the end of the 19th century, and Bob Wilson, who served Arsenal, Scotland and sports broadcasting with tremendous distinction, all learning their trade in the town. Chesterfield football club, the Spireites, is a useful metaphor for the town, having had its moments in the hearts of the nation, as it did in 1997—a great year—when, as a third division club, it was cruelly denied a place in the FA cup final by a combination of the Old Trafford crossbar and a short-sighted football referee. Now, after a quiet period, the club gets ready to welcome the new season at the sparkling new B2net stadium—a brand new home on the north entrance to the town, and a symbol of the regeneration of Chesterfield.

The campaign that brought me here to represent the people of Chesterfield focused most strongly on jobs. With Junction 29A, or Skinner's Junction, a huge site open for business as a result of the tireless work of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner), working with Labour party councillors who have fought for the area for so long, such as John Williams, Walter Burrows and John Burrows, Chesterfield and north Derbyshire finally get the investment in jobs that we needed—indeed the biggest investment in the area since the pits were sunk.

As Chesterfield rebuilds its economic prosperity, tourism also plays an increasingly important part, our world-famous crooked spire being just the highlight. While it is true that the number of people drawing the dole is less than a quarter of those who did so at its peak in the '80s, thanks to the Labour Government's steps to save jobs during the recession, the need for skilled work for those who do not go to university, or for graduate and apprenticeship opportunities, is still keenly felt.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has stated that his purpose is to improve the quality of life for the worst-off in society so that they can play a part and, one hopes, pay tax themselves one day. No one on the Labour Benches would oppose that aspiration; indeed, it was that aspiration that led Labour, in the face of Conservative opposition, to introduce the national minimum wage and the tax credits system. The starting point in reducing benefit dependency is not an increase in the rhetoric against the unemployed, but an increase in work opportunities. It is therefore depressing that the coalition should choose the future jobs fund as one of the first examples of waste to be cut.

The Secretary of State is right to say that benefit recipients should be free to try to work their way off sickness-related benefits while retaining some security, as previewed by the previous Labour Government in the pathways to work pilot. No one could object to his intention to make benefits simpler and fairer, but surely one of the key reasons benefits are complicated is that so are the circumstances of people's lives. The current system at least attempted to reflect logically the complexities of ordinary people's lives, and the Secretary of State has not yet demonstrated how he can simplify the system without increasing unfairness; until he does, I will remain a sceptic. From my perspective, however, I will provide any support that I can to help him to convince his own party of the need to invest more in jobs, not in cutting them, and to understand that benefit recipients are more often the victims than the architects of their circumstances. Alongside a call for personal responsibility must come governmental responsibility to put job creation before the benefit cuts and to ensure that the most needy are not the victims of the simplification of benefit payments.

Chesterfield has a great deal going for it; under Labour, it improved so much. I came into politics to fight for the next generation of working opportunities for Chesterfield and Staveley—to fight inequality and to protect the public services that our people rely on. As I stand here in this magnificent place, bearing a dual responsibility, sent here to represent the people of Chesterfield and the Labour party, there is not a prouder man alive.

8.59 pm

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for inviting me to address the House this evening. We have already heard contributions of real quality from my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson) and the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins). I hope that I can fulfil the same degree of quality in the words that I say.

Being elected to represent the wonderful constituency of Macclesfield is the greatest honour of my career. I will seek tirelessly to serve the people of Macclesfield and to honour the trust that they have put in me. Sir Nicholas Winterton is like few other predecessors—he could hardly be described as shy, even when he was retiring. He served as a hard-working constituency MP in Macclesfield for more than 39 years and, being elected in my 40s, I can assure the House and Macclesfield residents that that is a record I will not break.

At the start of the campaign, I canvassed one very short street in which three people told me about the way in which Nick Winterton helped them with real problems in their lives. That is the sort of constituency MP he was. In the House, he was a strong, independent parliamentarian, who gave long and legendary service. He was respected on both sides of the House and by many others who work here. Whether I am in Macclesfield or in the House, people constantly say to me, "You've got a hard act to follow and big shoes to fill." Well, I wear size 11 shoes, so I am off to a reasonable start, but I have a lot to learn. I wish Sir Nicholas and Lady Winterton a long and fulfilling retirement.

Macclesfield is famous for silk. At one point, it was the world's biggest producer of finished silk, with more than 100 mills and dye houses in the constituency. The fine silk tie that I am wearing was woven in Macclesfield and I am proud to wear it. Today, revitalising Macclesfield town centre is a real priority. Local residents and traders will be consulted on how that should be done in the months ahead, but further development must celebrate the town's rich heritage and ideally be linked to the creation of a national silk centre in Macclesfield, where it belongs.

Macclesfield hospital is also an important priority in the community. Many people have fought to keep the accident and emergency and children's services at the hospital, and I will continue to fight to ensure that they stay there. Macclesfield is also home of the mighty Macclesfield Town football club and Macclesfield rugby club, and I am proud to say that we were crowned champions of the national league 2 this season. Our communities are served well by the active *Macclesfield Express*, Canalside Community Radio and Silk FM. We enjoy great rail links; some people might describe them as first class, but I am very happy to travel standard, like many hon. Members.

The history of Poynton, in the north of the constituency, is rooted in coal. Many residents work in Manchester and continue to enjoy the sense of community that Poynton offers. Traffic congestion is a real challenge, and one that I will tackle as a major priority. In the far north-east, the vibrant village of Disley lies at the edge of the hills next to the magnificent Lyme park. Bollington, once known for cotton, nestles below the wonderful White Nancy and is known locally as "Happy Valley." With its strong community spirit, it is easy to see why. Nearby Prestbury, sometimes famous for footballers, boasts one of the oldest parish churches in the country and has a magnificent conservation area.

As a keen walker and rock climber, I love spending time in the upland villages of the hill tribes of Kettleshulme, Rainow, Wildboarclough and Wincle. I also enjoy all that the Peak district has to offer in the east of the constituency. To the west, we move out to the fertile farmland of the Cheshire plain and the unique rural communities of Langley, Sutton, Gawsworth, Marton and Lower Withington. I will work to protect that beautiful countryside and support our farmers and those rural communities, which were overlooked for far too long by the previous Government.

The most impressive thing about the great part of Cheshire that I represent is the warm, generous, hard-working and enterprising people who work and live there. We have well-known residents who have achieved their aims in the world of commerce and industry, and famous footballers. We also have other heroes, who are mostly unsung and work selflessly in the community: our doctors, nurses and policemen and the volunteers who work actively in our churches, in the local talking newspaper, in the MAST—the medical and surgical trust—hospital appeal, at East Cheshire hospice, for the Gateway Project in Poynton and for the Friends of Bollington Recreation Ground, to name but a few. Those people genuinely inspire me and do so much for our area.

Let me turn to the debate in hand. Since the war, Macclesfield has turned from its focus on silk to pharmaceuticals, with ICI and now AstraZeneca. AstraZeneca demonstrates that we can still innovate, develop and make things in this country and, in turn, the pharmaceutical industry shows that we can compete in global markets. However, too many local businesses have announced job losses in recent years, and the latest announcement—of 250 job losses—came today from the Cheshire building society.

We have to get this economy working again, which means that we must focus on reducing the deficit. When I had the honour of being a special adviser in the Treasury, working with "canny Ken" as the Chancellor, I learnt a lesson: we cannot spend what we do not have. That lesson has not been lost on the Government side of the House.

Having worked in the real world of commerce and industry for more than 20 years in companies such as Asda and PepsiCo, it is clear to me that growth is not determined by state diktat, but based on the decisions of thousands of brave businesses. Growth is developed only in a truly competitive private sector. That is what we need to create jobs, provide valued public services and support those in genuine need. That task will always motivate me as long as I serve the people of Macclesfield in this House.

9.5 pm

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): I am very grateful for the chance to speak in this debate, and I congratulate the many hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches. The knowledge and passion with which everyone has spoken is testament to the talent and commitment that exists in this House.

I feel incredibly privileged to be here, and I thank the people of Lewisham East for giving me this opportunity. I also thank Bridget Prentice, my predecessor. Her decision to step down at the last election came as a surprise to me, as it did to many. Anyone who knows Bridget will say that she is straight-talking, good-humoured but not-to-be-messed-with Glaswegian. As the Member of Parliament for Lewisham East since 1992, she was a fearsome advocate for our corner of south-east London. There is also huge respect for her here, as there is in the constituency, as a former Minister. She has been an enormous support to me over the past few months, and I thank her for her advice, encouragement and friendship.

When I was growing up, I never thought I would be a Member of Parliament. Yes, I thought I might be a PE teacher, or even a town planner, but not an MP. A trip down to the polling station every four or five years with my mum and dad was the limit of my political experience as a child, but I was brought up with a very strong sense of right and wrong, and a belief that with hard work and determination, I could do whatever I wanted. I am pleased that my mum and dad are here today and I

[Heidi Alexander]

thank them for all they have done for me. Given that they have sat here for seven hours, I should probably also thank them for their stamina.

I was very lucky to have a good comprehensive education, and even luckier to be a student when full grants allowed people from families such as mine to go to college without racking up enormous debts. I was lucky to have people close to me who wanted me to do well, and to complete a degree that nurtured my interest in the world around me and gave me the confidence to get on in life. It was the recognition of my own fortunate position and a desire to see the world a better place that led me into politics, to ensure that others had the opportunities that I had and to reduce the inequalities that still exist in our society. My brother often tells me to get off my high horse, but I have always wanted a job in which I can make a difference, so I guess it is no surprise that I should find myself here.

I am very proud to represent Lewisham East, which has been my home for the past eight years, and to represent a party that has brought about huge improvements in the lives of ordinary people, but I also know that my party has a significant challenge of renewal and revitalisation ahead of it. We need to listen to what voters across the country are telling us, which is precisely what I plan to do in Lewisham East.

Like many others, my constituency is one of great contrasts, from the leafy streets of Blackheath and Lee Green, through multicultural Catford, and to the homes of Downham and Grove Park. Bisected by overland railway lines, my constituency has a history of welcoming people from different parts of the UK and, indeed, the world. In her book "The Wouldbegoods", E. Nesbit described Lewisham as a place where

"nothing happens unless you make it happen".

More than 100 years later, I can assure the House that the residents of Lewisham East make an awful lot happen.

Although we have areas of significant deprivation, we are not deprived of ambition or community spirit. I have been fortunate over the past few years to work with many of the groups that make our corner of London special, such as the tenants' leaders who set up Phoenix Community Housing, the Friends and Users of Staplehurst Road Shops, and the volunteers at the Rushey Green Time Bank. I could go on. I love living in Lewisham, but I also know that a lot needs to change. During the election, I met mums and dads who were concerned about violent crime and gang culture, commuters fed up with being stuck in someone's armpit on overcrowded trains, and people who were concerned about jobs and housing and were worried about the changes they have seen in their community, but most of all I met people who were anxious about the economy, and I shall now turn to that subject.

My predecessor spoke in her maiden speech in 1992 about the scourge of youth unemployment. She called for quality training schemes and job guarantees for young people who were affected by the recession of the early 1990s. Sadly, 18 years down the line I am in a similar position as a result of the new Government's determination to slash public spending. Axing the future jobs fund beggars belief. In Lewisham, this scheme has already created 133 jobs, with another 42 positions lined up. These are real people benefiting from real jobs, with real money going into their pockets, real experience of the workplace and real references being secured to help them get their next job. Civil servants in Westminster may tell Ministers that the scheme is not working, but I am not sure that my constituents would say the same.

Ensuring that the next generation have the right skills to access the jobs of the future is critical. Ensuring that the next generation want the jobs of the future, and believe they can get them, is equally important. It never ceases to amaze me that while Canary Wharf is only a 15-minute DLR ride from my constituency, for some kids growing up in Lewisham East it might as well be another world. How we bridge that gap is a big challenge. Excellent schools can expand the horizons of our youngsters, but I cannot help but think that mentoring schemes, such as those run by Urban Synergy in my constituency, may also have some of the answers. By providing accessible role models and giving an insight into different careers, they fire the imagination of the next generation.

If London is to improve its economic competitiveness, the underlying challenge is to tackle the huge inequalities between the haves and the have-nots. Investment in housing and social housing is very important. I look forward to hearing from the new Front-Bench team about its plans for the decent homes programme, and I hope I will soon be in a position to reassure my constituents that much-needed investment in Lewisham homes will be forthcoming.

For as long as I am the Member of Parliament for Lewisham East, I will campaign hard to secure the resources that my part of London deserves. I will fight to reduce the gap between rich and poor and I will work tirelessly to give a voice to those who are least often heard. A friend of mine recently told her three-year-old that my job was to keep everyone in south-east London happy. That is one of the most challenging job descriptions I have ever heard, but I have told her I will do my best.

9.13 pm

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): It is a great honour to be called to deliver my maiden speech. First of all, I want to give hearty thanks to David Wilshire who, amidst difficulties and press distortions, managed to keep up his work as a fine constituency MP. Very often, people would open the door to me and say, "Ah, so you're the new David Wilshire," and I would reply, "Well, sort of, but I want to continue his traditions of service and commitment to the constituency."

People always ask me, "Where is Spelthorne?" A friend of mine said he did not realise it was a constituency; instead he thought someone called David Spelthorne was the MP for Wilshire. It is, however, a well-known constituency, and Spelthorne is a very old name, too. It comes from an old English word of which we have a remnant in the word "spelling". It means speaking, and the "thorne" part of the word "Spelthorne'" referred to a thorn tree on Ashford common where people used to gather and speak. That is where the name comes from, and it also appears in the Domesday Book as the southern hundred of the old county of Middlesex.

Middlesex had a long and illustrious history, which my predecessor was very keen to stress—much to the

annoyance of my Surrey colleagues. Middlesex did have an existence, however, and it had a reputation in this House, because in the old days it had proper elections. Charles James Fox was elected, and thousands of people were involved, whereas in nearby rotten boroughs there might be only half a dozen people. Famously, John Wilkes was elected in Middlesex, and was a distinguished Member of this House. He was described as the "ugliest man in England" but, like many politicians, he was not afraid of boasting and celebrating his own talents and he said that he had such charm that he could "talk away his face" in "half an hour". Hon. Members can imagine my surprise at the fact that we were given only seven minutes to speak in the House today.

In the limited time available to me, I wish to make some points about the subject of today's debate. Spelthorne is a seat in the south-east that relies almost exclusively on infrastructure and economic expansion, and in that context self-starting business men are very important. A gentleman from Shepperton, in my constituency, who has been in the breakage business for 30 years said to me, "Kwasi, it is very difficult. I am getting strangled by red tape and bureaucracy." A Government quango, whose name I shall not mention, had been bombarding him with forms that he had to fill in, so he had been spending all his time filling in forms and none of his time attending to the business. My thought was that it was precisely those small business people who will drive us out of recession and into recovery.

I have to say—even though this is a maiden speech, I will be controversial—that to hear Labour Members in many of these debates is to be in never-never land; they have not once accepted any blame for what happened and they seem to think that we can just sail on as before. In many of their eloquent speeches it appears that they have forgotten that wealth creation is the most important element in getting us out of this recession. I heard the right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Mr Meacher), who I believe has been in the House for 40 years, say that he was going to tax those in *The Sunday Times* rich list. Of course, one of the results of their being rich is that they can leave the country in about half an hour, so if he were to go down that route, a lot of them would leave and he would not bring in any more money to the Exchequer.

One of the right hon. Gentleman's remarks reminded me of the story of the man who, when leaving a gentlemen's club—it might have been the Carlton Club—in 1970 gave the footman sixpence. The footman looked at him and said, "That is only sixpence," to which he replied, "Ah, it is sixpence to you, but it is a pound to me." That was because income tax was at 95% or 97%. We cannot go down the road that the right hon. Gentleman suggests, and the Conservatives have stressed again and again that the only way to get out of this difficulty is to try to let business grow.

I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) refer to the Scottish enlightenment. He will recall that one of its most prominent figures was Adam Smith, rather than the previous Prime Minister, who did not take an enlightened Scottish approach. Adam Smith made it very clear in "The Wealth of Nations", a book that many hon. Members will know, how societies grow rich and how they can become very poor. I am sorry to say that the past 13 years have been an exercise that Adam Smith and the university of Edinburgh would probably have awarded a flat D grade for performance—although perhaps he would have awarded a B grade for effort, who knows?

I am pleased at this juncture to refer to the compelling speech made by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), in which she mentioned George Stephenson. There was some controversy as to whether he came from Newcastle upon Tyne Central or from Chesterfield, but I shall not comment on that as that is a matter for Labour Members. What she did say was that he made a fortune through industry, enterprise and innovation, and those are exactly the kind of things that this coalition Government will look to promote in the months and years ahead.

To sum up, I should say that the truest words said in this debate were uttered by someone making a maiden speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), who said that the private sector is the "backbone of our economy". In my few weeks in the House, I have not heard any truer words uttered in it. That is something that we have to be absolutely focused on, in terms of getting out of the recession. I hate to say this, but I find it staggering that Labour Members have not had the good grace to come to the House to apologise and to show some recognition of the very real problems that we face and the solutions that we need to get out of this situation. I thank the House for giving me such a good and warm reception for my maiden speech.

9.20 pm

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make what I understand will be the final maiden speech of the day. I congratulate all those who have gone before me. There have been some excellent speeches and some fascinating stories. I am pleased to welcome so many women to the House, alongside myself, because it is extremely important to have them here. New Members learn a lot when they come to this place, such as learning to sit for several hours to make their maiden speech. Another slightly bizarre tradition is that of jumping up and down, which I have decided must be to keep us fit in what would otherwise be a very sedentary day.

My predecessor, Gavin Strang, was the MP for Edinburgh East for 40 years. I know that many Members will join me in paying tribute to his service to the House, his constituents and the country. He served in government under Harold Wilson, Jim Callaghan and Tony Blair, and it is not just the length of his service that stands out. He is a man of principle and conviction, so much so that in his maiden speech in 1970 he eschewed the tradition of paying tribute to his predecessor and his constituency and launched into an attack on the Government of the day about selling weapons to apartheid-era South Africa. Gavin did not mellow with age. In recent years, he spoke against the Iraq war and the replacement of Trident. He won the respect of his colleagues and constituents by resisting the temptation to become a knee-jerk rebel, and that made his arguments all the stronger. I fear that it will be difficult for me to achieve Gavin's length of service in this place, unless there are some advances in medicine, in relation to ageing, in the next 40 years, but I aspire to emulate his principled approach.

Edinburgh is a beautiful city, and I have the honour and privilege of representing many of its gems. Right at

[Sheila Gilmore]

the heart of the constituency is Holyrood park with our very own volcano, Arthur's Seat, but I assure any Transport Ministers present that it is safely extinct. On the coast lies Portobello beach, which featured recently in *The Guardian* supplement *Travel* as one of Europe's best urban beaches. I should also mention Easter Road, the home of Hibernian football club, one of Edinburgh's two Scottish premier league teams, but perhaps I should declare an interest as my husband is a season ticket holder. Other sporting venues include Scotland's only swimming pool capable of hosting diving competitions, which is currently being refurbished for use in the 2014 Commonwealth games in Scotland.

In Edinburgh's historic centre lies the royal mile, which has an abbey and a palace at its foot and Edinburgh castle at its head. Less well known is my constituency's second castle, Craigmillar, which is reckoned much the superior by most children because they can run about and have so much fun in it. Edinburgh East also plays host to many Edinburgh festival venues. Places such as the Pleasance courtyard may be known to many here, as it seems to become an outpost of London for the month of August.

Appropriately for someone who is a lawyer, my patch includes all three levels of Edinburgh's law courts, as well as Edinburgh university, which is one of the oldest universities not just in Scotland but in the UK. Neither is the constituency short of politicians as it houses both the city council buildings and the Scottish Parliament. Carrying out our 1997 manifesto commitment to establish a Scottish Parliament is something of which Labour can be proud.

East Edinburgh is not just a place of history and tourist attractions, but is home to many people who work hard in minimum wage jobs, or who have retired on little more than the basic state pension. In previous economic recessions, with the decline in the area's traditional industries such as brewing and brick making, too many people became unemployed and sidelined on to incapacity benefit.

I supported the previous Government's attempts to prevent people from being condemned to such low-income existences and to help them advance out of them. However, as I was knocking on doors in the last year, I became aware of the gulf that can exist between the theory of a policy initiative and its implementation. When it comes down to real people, things are rarely straightforward. One woman in her 50s, suffering from cancer and still receiving treatment, had been declared fit for work. She was far from being a long-term claimant—as she said herself, she had worked all her life and it felt like a slap in the face to be treated in that way.

We also have to be aware that there are people whose conditions fluctuate. They can be very well one day but hardly able to get out of bed the next. That is the story of one of my constituents: she had ME—myalgic encephalomyelitis—but she too was declared fit for work.

The introduction of the new employment and support allowance was expected to lead to around 50% of applicants being deemed unfit for work. In practice, only 32% have been so assessed and thus in need of support. Either there has been a great improvement in health, or there is something very wrong with the assessment process. The fact that so many appeals succeed suggests that there is something wrong. I regret to say that all that was happening on my party's watch. In my campaign, I said that this would be one of the issues I would take up, regardless of who formed the Government. I believe that it is one of the primary roles of an elected Member to monitor where policy is not quite working out as we might hope.

It is worrying to have heard that the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions wishes to accelerate the roll-out of the employment and support allowance, despite one of its architects admitting that the pilot has severe problems. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will temper his zeal with mercy.

My politics was formed and forged by my father, and I am particularly proud to represent the area in which he was born and brought up. In conclusion, I want to thank all the voters of Edinburgh East for giving me the opportunity to represent them in this place.

9.27 pm

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like congratulate all those who have made their maiden speeches, especially my good Friends the hon. Members for Rugby (Mark Pawsey), for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid) and for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng).

Mr Deputy Speaker, I would love to be able to tell the House that generations of Zahawis have lived and worked in Stratford for hundreds of years, but I suspect you just might spot that I would be stretching the truth a little. What I can tell the House is that I have had the most incredibly warm welcome from all the thousands of people I met through the campaign, and that Stratfordians are truly special people—a rightly proud people. It was humbling for me to achieve 51% of the vote in an eight-horse race, and I will never forget who put me in this place.

My predecessor was a first-class Member of Parliament and I am not surprised that he has been elevated to the other place. I did not know him well, as I have spent the past 11 years concentrating on building up a business rather than around the candidates department, but I very quickly learned that there is an enormous amount of affection and huge respect for him among the people of my constituency. Coupled with that achievement is his hard work for his country and his party. He held the posts of shadow Health, Defence and Foreign Secretaries, and he was also deputy chairman of the party twice. I am thrilled that he has chosen to be known as the Lord Maples of Stratford-upon-Avon.

My constituency covers some 465 square miles. It contains some of England's most attractive market towns and some 120 stunning villages, ranging from Long Compton in the south to Earlswood in the north. Stratford town itself awaits the re-opening of the Royal Shakespeare Company theatre in November; under the great leadership of Vicky Hayward, it is undergoing a £112 million makeover that will deliver a whole new experience for those coming to see the works of the great bard. My wife Lana and I were honoured to be part of the procession for his 446th birthday celebrations in April, when we walked from his birthplace in Henley street to his place of rest at Holy Trinity church.

My constituency is not without its problems, some very local and others inflicted on it by the policies of the

previous Government. The town of Stratford is suffering from overdevelopment, and the top-down targets set by central Government have clearly done a lot of damage. All our towns have problems with antisocial behaviour and thuggery, which stem from a combination of the 24-hour drinking laws and a police force who are hampered by bureaucracy. The farmers are suffering too, with too much red tape, the single farm payments being delayed for months, and the problem with badgers, which I highlighted in the House last week. I will continue my predecessor's campaign for better flood defences and to save our fire stations in Alcester, Bidford and Studley.

The biggest problem in Stratford-on-Avon is the economy. We have too many closed shops and too many burdens on business. We need to help small and medium-sized businesses to do better and get back on their feet. They, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has identified, are the future and the solution to our economic woes. I am very pleased to have seen my right hon. Friend make the Government's first ministerial visit to China and play such a central role at the G20 in South Korea. I am pleased to see in the Gracious Speech special emphasis on balancing the books, getting rid of the tax on jobs and giving a one-year national insurance holiday to start-ups. I strongly believe that that will be a catalyst to kick-start the enterprise economy.

I now utter my only word of caution. I am someone with first-hand experience of a start-up. We must be careful what we do on capital gains tax. Of course I understand the need to raise some taxes and to help to create a fairer tax system. It must be right to relieve the lowest earners of the tax burden. I would go as far as labelling it a moral tax cut. However, it is important to remember the job creators, those who back them and those who join them and work for them. It would be counter-productive to penalise people who invest in start-ups—in itself a high-risk thing—by increasing CGT on their investment. It would also be wrong to penalise employees who join a risky start-up from possibly a safer occupation and, of course, to penalise entrepreneurs themselves.

In the Gracious Speech there was a strong focus on freedom, fairness and responsibility. It would be unfair and wrong to penalise people who have acted and saved responsibly with a further tax at a time when we are introducing incentives to act responsibly in marriage and partnership. Penalising responsible investment would send a contradictory and unhealthy message to the country.

No maiden speech from the Member for Stratford-on-Avon would be complete without a quote from our country's greatest poet and playwright. I thought long and hard about which of his works would be most appropriate, and I settled on the Scottish play, that great tale of human ambition, conspiracy and tragedy. It is from the witches scene in act I, which must surely be read as a warning to the three largest parties in this House:

"When shall we three meet again
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.
That will be ere the set of sun."

Our country faces a dark economic storm, and the people will be watching us and how we behave in this House. Let us not be tempted by self-interest or party interest but let us instead put our country first.

9.34 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I begin by paying tribute to the hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches this evening and have given us thoughtful, elegant and eloquent speeches. We have toured the nation—the hills, the valleys, the coasts and the cities. They have been wise speeches. Given the number of people who have paid tribute to their local newspapers as well as to their constituents, remind me to mention the *Pontefract and Castleford Express* rather more often.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) began the maiden speeches and was typically modest in not mentioning the impact of the work that she did on child poverty before she was elected. The hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid) gave us an eloquent speech, in which he confessed to having been a banker in a previous life—a brave thing to do. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith) told us about Nye Bevan's warning of collusion between Liberal Democrats and Tories—a rare example of a Nye Bevan understatement, I fear.

The hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) talked about her commitment to new jobs in her constituency. The hon. Member for High Peak (Andrew Bingham) laid claim to having one of the most beautiful constituencies in the country; I suspect he may be right. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) invited us all to go quad biking in his constituency, and the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb) also talked about tourism in his constituency and paid a lovely tribute to Betty Williams, which we would all support. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) paid a gracious tribute to the changes on lesbian and gay equalities that have taken place in the last few Parliaments. The hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie) talked about the importance of investment in jobs in Northern Ireland—so too did the hon. Member for Belfast East (Naomi Long)—and the importance of economic development as part of the peace process.

The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson) talked about support for manufacturing. The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) raised the subject of energy efficiency and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) drew on her experience and talent as a Bank of England economist to warn powerfully of the risks of a contractionary Japanese experience. The hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Stephen Gilbert) talked about social housing. My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) paid tribute to the visionaries and social campaigners rooted in London's east end and showed she would be a strong MP in the same tradition.

The hon. Members for Worcester (Mr Walker) and for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) both paid respectful tributes to their fathers, who were both their predecessors, although I must say I thought that Hyacinth Bucket was in "Keeping up Appearances", not "One Foot in the Grave". But we also had scenes from "Gavin and Stacey" from the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns), who spoke about the importance of the economy to his constituency. The hon. Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker) told us he was a skydiver and began to dissect global capitalism.

[Yvette Cooper]

I missed the speech by the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds), but my mum and dad live in his constituency, so I hope he will look after them well. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood) shared her concern about long-term unemployment in Birmingham. I cannot quite read my handwriting, but I think it must say that the hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss) talked about farming—seeing as it is Norfolk. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) talked about the importance of engineering, seeing as it is Stockton North.

We spent quite a lot of time in Edinburgh today. In the course of the day we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray), who gave us a funny and witty speech just as we were starting to get tired for the evening; my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Sheila Gilmore), who talked about the festival in her constituency; and the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Mike Crockart), who talked about the zoo in his constituency—very appropriate, now that he has joined us in this place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) talked about defending England against the Scots, and the hon. Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson) managed to amuse us while pretending not to be amusing at all—in which I detect an echo of his brother, perhaps, after all.

The hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) talked about the importance of local communities. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) gave us a Shakespearean tour, and I think signed up to being the first of the rebels among the new Members on his side. The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) told us a lovely story about his constituency's Domesday roots and my hon. Friends the Members for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) and for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) both talked about the importance of not axing the future jobs fund. I was going to pay tribute to the parents of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East, who sat through the entire debate but decided to leave before the closing speeches began—perhaps wisely.

I congratulate the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), on his appointment. I know it is an appointment that he will relish, because he has a genuine interest in issues concerning poverty and families suffering from deprivation. I welcome too his Front-Bench colleagues, although I think they will be having an interesting time.

The Secretary of State said in his speech last week that he wanted clear and evidence-based policies, but he has in charge of employment statistics the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), the man who said that crime was going up when in fact it was going down and was roundly rebuked by the UK Statistics Authority, the police and even the London Mayor for his lack of factual accuracy; so we look forward to those economic statistics debates.

The Secretary of State has also said that he wants to cut poverty, but as part of his team he has the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Thornbury and Yate (Steve Webb), whom I very much respect. He told the House last year that

"the idea that the Conservative party is the answer to child poverty is amazing."—[*Official Report*, 9 December 2009; Vol. 502, c. 437.]

He also said:

"To hear Conservative Front Benchers suggest that they even care about this subject...is frankly unbelievable."—[*Official Report*, 20 July 2009; Vol. 496, c. 625.]

He has also stated:

"The reason unemployment has risen so rapidly in the UK is not because people have suddenly become workshy, but because the jobs are not there.

These Tory plans for benefit reform will not do anything to change that."

We thought that the hon. Gentleman might have a few tensions with the Treasury about his plans, but it seems that the real fractious relationships are within his own team. If the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister are the happy couple in the rose garden, it seems that the Secretary of State has finally been granted his wish of being put in charge of dealing with dysfunctional families who are at risk of breakdown.

The Secretary of State has high ambitions. We will support him where we can. We will, of course, support measures to restore the pensions link with earnings. We will not support ripping up the rest of the Turner consensus, putting future pensions for low and middle-income earners at risk. We will support the Secretary of State where he brings forward genuine proposals that help to reduce poverty and disadvantage, but we will not support plans to water down the child poverty target and we would be extremely concerned by proposals to freeze all benefits below inflation.

The Secretary of State did some serious work on policy options at the Centre for Social Justice—on benefit reform and on measures to help to ensure that people are better off in work. We will look very sympathetically at those and we are interested in the proposals that he made when he was in opposition, but his case would be considerably stronger if he accepted that hundreds of thousands of families throughout the country are thousands of pounds a year better off as a result of the minimum wage and the tax credits that he and his party strongly opposed.

I hope, too, that the Government will continue the implementation of the reforms to sickness benefits and to lone parent benefits that we introduced and were starting to roll out. Those reforms and the investment in support to help the unemployed have already cut the number of people on inactive benefits by more than 350,000 since 1997. The combination of extra investment and support alongside benefit reforms and stronger requirements to take up that help have made a big difference. It is unfortunate that both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats voted against some of our stronger requirements on benefit claimants in the previous Parliament.

I hope that the Secretary of State will recognise the good work that Jobcentre Plus did to respond to the recession. As a result of the extra investment and the hard work of those staff, the claimant count peaked at 5% in this recession, compared with 10% in the 1990s recession and in the 1980s recession. That was possible only because of the extra investment in jobs alongside the tougher conditions on benefits. That is why it is so shocking that his first priority is to cut the future jobs fund. That is up to 80,000 youth jobs gone when the

Chancellor himself has said that youth unemployment is still too high. I have to ask Government Front Benchers: did they talk to a single young person on the future jobs fund before cutting those jobs? Did they talk to a single voluntary sector provider before they cut the funding used to get people into work? Before the election, they told a very different story. The Prime Minister visited Merseystride, a social enterprise helping the long-term unemployed, during the election. He said to them that the future jobs fund was "a good scheme". I hope that he will remember that visit. Then he said:

"And good schemes we will keep".

What did the then shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, who is not in her place, say at that time? She said:

"The Conservative position on the Future Jobs Fund...has been misrepresented by certain groups in the media. We have no plans to change existing Future Jobs Fund commitments".

As for the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Thornbury and Yate, he said on behalf of the Liberal Democrats:

"We have no plans to change or reduce existing government commitments to the Future Jobs Fund. We believe that more help is needed for young people not less."

So there we have it—a breaking of Tory and Liberal election promises. There has been no evidence, and no consultation with the voluntary sector. So much for the big society; this is, in fact, just a big sham. There has been no consultation with young people, and no listening to the thousands of young people who are getting their first chance because of the future jobs fund. These are cuts in help for young people. The Government just don't get it: if they cut help and support for jobs for young people right now, it will cost all of us more for decades to come. Once again, they will be making the mistakes of the '80s and '90s, when they abandoned young people to long-term unemployment. That is not getting people off welfare into work; it is leaving them abandoned on welfare for decades, and we will not support it.

9.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): It has been a really interesting debate, and I thank the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) for her kind comments welcoming me back to the Dispatch Box. Her husband is probably away doing whatever one does when one is standing to be Leader of the Opposition. Let me say this to her so that she can quietly say it to him: it is not all that it is cracked up to be. She might whisper that in his ear and hope that he does not get the nominations.

We have had an excellent debate; the right hon. Lady is correct about that. As for all those who made maiden speeches, the degree to which they consider it a real honour to have been elected is a great reminder to all of us who have, over time, become a bit more cynical about the speeches that we make in this place. Almost every one of those speeches reminded me—and, I know, pretty much everyone else in the House—of that fact.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid) confessed to being a banker, as the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford said. That is a pretty brave thing to do in this House at the moment. He paid a moving tribute to the two soldiers from his constituency who died. My hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) said that she was happy to be here, and I am happy about that, too, but she replaced a good friend of mine from the other side of the House, Andy Reed, with whom I used to play football. I am rather sorry to see him go—he was a very good MP—but not that sorry, and I am pleased to see my hon. Friend here.

The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford is right to say that the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) comes to this House with a strong record on the subjects that we are considering. I look forward to hearing her speak informatively, and to her bringing her great knowledge to debates. Most of us will consider her a real asset to this House.

The hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith) said that he stood on the shoulders of giants, and I must say that they do not come any bigger than the two to whom he referred—Nye Bevan and Michael Foot, probably two of the greatest orators to have sat in this place—so he has huge shoes to fill. He spoke about benefit dependency, a huge issue, and one to which I shall refer in a second; it is at a ridiculous level.

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Andrew Bingham) challenged anyone in this House to match his constituency for natural beauty. I can with Chingford. We do not have a lot of countryside, but we have a lot of people who work very hard—and who pretty well tell their MP that MPs do not.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) talked about high unemployment in Northern Ireland; it is, of course, staggeringly high there—higher than in most other places. We know that there is a historical issue there, but there is also much more that we have to do about it. I hope that he will play a full part in that when the time comes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb), who spoke very well, talked about his constituency. He said that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House told him, when he arrived here, not to get too used to this place because his constituency would soon be abolished. That threat has been given to all of us throughout the years; it is either our constituency or we who should be abolished. One way or another, one can fit oneself around that. In my case, it was more me than the constituency that was to be abolished.

The hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) spoke about her direct predecessor, George Galloway, who stirs emotions on both sides of the House—not necessarily very constructive ones among Labour Members. Her predecessor but one, Oona King, was highly respected on both sides of the House. If she was in another party, I would wish her the best of luck with any chance that she has to be Mayor, but in the meantime, she will be a great adornment to the campaign.

May I tell my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), who mentioned his father, that those are a big pair of shoes to fill? I knew the father of my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) incredibly well. Jim Pawsey was well regarded by Conservative Members and well liked, so my hon. Friend will have a big act to follow, as his father was always direct in telling people what he thought, regardless of whether it cost him a job: it did. The hon. Member for Labour—rather,

[Mr Iain Duncan Smith]

the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves); I apologise, I did not quite hear some of the speeches, and I did not write all these notes. However, I gather that she made an extremely good speech, and spoke about her predecessor, John Battle, who was well liked in the House. She also quoted the Japanese advice to lead, and not to reduce borrowing quickly. I am an eighth Japanese, and the Japanese are not always right about everything.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson) praised his predecessor, Patrick Cormack—*[Interruption.]* Yes. Many of us remember him fondly. The one thing that we do remember about him is his incredible ability to speak about this place in 17th-century terminology as "Parliament assembled". He will be much missed, and I hope that my hon. Friend fills his shoes very well indeed. The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), who is a member of Plaid Cymru, spoke about fuel poverty—something to which we shall definitely return—and benefit complexity. I welcome him to the House if he shows interest in those subjects.

The hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Stephen Gilbert) spoke about being got rid of as a result of a boundary review affecting his constituency. Again, I suggest that he fight that if he can: he may be here longer than he thinks. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns) spoke very well, and referred to "Gavin and Stacey". I am not quite sure what the connection is, except that Gavin came from Essex—near Chingford—and Stacey came from Wales, which shows that on this side of the House, we can unite the party yet again. It is a fairly tenuous link, I grant.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood) has very big shoes to fill. Clare Short ended her parliamentary career in some measure of dispute with her party, but I can hardly think of anyone who has left the House, whether in government or opposition who was more well respected—*[Interruption.]* Well, she spoke passionately, but people did not always agree with her. However, if someone's fault is that they are passionate in the House, it is a fault with which everyone will agree.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) spoke well about his support for preventing poverty. The hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie) was keen on the poverty agenda, and spoke about living in the same house as St Patrick. Any attempt to be deified in the House will end in tears. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss) spoke about the importance of skills, in another very good speech. The hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) spoke about credit unions and loan sharks. I am with him on that: we need to do a lot more to try to break the stranglehold of doorstep lenders and, more particularly, of the very bad elements among loan sharks. I am very strong on seeing what we can do about credit unions.

May I tell my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) that his seat is a Conservative gain, although it was Conservative before? His predecessor remains a friend of mine. It was always difficult to know quite where Quentin was going to be standing at any one time.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): Underneath his bell tower.

Mr Duncan Smith: That is exactly right.

The hon. Member for Belfast East (Naomi Long) said that she was dedicated to bridging the political divide and the regions, as a member of the Alliance party. She should come across to this side of the House: we are the living embodiment of an alliance, so perhaps she could join us. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker) made a very good speech, and I remember his predecessor, Paul Goodman, very well. The hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) made an excellent speech and spoke about astronomical manufacturing. I am not quite sure what that means, but it sounded good at the time.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Mike Crockart) spoke about the pivotal role of community groups. I agree with him. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) paid tribute to the grass roots and sense of respect of the people of Newcastle. She made an extremely witty speech. If she carries on like that in the House, she will rise fast and dominate her own side. I commend her.

My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson), who made a very good speech, said that he did not have the humour gene of his brother, but he proved that not to be true. He has the hair, too, of which I am rather jealous. He will go far in the House, provided he follows his brother's trait of never sticking to any particular line for any length of time but ending up being elected to highest office while he is at it, which is a pretty good record of success.

The hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) made a very good speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) spoke about business being strangled by red tape. The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Sheila Gilmore) made an excellent speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) made a very good speech in which he spoke in Shakespearean terms about the gathering clouds and the dark lowering economy. I was getting so worried at one stage that I thought I would not get to the Dispatch Box to speak at all. Never mind, here we are.

I shall touch quickly on speeches not made by new Members. The right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Mr Blunkett), whom I know and like enormously, blamed bankers, the world economy, the leadership candidates in his own party, and everyone except the previous Government, for the shambles that we are now in. He should think again. It was the Government of whom he was a member who reduced the country to the state that it is in.

Mr Blunkett *rose—*

Mr Duncan Smith: We do not have a great deal of time. I will give way, but I shall finish shortly.

Mr Blunkett: I am grateful and I shall be brief. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman, whom I wish well, would describe to all of us why the rest of Europe has been devastated by the Labour Government.

Mr Duncan Smith: I can answer many questions, but I cannot say what the last Labour Government did as they toured Europe destroying all those economies, so I

am afraid I cannot help the right hon. Gentleman. All I know is that we have spent huge sums, much of it not carefully adjusted to see whether it was working, including the future jobs fund, about which I was asked earlier. The issue is not that it was not creating jobs, but that the jobs that were being created were more than likely to be temporary, they were nowhere near the number originally projected, and the cost of the programme was running out of control.

Everyone wants to create jobs and stop the wage scar for the young unemployed, but I must tell the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford that we face a nightmare in which we have to look at the spending to make sure that whatever we spend delivers real life change. We will be doing that with welfare reform to try to make it much easier for people to get back to work, and to make sure that the money they earn is real money and means that going to work pays. We will reform pensions. The right hon. Lady and her party managed to lower the level of life chances for far too many people in this country, and it is the coalition Government who now set out to help the young, the unemployed and the impoverished in Britain once and for all.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 247, Noes 343.

Division No. 2] **[21.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Anderson, Mr David
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bain, Mr William
Balls, rh Ed
Banks, Gordon
Barron, rh Mr Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary
Benton, Mr Joe
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Roberta
Blears, rh Hazel
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Blunkett, rh Mr David
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Brown, Mr Russell
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Byrne, rh Mr Liam
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Mrs Jenny
Clark, Katy
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crausby, Mr David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Tony
Curran, Margaret
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
Darling, rh Mr Alistair
David, Mr Wayne
Davidson, Mr Ian
Davies, Geraint
De Piero, Gloria
Denham, rh Mr John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Doran, Mr Frank
Dowd, Jim
Doyle, Gemma
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Engel, Natascha
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flello, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goggins, rh Paul
Goodman, Helen
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hain, rh Mr Peter
Hamilton, Mr David
Hamilton, Mr Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Mr Tom
Havard, Mr Dai
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Heyes, David
Hillier, Meg
Hilling, Julie
Hodge, rh Margaret
Hood, Mr Jim
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hoyle, Mr Lindsay
Hunt, Tristram
Illsley, Mr Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda
James, Mrs Siân C.
Jamieson, Cathy
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Diana R.
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeley, Barbara
Keen, Alan
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Mann, John
Marsden, Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
McCann, Mr Michael
McClymont, Gregg
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKinnell, Catherine
Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Meale, Mr Alan
Mearns, Ian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, rh David
Miliband, rh Edward
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morrice, Graeme
Morris, Grahame M.
Mudie, Mr George
Munn, Meg
Murphy, rh Mr Jim
Murphy, rh Paul
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Nash, Pamela
O'Donnell, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Osborne, Sandra
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Perkins, Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Qureshi, Yasmin
Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Robertson, John
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Roy, Mr Frank
Roy, Lindsay
Ruddock, Joan
Sarwar, Anas
Seabeck, Alison
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shuker, Gavin
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Mr Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela *(Penistone and Stocksbridge)*
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Soulsby, Sir Peter
Spellar, rh Mr John
Straw, rh Mr Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thomberry, Emily
Timms, rh Mr Stephen
Trickett, Jon

Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mr Tom
Watts, Mr Dave
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, rh Malcolm
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wood, Mike
Woodcock, John
Woodward, rh Mr Shaun
Woolas, Mr Phil
Wright, David
Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs Sharon Hodgson and Kerry McCarthy

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Alexander, rh Danny
Amess, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bagshawe, Ms Louise
Baker, Norman
Baker, Steve
Baldry, Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Binley, Mr Brian
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Mr Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brake, Tom
Bray, Angie
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Mr Steve
Brokenshire, James
Brooke, Annette
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona
Bruce, rh Malcolm
Buckland, Mr Robert
Burley, Mr Aidan
Burns, Conor
Burns, Mr Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burstow, Mr Paul
Burt, Alistair
Burt, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Cable, rh Vince
Cairns, Alun
Cameron, rh Mr David
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cash, Mr William
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clappison, Mr James
Clark, Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crockart, Mike
Crouch, Tracey
Davey, Mr Edward
Davies, David T. C. *(Monmouth)*
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Philip
Davis, David *(Hallernprice and Howden)*
de Bois, Nick
Dinenage, Caroline
Dodds, Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
Dorries, Nadine
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Jonathan
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farron, Tim
Featherstone, Lynne
Field, Mr Mark
Foster, Mr Don
Francois, Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fullbrook, Lorraine
Fuller, Richard
Garnier, Mr Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
George, Andrew
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gilbert, Stephen
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian
Greening, Justine
Grieve, Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Sam
Hague, rh Mr William
Halfon, Robert
Hames, Duncan
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hancock, Mr Mike
Hands, Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, Mr John
Heald, Mr Oliver
Heath, Mr David
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Hendry, Charles
Herbert, Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollingbery, George
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Horwood, Martin
Howarth, Mr Gerald
Howell, John
Hughes, Simon
Huhne, rh Chris
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, Sajid
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kelly, Chris
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lancaster, Mark
Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Jessica
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leech, Mr John
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Mr Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, Mr David
Lloyd, Stephen
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
Main, Mrs Anne
Maude, rh Mr Francis
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McCrea, Dr William
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Patrick
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, Maria
Mills, Nigel
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Mundell, David
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
O'Brien, Mr Stephen
Offord, Mr Matthew
Ollerenshaw, Eric
Opperman, Guy
Osborne, rh Mr George
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, Mr James
Parish, Neil
Patel, Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Pickles, rh Mr Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pritchard, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Raab, Mr Dominic
Randall, Mr John

Reckless, Mark
Redwood, rh Mr John
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reevell, Simon
Reid, Mr Alan
Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm
Robathan, Mr Andrew
Robertson, Hugh
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rogerson, Dan
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, Amber
Russell, Bob
Rutley, David
Sanders, Mr Adrian
Sandys, Laura
Scott, Mr Lee
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Shepherd, Mr Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, David
Simpson, Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Miss Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Sir Robert
Soames, Nicholas
Soubry, Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mr Mark
Stanley, rh Sir John
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Mr Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sturdy, Julian
Swales, Ian
Swayne, Mr Desmond
Swinson, Jo
Swire, Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Teather, Sarah
Thurso, John
Timpson, Mr Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Tredinnick, David
Truss, Elizabeth
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Uppal, Paul
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Ward, Mr David
Watkinson, Angela
Weatherley, Mike
Webb, Steve
Wharton, James
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, Mr David
Williams, Mr Mark
Williams, Roger
Williams, Stephen
Williamson, Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wright, Jeremy
Wright, Simon
Yeo, Mr Tim
Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Stephen Crabb and Mark Hunter

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: at the end of the Question to add:

"but respectfully request that your Government includes as part of its Strategic Defence and Security Review a full examination of the Trident nuclear missile system and any possible replacement."—*(Angus Robertson.)*

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 33), That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 27, Noes 330.

Division No. 3] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Clark, Katy
Corbyn, Jeremy
Durkan, Mark
Edwards, Jonathan
Flynn, Paul
Griffith, Nia
Havard, Mr Dai
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
James, Mrs Siân C.
Joyce, Eric
Lazarowicz, Mark
Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Long, Naomi
Lucas, Caroline
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
McDonnell, John
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, Angus
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Soulsby, Sir Peter
Weir, Mr Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Wood, Mike

Tellers for the Ayes:
Pete Wishart and Hywel Williams

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Alexander, rh Danny
Amess, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Bagshawe, Ms Louise
Baker, Norman
Baker, Steve
Baldry, Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Binley, Mr Brian
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Mr Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brake, Tom
Bray, Angie
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Mr Steve
Brokenshire, James
Brooke, Annette
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona
Bruce, rh Malcolm
Burley, Mr Aidan
Burns, Conor
Burns, Mr Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burstow, Mr Paul
Burt, Alistair
Burt, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Cable, rh Vince
Cairns, Alun
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cash, Mr William
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clappison, Mr James
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, Stephen
Crockart, Mike
Crouch, Tracey
Davey, Mr Edward
Davies, Philip
Davies, Philip
Davis, David *(Haltemprice and Howden)*
de Bois, Nick
Dinenage, Caroline
Dodds, Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
Dorries, Nadine
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Jonathan
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farron, Tim
Featherstone, Lynne
Field, Mr Mark
Foster, Mr Don
Francois, Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fullbrook, Lorraine
Fuller, Richard
Garnier, Mr Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
George, Andrew
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gilbert, Stephen
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian
Greening, Justine
Grieve, Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Sam
Hague, rh Mr William
Halfon, Robert
Hames, Duncan
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew

Hancock, Mr Mike
Hands, Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, Mr John
Heald, Mr Oliver
Heath, Mr David
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Hendry, Charles
Herbert, Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollingbery, George
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Mr Gerald
Howell, John
Hughes, Simon
Huhne, rh Chris
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, Sajid
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, Gareth
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kelly, Chris
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lancaster, Mark
Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Jessica
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leech, Mr John
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, Mr David
Lloyd, Stephen
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
Main, Mrs Anne
Maude, rh Mr Francis
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McCrea, Dr William
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Patrick
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, Maria
Mills, Nigel
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Mundell, David
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
O'Brien, Mr Stephen
Offord, Mr Matthew
Ollerenshaw, Eric
Opperman, Guy
Osborne, rh Mr George
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, Mr James
Parish, Neil
Patel, Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Pickles, rh Mr Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pritchard, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Raab, Mr Dominic
Randall, Mr John
Reckless, Mark
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reevell, Simon
Reid, Mr Alan
Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm
Robathan, Mr Andrew
Robertson, Hugh
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rogerson, Dan
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, Amber
Russell, Bob
Rutley, David
Sandys, Laura
Scott, Mr Lee
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Shepherd, Mr Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, David
Simpson, Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Miss Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Sir Robert
Soames, Nicholas
Soubry, Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mr Mark
Stanley, rh Sir John
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Mr Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sturdy, Julian
Swales, Ian
Swayne, Mr Desmond
Swinson, Jo
Swire, Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Teather, Sarah
Thurso, John
Timpson, Mr Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Tredinnick, David
Truss, Elizabeth
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Uppal, Paul
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Ward, Mr David
Watkinson, Angela
Weatherley, Mike
Webb, Steve
Wharton, James
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, Mr David
Williams, Mr Mark
Williams, Roger
Williams, Stephen
Williamson, Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wright, Jeremy
Wright, Simon
Yeo, Mr Tim
Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
James Duddridge and Mark Hunter

Question accordingly negatived.
Main Question put.
The House divided: Ayes 335, Noes 257.

Division No. 4] **[10.29 pm**

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Alexander, rh Danny
Amess, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bagshawe, Ms Louise
Baker, Norman
Baker, Steve
Baldry, Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Binley, Mr Brian
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Mr Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brake, Tom
Bray, Angie
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Mr Steve
Brokenshire, James
Brooke, Annette
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona
Bruce, rh Malcolm
Buckland, Mr Robert
Burley, Mr Aidan
Burns, Conor
Burns, Mr Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burstow, Mr Paul
Burt, Alistair
Burt, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Cable, rh Vince
Cairns, Alun
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cash, Mr William
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clappison, Mr James
Clark, Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey

Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, Stephen
Crockart, Mike
Crouch, Tracey
Davey, Mr Edward
Davies, David T. C. *(Monmouth)*
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Philip
Davies, Philip
Davis, David *(Haltemprice and Howden)*
de Bois, Nick
Dinenage, Caroline
Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
Dorries, Nadine
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Jonathan
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farron, Tim
Featherstone, Lynne
Field, Mr Mark
Foster, Mr Don
Francois, Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fullbrook, Lorraine
Fuller, Richard
Garnier, Mr Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
George, Andrew
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gilbert, Stephen
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian
Greening, Justine
Grieve, Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Sam
Hague, rh Mr William
Halfon, Robert
Hames, Duncan
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hancock, Mr Mike
Hands, Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, Mr John
Heald, Mr Oliver
Heath, Mr David
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Hendry, Charles
Herbert, Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollingbery, George
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Horwood, Martin
Howarth, Mr Gerald
Howell, John
Hughes, Simon
Huhne, rh Chris
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, Sajid
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kelly, Chris
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lancaster, Mark
Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Jessica
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leech, Mr John
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Mr Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, Mr David
Lloyd, Stephen
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
Main, Mrs Anne
Maude, rh Mr Francis
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Patrick
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, Maria
Mills, Nigel
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Mundell, David
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
O'Brien, Mr Stephen
Offord, Mr Matthew
Ollerenshaw, Eric
Opperman, Guy
Osborne, rh Mr George
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, Mr James
Parish, Neil
Patel, Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Pickles, rh Mr Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pritchard, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Raab, Mr Dominic
Randall, Mr John
Reckless, Mark
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reevell, Simon
Reid, Mr Alan
Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm
Robathan, Mr Andrew
Robertson, Hugh
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rogerson, Dan
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, Amber
Russell, Bob
Rutley, David
Sanders, Mr Adrian
Sandys, Laura
Scott, Mr Lee
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Shepherd, Mr Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Miss Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Sir Robert
Soames, Nicholas
Soubry, Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mr Mark
Stanley, rh Sir John
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Mr Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sturdy, Julian
Swales, Ian
Swayne, Mr Desmond
Swinson, Jo
Swire, Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Teather, Sarah
Thurso, John
Timpson, Mr Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Tredinnick, David
Truss, Elizabeth
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Uppal, Paul
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Ward, Mr David
Watkinson, Angela
Weatherley, Mike
Webb, Steve
Wharton, James
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, Mr David
Williams, Mr Mark
Williams, Roger
Williams, Stephen
Williamson, Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wright, Jeremy
Wright, Simon
Yeo, Mr Tim
Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
James Duddridge and Mark Hunter

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham

Anderson, Mr David
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bain, Mr William
Balls, rh Ed
Banks, Gordon
Barron, rh Mr Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary
Benton, Mr Joe
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Roberta
Blears, rh Hazel
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Brown, Mr Russell
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Byrne, rh Mr Liam
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mr Alan
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Mrs Jenny
Clark, Katy
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crausby, Mr David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Tony
Curran, Margaret
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
Darling, rh Mr Alistair
David, Mr Wayne
Davidson, Mr Ian
Davies, Geraint
De Piero, Gloria
Denham, rh Mr John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, rh Frank
Dodds, Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Doran, Mr Frank
Dowd, Jim
Doyle, Gemma
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Engel, Natascha
Evans, Chris
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flello, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goggins, rh Paul
Goodman, Helen
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hain, rh Mr Peter
Hamilton, Mr David
Hamilton, Mr Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Mr Tom
Havard, Mr Dai
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Heyes, David
Hillier, Meg
Hilling, Julie
Hodge, rh Margaret
Hood, Mr Jim
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hoyle, Mr Lindsay
Hunt, Tristram
Illsley, Mr Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda
James, Mrs Siân C.
Jamieson, Cathy
Johnson, Diana R.
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeley, Barbara
Keen, Alan
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Long, Naomi
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Mann, John
Marsden, Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
McCann, Mr Michael
McClymont, Gregg
McCrea, Dr William
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKinnell, Catherine
Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Meale, Mr Alan
Mearns, Ian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, rh David
Miliband, rh Edward
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morrice, Graeme
Morris, Grahame M.
Mudie, Mr George
Munn, Meg
Murphy, rh Mr Jim
Murphy, rh Paul
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Nash, Pamela
O'Donnell, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Osborne, Sandra
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Perkins, Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Qureshi, Yasmin
Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, Angus
Robertson, John
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Roy, Mr Frank
Roy, Lindsay
Ruddock, Joan
Sarwar, Anas
Seabeck, Alison
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shuker, Gavin
Simpson, David
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Mr Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela *(Penistone and Stocksbridge)*
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Soulsby, Sir Peter
Spellar, rh Mr John
Straw, rh Mr Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thornberry, Emily
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mr Tom
Watts, Mr Dave
Weir, Mr Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, rh Malcolm
Williams, Hywel
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodcock, John
Woodward, rh Mr Shaun
Woolas, Mr Phil
Wright, David
Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs Sharon Hodgson and Kerry McCarthy

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Address to be presented to Her Majesty by Members of the House who are Privy Counsellors or Members of Her Majesty's Household.

Business without Debate

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made,

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 22 October, 12 and 19 November and 3 December 2010 and 21 January, 4 and 11 February, 4 and 18 March, 1 April, 13 May and 10 and 17 June 2011.—*(Stephen Crabb.)*

Mr Speaker: As there is an amendment not supported by the Member in charge, I will follow the practice of my predecessors and treat that as an objection to the motion.

PETITION

Blockade of Gaza

10.44 pm

Sandra Osborne (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): I wish to present the petition of residents of Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock constituency and others.

The petition states:

the petitioners are appalled by the loss of life associated with Israel's attack on the flotilla of ships carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza, an attack which took place in international waters; further declares that Israel's blockade has destroyed the economy of Gaza, deepened poverty, inflicted widespread suffering and imposed collective punishment on the people of Gaza.

The petition was collected on Saturday. People in my constituency are very concerned about this issue, and I hope that the Government take note of their concerns.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The Petition of residents of Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock constituency and others,

Declares that the petitioners are appalled by the loss of life associated with Israel's attack on the flotilla of ships carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza, an attack which took place in international waters; further declares that Israel's blockade has destroyed the economy of Gaza, deepened poverty, inflicted widespread suffering and imposed collective punishment on the people of Gaza.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons calls on Israel to end its blockade and supports international efforts to secure a lasting settlement with a secure and independent state of Palestine alongside a secure and independent Israel.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.]

[P000834]

Housing policy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Stephen Crabb.)*

10.45 pm

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): I am particularly pleased to have secured this evening's Adjournment debate, as it is on a very important aspect of Government policy that I now know needs to be developed. There were a number of welcome statements in the coalition agreement about the abolition of regional spatial strategies, shared equity accommodation, and the removal of garden grabbing from the planning system.

In my part of the world, the most important issue facing local communities is the lack of affordable housing for local people. It has bedevilled the area for decades but, if anything, the situation has become significantly worse in the last decade. We know that the planning system is fuelled primarily by greed rather than need: in those circumstances, it is difficult to design a system that enables need to be met, and I am particularly pleased to see that the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Andrew Stunell), is here to respond to this important debate.

In the short time available to me, I intend to develop a number of issues, and I have a number of questions about what will happen with the supply side. The Government are to abolish the regional spatial strategies and the housing targets that go with them, so what role will development control play in meeting affordable housing need after that abolition?

With regard to planning policy statement 3, I believe that there will be an increasing number of questions about the integrity of exception sites and about maintaining that integrity, especially in rural areas. In addition, I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will be keen to respond to what I believe is widespread concern about how some elected members of planning committees are finding themselves at risk of predetermination in the consideration process.

Other supply-side questions have to do with the management and regulation of the private rented sector, its relationship with the housing benefits system, and whether there should be formal regulation of landlords and letting agents. On the demand side, I particularly want to probe the Government's approach to the control of second homes—something that has a significant impact on communities in my constituency and many other areas around the country. I also want to discuss the Government's attitude to property taxation, given the earlier announcement of the extension of capital gains tax and the impact that that is likely to have on the private rented sector in particular.

On the abolition of regional spatial strategies, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has embellished the previous coalition agreement statement with his own statement. On 3 June, he said that

"the new Government has announced it will abolish Labour's unelected Regional Assemblies, top-down building targets and unwanted Regional Spatial Strategies."

In my part of the world, the housing stock has more than doubled in the last 40 years. In fact, the area is one of the fastest growing places in the UK, yet the housing

[Andrew George]

needs of local people have got dramatically worse over that period. The previous Government's approach of adding another 70,000 houses in a place like Cornwall, which is what they proposed in the regional spatial strategy over 16 years—as if somehow, by magic, that would address the housing needs of local communities—is disproved by the way the market has operated in the past 40 years. We need a much more sophisticated approach if we are to address the deep-seated, endemic and serious housing problems in such a place as Cornwall. Simply turning it into a developers' paradise is not the answer.

The Secretary of State went on in his letter:

"In contrast to Labour's regime of targets, we will be seeking to introduce new incentives to reward councils which build more homes and support local business growth."

The question really is how the Government intend to do that. If fewer private market houses are to be heaped in where it is not helpful in places like Cornwall, which I would welcome, does that mean that the Government will introduce a system driven more by need than demand? If that is the case, would the outcome be that in places like Cornwall a higher proportion of any new development would be affordable housing to meet local housing need than was originally the case in the previous Government's regional spatial strategy?

On the wider implications of development control in meeting the need for affordable housing, sometimes the best way of meeting local housing need is to have strict control on housing development, although that sounds counter-intuitive, especially in rural areas such as Cornwall. Then one can apply the exceptions approach not only in rural areas but perhaps in others. Often the value of the land is determined by the planning process and what that land can be used for. That determines ultimately whether we can achieve the ultimate goal of developing affordable housing.

The role of the intermediate market is developed in the coalition agreement. Shared ownership accommodation is encouraged, which is something that I warmly welcome. That is encouraging. The coalition agreement says that we will

"promote shared ownership schemes and help social tenants ... own or part-own their own home",

but how will we do that? There is a serious lack of mortgage finance to develop a meaningful intermediate market. In places like Cornwall it is vital that we create a new rung on the housing ladder for people at the very bottom who cannot make the enormous jump on to the first rung of the private market.

Dan Rogerson (North Cornwall) (LD): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way and congratulate him on obtaining this debate so early in the new Parliament. In talking about definitions and the Government's policy, does he agree that "affordable" housing can sometimes be used by developers to provide housing for sale that is still very much unaffordable to local people? It is discounted when compared to the full market price, but really socially rented accommodation would do the most to bite into that need in our communities.

Andrew George: My hon. Friend is right to suggest that we need a lot more social rented accommodation, but much of the pressure on that accommodation is from people who might otherwise get on to the intermediate rung of the housing ladder. I am keen that we should develop that. The problem is the lack of mortgage finance. Only three lenders are currently lending, and in order to get schemes to go ahead it is necessary to have all three lenders on a site. With that, of course, comes significant pressure for relaxation of the section 106 agreements, which often go alongside such developments.

Before I was elected I was a rural housing enabler before such things were properly invented. I was involved in many of the kind of developments that have taken place since the early 1990s as a result of what was then PPG3 and is now PPS3. We found exception sites. What I found then, and has been found since that time, is that it is easier to find exception sites where the development value is significantly less than £10,000 a plot. People were finding it a great deal cheaper than that in the early 1990s. Such sites could be taken forward in an environment in which the integrity of the planning system was maintained. Otherwise, the hope value on all those sites will be lost.

Rural exception sites—also known as departure sites—are sites beyond or close to defined settlements. Exception sites are acceptable for the provision of 100% affordable housing but not for the provision of open market housing. Often such schemes consist of fewer than 20 houses—more often than not, far fewer. It is very important indeed, , as PPS3 states, that:

"Rural exception sites should only be used for affordable housing in perpetuity."

The problem is that there is pressure from some local authorities to weaken, or lessen, the pressure on that. I therefore urge my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that the integrity of the exceptions approach in PPS3 is retained. That has been supported—I spoke to Matthew Taylor before he produced his report last year—by the Taylor review, the Affordable Rural Housing Commission, the rural housing trusts and all the housing charities that work in this field. It is vital that such sites provide affordable housing in perpetuity 100%. There is a risk that we might lose that.

I mentioned predetermination; I shall be interested to hear what the Minister says on that. There is concern among many elected members; they feel unable to campaign on the issue before they are elected, in case, once they have expressed a view about the way in which their local community might or should develop, it would restrict what they might be permitted to do on a planning committee. A statement on that would therefore be particularly helpful.

I mentioned housing benefit. In areas such as mine, where a large proportion of the local community live on the very margins of economic survival, because of the very high private rents those people often depend on the housing benefit system whether they are in or out of work. The problem is that the system as it operates at the moment still results in the withdrawal of housing benefit at the rate of about 85p in the pound earned for people in that situation. If that is the case, clearly there are a lot of people, particularly in areas such as mine, who are going in and out of work who suffer from that mechanism and a housing benefit system that does not take fully into account the difficulties of living at that level. As a result, a lot of people living in my part of the world, and many other places, are living in awful accommodation, which certainly does not meet national standards, and are often paying very high rents indeed.

In my area there are some excellent private landlords and the private rented sector is run extremely well, but of course there are some who do not run it as well as perhaps they should. For example, one family that I was seeking to help earlier this year during the very cold winter, who were living in a one-bedroom flat up some stairs and had a one-year-old baby boy—the mother had epilepsy—found themselves in and out of both accommodation and the working environment and were unable to maintain the housing benefit at rental levels. They found themselves under a great deal of pressure from their letting agent at the time. I will quote from a letter that the letting agent, Antony Richards Property Services, sent to my constituents, a Mr Shaun Burden and Ms Rosemary Jarmain, who were living in Morrab road at the time. They have since been housed by the council in accommodation in Newlyn.

The letting agent wrote:

"In the absence of any rent forthcoming and your apparent refusal to help yourselves by providing the information…we are left with no alternative but to seek to enforce the possession notice served last year…the Council will deem you as Intentionally homeless and are highly unlikely to offer you accommodation. You will then be homeless.

The choice is yours.

I am told the streets are cold at night."

Such treatment of local families in a desperate situation is not acceptable.

Adverts for Homechoice in Cornwall have shown that this week, of the 42 properties available, 14 are one-bed, 21 are two-bed, six are three-bed and one is four-bed. In Cornwall, there is a serious shortage of family accommodation—three and four-bed accommodation.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): Will my colleague give way?

Andrew George: Because of time, I need to press on. I am terribly sorry.

I mentioned the issue of second home ownership and the need to control second home ownership in areas such as mine. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is aware of the background in constituencies such as mine. For example, recent surveys of estate agents have shown that last year alone four times as many properties were sold to second home buyers as to first time buyers. In some communities a significant number—sometimes 20%, 30% or 40%—of the properties in local communities are owned by second home owners. Those circumstances make it difficult for people to have any chance of being able to afford a home of their own.

The previous Government looked at the issue following the Taylor review and other representations that I and others made. The then Government said that they were not prepared to look at our proposal to introduce a new use classes order to allow local authorities to restrict the number of second homes permitted to be converted from permanent residency to non-permanent residency in many of the communities where local people do not get a chance.

The previous Government said that they were not prepared to go forward because they thought that that would be difficult to enforce, but with council tax records, business tax records, the electoral register, capital gains tax information and local knowledge, I believe that it is possible to enforce that and to define properly what second homes are.

I mentioned the issue of capital gains tax. I hope that the Government will think carefully, before the Budget on 22 June, about the implementation of the changes in capital gains tax. I welcome the broad announcement, but I hope that there will not be an unintended impact on other business investments, including private letting properties, which are important to our communities. I hope that there will be roll-over relief, annual exemptions and other measures to ensure that the private letting sector is not hit detrimentally. I hope that the Minister is listening and I look forward to his reply.

11.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Stunell): I am delighted to have the opportunity to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Andrew George) and to discuss an important issue that he has pursued in the House for a long time, on the Opposition Benches and on the Government Benches, with great vigour. I thank him for his support for the coalition Government's action and plans in this area, which I hope on the whole he will find acceptable.

The Government believe that enabling people to have a home of their own is a high priority. The problem that we face is that the current system does not deliver that, and my hon. Friend has outlined some of the impacts of the current circumstances on his constituents. He may want to look at the speech that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing made at the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors this morning, which covers some of the points. Perhaps I will not duplicate all of them here.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Ives made a wide-ranging contribution on an important topic. Mine will not be quite as wide-ranging. I am not the Chancellor of the Exchequer, so I will not be commenting on capital gains tax. There may be some other things that my hon. Friend will find are missing, too, but on the issue of the disqualification of councillors from taking part in planning decisions and other decisions at their council because they have an opinion about it—so-called pre-determination—I hope that I can give him some comfort. It is absolutely the case that it is wrong for local representatives to be barred from taking part in decisions, even if they have a clear predisposed view. The fact is that despite the advice that is often handed out to them, it is not wrong for councillors to be predisposed towards a particular view, or to express and publicly voice it. They may even have been elected on a particular issue, and it would of course then be deeply frustrating for them to receive apparently professional advice that disqualifies them from taking part. The Government certainly understand the concern that the issue causes to councillors, and if necessary, we will legislate to ensure that councillors are not prevented from speaking up on issues on which they have campaigned. I hope that that is useful news for my hon. Friend and his councillors.

On housing supply, my hon. Friend seemed to suggest that the changes that we were making were intended to produce fewer homes. That is not the case at all. We want homes in the right places, and our view is quite clear: we have not built enough homes. Indeed, this

[Andrew Stunell]

year, house building is at its lowest level since 1946 or, if one discounts the war, since 1923. There is a huge gap between supply and demand, and it is the Government's policy to address that. The long-term demand for housing is strong, even if, as he rightly says, it is at the moment a little hard to make that market work properly.

Mr Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Stunell: Yes, but I have very little time, and I have to be fair to my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives.

Mr Spencer: Just a small point: obviously, the housing ladder has a bottom and a top. In Sherwood, there are many single people living in five-bedroom houses who want to stay in the village in which they live, but who, unfortunately, cannot find elderly accommodation locally. Building the right property in the right place is a big advantage and a big assistance to people who want to come out of a large property and who would free up spaces on the ladder so that people could move up.

Andrew Stunell: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I am sure that he will pursue it in debates in future.

We need to recognise that the under-supply of housing has consequences. It impacts on the affordability of homes. I will not rehearse the arguments, but the fact is that first-time buyers are pretty much out of the market at the moment unless they have the support of parents or friends, or there are outside circumstances; the average age of a first-time buyer is now 37, and that is obviously not acceptable. We have a problem with housing market stability, too. A volatile housing market can quickly translate into instability in financial markets and the wider economy.

Andrew George: I entirely accept what my hon. Friend says in respect of the national picture and the national figures. I understand that the coalition agreement talks in national terms about such patterns, but as I understand it, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and the coalition agreement are giving local authorities the power and ability to interpret the national standing and to ensure that local need is met in the way that the local authority deems best. The local authority is surely in the best position to know how local need might be met.

Andrew Stunell: It is certainly in a better position to do so than the devisers of regional spatial strategies; I think that we can agree on that. We need to increase supply.

My hon. Friend has brought me neatly on to the abolition of regional spatial strategies, a phrase that has to be said carefully and articulated clearly. Regional spatial strategies have gone. The Secretary of State has written to planning authorities telling them that it is now a material consideration for them to take account of his letter saying that regional spatial strategies are to be disposed of. The legal decision must await legislation, but clearly we are there already. It is not just a question of telling local authorities, "You're on your own"; there will be clear incentives for local authorities that permit the development of housing, and a reward system that will give them the opportunity to develop infrastructure and services to match the investment that they are allowing.

My hon. Friend had plenty to say about second home ownership. I have had the privilege of listening to him speak on the subject in debates for a number of years. He asked for some specific things. I cannot deal with capital gains tax—that is definitely well above my pay grade—but he also asked whether we could use the planning use class of second homes. The Government do not believe that there is a way forward on that. I would be interested—I do not suppose that I have the choice—to receive further representations from him and from others who think differently, but there are serious difficulties over how that can be done, not least because, for the first time, we are bringing the ownership of an asset into consideration of whether it was a material planning use or not. *[Interruption.]* I can see that my hon. Friend wants to engage in debate, and I look forward to doing so over the coming months.

My hon. Friend will have received a parliamentary response from the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), probably this afternoon, to say that we have no immediate plans to change the discount on council tax for second homes. However, my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives has raised some interesting issues, and some of us have great sympathy with them.

My hon. Friend asked about rural exception sites, and there seems to be a bit of a flurry: perhaps PPS3 and rural exception sites might, in some mysterious way, be at risk. I want to assure him that there is nothing in the coalition agreement or in the Conservative Green Paper on open source planning—I did not think that I would be likely to be standing at the Dispatch Box defending it—that would to change rural exception sites. The Government believe, as he does, that they are important and very material, so I hope that he accepts our assurance.

My hon. Friend rightly drew attention to the need to put in the missing rung in the ladder through the development of the intermediate market. Again, I refer him to the words of my hon. Friend the Minister at the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors this morning. We are committed to supporting that intermediate sector and making sure that it flourishes. We want to promote shared ownership and help social tenants and others to own or part-own their home. Shared ownership is a way of helping lower-income households purchase a share in a home, perhaps for as little as 25%, which is what the current HomeBuy offer says.

Sarah Newton *rose—*

Andrew George *rose—*

Andrew Stunell: I am keeping an extremely close watch on the time, Mr Speaker, as I am sure you are, but I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives.

Andrew George: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I apologise for catching him at the close of his speech. The Government own two banks, but mortgage finance

is the big stumbling block in developing this sector. Is there anything more that he and the Government can do to enable the sector to move forward?

Andrew Stunell: Again, I do not think that that can be dealt with at my level, but the whole Government are committed to putting the British economy back on its feet and to restoring the health of the financial and business sector. That is going to be the fastest way to get the financial market working properly. I know that my hon. Friend, like me, is committed to dealing with that.

Finally, may I deal with the private rented sector? The House will have been appalled to hear of the case that my hon. Friend drew to our attention and of the callous words of the letting agent as they affected his constituent. We must recognise that the private rented sector is significant: 13% of households are in the private rented sector, and some tenants in that sector face problems of overcrowding, poor-quality accommodation and difficulties with the letting agents themselves. I certainly have a great deal of sympathy for anyone who suffers as a result of poor practice by a letting or managing agent.

We advise anyone contemplating renting or letting a property through an agent to use one who is a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors scheme, the Association of Residential Letting Agents or the national approved letting scheme. About half the agents are members of those organisations. I look forward to working with my hon. Friend over the coming months and years to make sure that what he wants, what I want and what the Government want—

11.15 pm

House adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 9(7)).

House of Commons

Wednesday 9 June 2010

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister for the Cabinet Office was asked—

Non-departmental Public Bodies

1 **Simon Kirby** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Con): What mechanism he plans to use to review the effectiveness of non-departmental public bodies. [1341]

4. **Chris Skidmore** (Kingswood) (Con): What mechanisms he plans to use to review the effectiveness of non-departmental public bodies. [1344]

9. **Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): What mechanisms he plans to use to review the effectiveness of non-departmental public bodies. [1349]

10. **Mr David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What mechanisms he plans to use to review the effectiveness of non-departmental public bodies. [1350]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Mr Francis Maude): We are committed to cutting the number of public bodies to increase accountability and cut costs. In future, each public body will have to meet one of three tests—does it perform a technical function, does it need to be politically impartial or does it act independently to establish facts? The Prime Minister has written to Cabinet colleagues asking them to apply those tests rigorously to the public bodies within their area of responsibility. I will be meeting colleagues in the coming weeks to take the review forward, and I expect to publish the outcome in the autumn with a view to introducing a public bodies Bill later this year.

Simon Kirby: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer, and I welcome him to the Dispatch Box. Given the Government's clear policy on localism, will he ensure that the regional development agency quango, SEEDA—the South East England Development Agency—is rapidly dismantled and that its powers and decisions are handed back to the local authorities to which those powers have always properly belonged?

Mr Maude: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. It is very good to see him here. He is a close neighbour in Sussex and he makes a very good point. The Government will engage in discussions with local partners, including local authorities and local business organisations, to work out with them in respect of each RDA the best way forward. I suspect that he and I have the same sort of concerns about the way in which SEEDA has operated.

Chris Skidmore: While the excellent Frenchay hospital near my constituency was downgraded by the previous Government despite a 50,000-strong petition of local residents opposing the move, it was reported last year that the salaries of NHS quango bosses have increased by up to 77% in the past three years. Does the Minister agree that this Government's commitment to transparency and accountability will help to reduce that sort of cost to the taxpayer and will help to protect NHS front-line services?

Mr Maude: First, I congratulate my hon. Friend on the very vigorous campaign that he has fought and continues to fight in the interests of his constituents to protect the work of the Frenchay hospital. I have visited the hospital and I know what good work it does. He is absolutely right that transparency is the friend of the citizen in exposing what the state spends its money on. It will enable communities, individuals and organisations to exercise and enforce much greater accountability. Money is going to be increasingly scarce in the years ahead, thanks to what we inherited from the Labour party, and it is going to be increasingly important that it is spent where it is needed, at the front line, on patients and on parents whose children are at school.

Andrew Stephenson: I thank my right hon. Friend for those reassurances. Will he tell us what we are going to do to stop the proliferation of more and more quangos, as happened under the previous Government?

Mr Maude: In addition to applying rigorously to existing public bodies and quangos the three tests that we have set out, we will ensure that public bodies do not come into existence unless they are absolutely necessary to meet one of those three tests. Bodies that spend public money and deliberate on policy should in general be accountable, through Ministers, to Parliament. That is a basic principle, and that is what we will enforce in future.

Mr Amess: As someone who has long been concerned about unelected, unaccountable quangos, would my right hon. Friend care to comment on mechanisms that deal specifically with quangos in Essex? Would he welcome representations from me and other Essex colleagues?

Mr Maude: I would indeed. I expect those representations to be vigorous and forthright and I look forward to receiving them.

Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab): Many public bodies, such as the RDAs the Minister mentioned, but also the Bank of England, the BBC, the Judicial Appointments Commission and parliamentary boundary commissions, are independent of Government precisely because they have to be independent of Government. Will the Minister give the House a commitment that this will not just be a centralising exercise whereby bodies that ought to be independent are taken under direct control by Ministers?

Mr Maude: I am disinclined to take lectures about centralising tendencies from someone who was a Minister in the last Government. I simply refer the hon. Gentleman to what I said. The tests that we will apply to quangos—to public bodies—will be rigorous and serious. If there is an overwhelming requirement for them to be independent politically, that will be one of the tests, but the presumption will be that public functions should be exercised by organisations accountable to Parliament.

Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): May I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his post? He may be aware that I chair the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, a non-departmental public body that has enjoyed cross-party support for its whole existence. Can he clarify the processes that are taking place? The Westminster Foundation for Democracy is already under a process of review as one of the arm's length bodies independent from the Foreign Office. How does that mix with the process he has set out today?

Mr Maude: I hope they will seamlessly meld together. I am not conscious of the particular review to which the hon. Lady refers, but this review will cover all public bodies that come under the responsibility of all Departments. I am confident that in my discussions about the review with the Foreign Secretary the Westminster Foundation will be considered in a proper way.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his responsibilities. If he has a bonfire of the quangos, there are one or two I might add. There is one where newly appointed staff are increasing, its executives earn more than Ministers and MPs, and are appointing press officers and consultants, yet they do not even answer the telephone. Would the Minister be surprised and would he care to name that quango? Might it be the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority?

Mr Maude: These are deep waters and I prefer not to venture into that particular one at this stage, but I am absolutely confident that the right hon. Gentleman will make his views known in his characteristically forthright manner.

Cabinet Government

2. **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): If he will discuss with ministerial colleagues proposals to strengthen Cabinet government. [1342]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr Oliver Letwin): First, I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, who in marked contrast to the previous Prime Minister and his predecessor, long campaigned for Cabinet government to become a reality. I am delighted to tell him that I do not have to answer his question in the future; I can answer in the present, because in the last three weeks we have already taken enormous strides to create proper Cabinet government through the formation of a small number of effective decision-making Cabinet committees that will look across the whole range of Government business, make decisions collectively and not resort to the kind of sofa government that caused so many problems, for example, in the entry to the Iraq war.

Kelvin Hopkins: I thank the Minister for his answer. The British constitution has sometimes been characterised as a time-limited elective dictatorship and the Prime Minister as an elected monarch. In an era of sofa government, the Cabinet was downgraded to cipher status. Is it not time for really radical change—perhaps with the Cabinet elected by Members of Parliament?

Mr Letwin: The trend towards elections is indeed one that the Government have in general sponsored, as the hon. Gentleman is well aware. Many Members have put themselves forward and are in the course of being elected for many important posts in the House. But the reality of Cabinet government does not depend on elections, it depends on whether the Prime Minister of the day and, indeed, in the coalition Government, the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of the day are willing to see collegiate decision making rather than elective dictatorship. They are not only in this instance willing, but keen to do so. If I may point it out to the hon. Gentleman, one of the advantages of the new politics of coalition Government is that it enforces on us collective decision making, because we have to agree between the two parties in the coalition as well.

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not wish to be unkind to new Ministers, but answers are, frankly, too long. They need to be shorter.

Voluntary Organisations

3. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effects on voluntary organisations of the Government's regulatory and administrative requirements. [1343]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr Nick Hurd): One of our priorities is to make it easier to run a voluntary organisation, so we are committed to clearing the thicket of bureaucracy that too often gets in the way of doing good and to setting up a joint task force with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to look at how we can reduce red tape for small organisations.

Fiona Bruce: The requirements for people to obtain more than one Criminal Records Bureau check when working or volunteering with different community organisations is causing much duplication and expense, both to individuals and to community groups such as Crossroads Care Cheshire East in my constituency. Will the Minister consider reviewing the CRB check procedure and introducing one single registerable and transferrable check for each individual?

Mr Hurd: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House and wish her every success in following in some quite formidable footsteps. The point she makes is extremely important and that frustration has been expressed to me by a number of voluntary organisations. I hope that she will be pleased to know that, in the coalition agreement, the Government are committed to reviewing the criminal records and vetting and barring regime and I will make sure that the relevant Minister in the Home Office is aware of her concerns. She and I will be following that review very closely.

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new and important role. Given statements made in recent days by the Prime Minister and others about deep and early cuts in public spending at the same time as statements about an

extended role for voluntary organisations in the delivery of public services, I am sure that, as the Minister for the voluntary sector, he will want to move swiftly to reassure anyone who thinks that there is any suggestion that this means that the Government want to get public services on the cheap. He will want to rebut that suggestion very swiftly. Therefore, will he confirm to Members on both sides of the House who value greatly the work of voluntary organisations that he and other Ministers will uphold the compact with voluntary organisations and, in particular, the commitment to three-year funding as a minimum and to full recovery of costs for volunteering?

Mr Speaker: Again, I am afraid that that question was a little on the long side. I know that the answer will not be.

Mr Hurd: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, but it is a bit rich coming from a member of a Government one of whose last acts involved the breaching of the compact by the then Minister for the third sector. The compact is an important framework for the relationship between the state and the sector at a very important time in its development. We want the sector to work more closely with the state and the compact has an important part to play in making sure that that relationship works productively.

Emergency Planning College

5. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): What plans he has to visit the emergency planning college at Hawkhills. [1345]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr Nick Hurd): The emergency planning college is in my hon. Friend's constituency and does extraordinarily valuable work in training people to support this country's resilience in all types of emergency. I have no current plans to visit the college but my hon. Friend is, I am sure, about to tell me why that is a missed opportunity.

Miss McIntosh: May I take this opportunity to invite my hon. Friend, whom I congratulate on his appointment, to visit the college? I know that he would be very welcome. Such a visit would act as a morale booster to the college. Will he extend its role to make sure that we can in future pre-empt tragedies such as we have seen in Cumbria and to ensure that all the emergency services are put through their paces at regular intervals to prepare for any such incidents in the future?

Mr Hurd: I welcome my hon. Friend back to the House and I thank her for her question. Clearly we need to be proud of the college, which is a national centre of excellence and has won awards, including, I believe, a best in the world award, for its work? I understand that it has been through a recent reorganisation. If it would welcome a ministerial visit, I would be happy to do so. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. May I remind the Minister that it is very important to face the House, because otherwise Members cannot hear? The Minister can come back to the Dispatch Box.

Mr Hurd: I think that I had finished, Mr Speaker. If the college would welcome a ministerial visit, I will be happy to fit that in.

Pay Rates (Civil Service)

6. **Katy Clark** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): If he will bring forward proposals to equalise rates of pay between staff in the civil service and in non-departmental public bodies. [1346]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Mr Francis Maude): For the grades below the senior civil service, these matters are delegated to individual departments and to non-departmental public bodies. Nevertheless, we will seek to improve and modernise civil service pay arrangements to ensure that they are fair and transparent, to enable us to retain and motivate staff and to offer best value for money to the taxpayer.

Katy Clark: I thank the Minister for that answer and welcome him to his position. He will be aware that there are 230 separate bargaining units in the civil service and, at the moment, people doing exactly the same job can earn rates of pay that differ by up to 30 per cent., and more. What will the right hon. Gentleman do to bring about more equal and fairer pay structures within the civil service so that we have justice and to improve morale?

Mr Maude: In the absence of any money—and as the former Chief Secretary pointed out, there is no money left—the opportunities to equalise pay in an upwards direction are pretty limited. We have said that as part of the efficiency and reform group work that we have set in train, we will carry out a review to see how we can simplify civil service pay, but this is a deeply complex area.

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): Can the Minister please give any details of the review into the introduction of the 20 times pay multiple in the public sector?

Mr Maude: The terms of reference for Will Hutton's review are being drawn up and finalised. As my hon. Friend says, the review will look at the multiple between the best-paid and least-paid employees in the public sector. We are decentralisers and localists, so we will not expect to exercise our writ across the whole of the wider public sector. We think transparency will play an important part in driving down the differentials.

Non-personal Data

7. **Mr Tom Watson** (West Bromwich East) (Lab): What plans he has to publish non-personal data held by Government Departments. [1347]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Mr Francis Maude): In our first month in government we have already published a number of key data sets, including the Treasury COINS—combined online information system—database, MRSA and C. difficile weekly infection rates for each hospital, and details of the salaries of 172 civil servants who are paid more than the Prime Minister. The letter from my right

hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 29 May set out specific commitments to publishing further data on spending, contracts and the civil service during the rest of the year. We will also give the public a right to data so that people can obtain the Government-held data sets that they want.

Mr Watson: The right hon. Gentleman is doing a great job and I hope he gets the support of my Front-Bench team in accelerating the programme of releasing public sector data, but does he accept that the Government cannot be selective about those data? They cannot print 172 civil servants' salaries without telling me what Andy Coulson is paid.

Mr Maude: All this will be divulged in due course. If I may, I should like to pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman. When he was a Minister in the Cabinet Office, he pursued the agenda of data transparency with admirable vigour, and I suspect he was somewhat frustrated by the lack of progress that it was possible for him to make. I look forward to working closely with him as we jointly pursue this agenda in the public interest.

Charities (Regulation)

8. **David Tredinnick** (Bosworth) (Con): What plans he has for the future regulation of charities. [1348]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr Nick Hurd): The Government are committed to making it easier for people to set up and run charities and to reduce the amount of regulation, monitoring and reporting that has been imposed on the sector. I am meeting the chair and chief executive of the Charity Commission next week to discuss this further.

David Tredinnick: I welcome my hon. Friend to his post. Will he discuss gift aid at that meeting? At present the administrative burden falls largely on the charities and that should be rectified.

Mr Hurd: We know how important gift aid is to the sector, and I will meet the Economic Secretary to the Treasury to discuss reform. We have said that we would like to reduce the bureaucratic burden associated with gift aid which falls on charities, and disproportionately on small charities. The Treasury-led gift aid forum is examining the case for reform and will report in September.

Tessa Jowell (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I, too, welcome the hon. Gentleman and the other Ministers to the Front Bench. In reviewing the regulation of charities, it is also important to maintain both the capacity and the capability of charities. Perhaps the Minister can therefore explain to the House the reasoning for ending the funding of the Futurebuilders programme, which was widely acclaimed in a recently published evaluation by Sheffield Hallam university, and which is building the capacity of precisely the organisations that the Government want to take more responsibility for delivering services?

Mr Hurd: We have not closed the funding for Futurebuilders. As the right hon. Lady well knows, Futurebuilders is effectively shut for business. It has spent the money. We have taken a decision to use the future income from the loan book to fund our programmes for training community organisers and a new community grants programme.

Tessa Jowell: That is precisely the problem: the Futurebuilders programme is an investment fund, with loans made that are then recycled to other organisations. The Government have decided to end the programme and, therefore, effectively to shut it. Why?

Mr Hurd: The programme has run its course, and we have taken a decision on where to recycle the income. We think that the future of loan finance delivery is through the big society bank, and we want to encourage the traditional banking industry to meet the sector's debt needs. That is the future—not the Futurebuilders programme, which distorted the market, rather than built it.

Cabinet Committees

11. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the contribution of Cabinet Committees, Sub-Committees and working groups to the work of his Department. [1351]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr Oliver Letwin): I am very conscious of your admonition to be brief, Mr Speaker, so I shall just say to the hon. Gentleman that we have a rather more modest ambition, which is not to ask what the Cabinet can do for our Department, but what our Department can do for the Cabinet.

John Mann: I appreciate that the Government have to find something for their official bag carrier to the Prime Minister to do, but will the Minister confirm that for every new Committee and working group established an existing one will be abolished?

Mr Letwin: I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that I am actually the unofficial bag carrier to the Prime Minister; I do not even qualify as the official one. We have organised ourselves in a way that means that we have cut to the bare minimum the number of groups that we operate. We have a far tighter Cabinet Committee system than that which was operated under the previous Government, because, as I said to the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), who asked an earlier question, we are absolutely determined that our Cabinet Committees be genuine decision-making bodies, not merely a dignified part of the constitution.

Efficiency and Reform Group

12. **Mr David Anderson** (Blaydon) (Lab): If he will ensure that trade unions are involved in the work of his Department's efficiency and reform group. [1353]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Mr Francis Maude): We are committed to proper engagement with public service staff and their representatives. Last week I had a good meeting with the Council of Civil Service Unions, and yesterday I attended a meeting of the TUC's public service liaison group. We will invite the TUC and its member organisations, plus other representatives of public service employees, to meet regularly to discuss matters affecting the work

force who deliver our vital public services, and to build on the work of the Public Service Forum, which I am committed to continuing and which will meet in July. There will be difficult issues to discuss, no doubt, but we are determined to air them through regular dialogue.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for that reply. Will he look at the report that the Public and Commercial Services Union produced last year, showing that 20,000 tax collectors were sacked at a time when at least £40 billion of tax evasion and avoidance was going on in this country? Will he work with the unions to try to resolve that matter?

Mr Maude: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but he will recollect the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury who said that there was no money left. We have to run the Government with less money than there was, and there will have to be cuts. We hope, to the maximum extent possible, that public spending can be cut without affecting jobs, but it is unreal to expect that that will be totally avoidable.

Early Intervention Programmes

13. **Mr Graham Allen** (Nottingham North) (Lab): Whether he has had recent discussions with third sector organisations on the financing of early intervention programmes; and if he will make a statement. [1354]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr Nick Hurd): I salute the hon. Gentleman's pioneering work in that area, and he will know that the voluntary and community sector can be a very helpful provider of early intervention services that reduce the drivers of demand on the state. I shall be in contact with my colleagues in all relevant Departments about any future policy developments on early intervention, and about how the Office for Civil Society can contribute.

Mr Allen: I welcome the Minister to his place. Will he meet me and a Treasury Minister to discuss how we can release the bonds on the voluntary and charitable sectors so that they can raise money in the City of London in order to pursue early intervention through social investment bonds? Will he agree to meet me?

Mr Hurd: I can certainly speak for myself and agree to meet the hon. Gentleman. He will know about the interesting work on social impact bonds, which bring in private capital for investment in early intervention and involve payment by results. That will be an important part of the future.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Does the Minister agree that voluntary organisations are preferable to state organisations when providing early intervention?

Mr Hurd: I am sure that that is the experience of most colleagues in the House—if they have been to visit social enterprises or community organisations and seen the extraordinary work that they can do and the different relationships that they can have with the people whom they are trying to help.

Mr Speaker: There was some very helpful co-operation there from a Government Back Bencher, the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), and indeed, I pay tribute to the Minister on the Front Bench for responding in such a pithy and, I hope I can say, timely fashion. The House will be very grateful and will join me in thanking both the hon. Member for Wellingborough and, indeed, the Minister in his response from the Front Bench.

I ask the House to stand and to observe one minute's silence in memory of those who lost their lives in west Cumbria a week ago today.

12 noon

The House observed a one-minute silence.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [1326] **Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 9 June.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): As the people of Cumbria gather for memorial services to remember the shocking and tragic events of last week, it is right that our thoughts are with them and with the friends and families of all those who were killed or injured.

I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in paying tribute to the soldiers who have died in Afghanistan: from 40 Commando Royal Marines, Marine Anthony Hotine; from 1st Battalion the Mercian Regiment, Lance Corporal Alan Cochran and Corporal Terry Webster; and a soldier from 3rd Regiment Royal Horse Artillery who died yesterday. They were all extremely talented and professional servicemen who gave their lives for the safety and security of people in our country. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude, and our thoughts should be with their families and with their friends.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Albert Owen: May I associate myself with the words of the Prime Minister and offer my condolences to the families of those who were tragically killed in west Cumbria and of the servicemen who have died serving our country?

There have been reports in the newspapers that the Prime Minister wants a positive relationship with the Assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and, indeed, wants to work with them in partnership. On that theme, will he put a measure before the House that allows a referendum this autumn for greater powers for the Welsh Assembly? Will he come clean with this House, and with the people of Wales, and say whether he is in favour of additional powers himself?

The Prime Minister: First, let me be as frank and as clear as I can be. We had a meeting of the joint ministerial council yesterday with representatives of all the devolved Assemblies and Governments. I want to have a genuine respect agenda between the UK Government and all those Administrations. We have always said—*[Interruption.]* I will tell you exactly what that means: there will be a referendum on extra powers for the Welsh Assembly. That referendum, we believe, should take place next year.

Albert Owen *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but if he wanted to have a referendum earlier, the last Secretary of State could have pushed it through earlier, and he did not. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that that referendum will take place. It will be a matter for people in Wales to decide. They must determine their future. As for my view, as someone who spends a lot of time in Wales and has great respect for people in Wales, I always find that, yes, there is a debate about powers for the Assembly, but there is also debate among people in Wales wanting to know how we are going to make progress on housing, on health care, on schools, and on jobs—the real issues as well as just the institutional ones.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): May I associate myself with the remarks that the Prime Minister rightly made about the dreadful shootings in Cumbria last week, and also pay tribute to the emergency services and to all those who are recovering from that appalling tragedy?

The Prime Minister will be aware that the national cancer reform strategy states that no cancer patient should have to travel for more than 45 minutes to receive radiotherapy treatment. Last December, we received a commitment from our local health trusts that there would be a new cancer unit for South Lakeland in Kendal. Will the Prime Minister agree to meet me and health campaigners and NHS officials soon to try to ensure that he, too, makes a commitment to the delivery of a cancer unit—

Mr Speaker: Order. We really must have shorter questions.

The Prime Minister: First, the hon. Gentleman will note from the coalition agreement, as I am glad to remind everyone, that we are protecting NHS spending. There will be real increases in NHS spending under this Government year on year. I absolutely understand the concerns that there are about wanting to keep services local to people. I know that is the case in Lakeland, and it is also the case with the West Cumberland hospital. I am very happy to ensure that there is a meeting between the Health Secretary and the hon. Gentleman to discuss the matter and ensure that we keep services local. A lot of the reconfigurations that took place under the previous Government caused an enormous amount of pain and unease in local areas and did not actually lead to improved services.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to the four soldiers who have died in the service of our country in the past week: Marine Anthony Hotine from 40 Commando Royal Marines, Lance Corporal Alan Cochran and Corporal Terry Webster from 1st Battalion the Mercian Regiment, and a soldier from 3rd Regiment Royal Horse Artillery. They fought with bravery, and today we remember not just the sacrifice they made but the loved ones they leave behind.

I support what the Prime Minister said about Cumbria and join him in expressing our heartfelt sympathy to the family and friends of all those who were killed or injured. The police investigation is under way. Can he update us on the work that the Government are doing, and is he in a position yet to tell the House whether the Government have any plans to reconsider the regulations on guns? As the Home Secretary rightly said in her statement last week, we have to learn any lessons we can.

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. and learned Lady for her words. It is right to reflect on this appalling tragedy and think about how best we can go forward. Specifically on gun laws, we need to be clear first about the full facts of the case. We also need to determine the type and scope of reviews that will take place after this tragedy. Of course the Home Office will look again at the gun laws in the light of the tragedy, and I can also announce today that the chief constable of Cumbria has already written to the president of the Association of Chief Police Officers asking him to support a peer review, to be conducted by national police experts on firearms licensing and police firearms response and tactics. Those reviews will become publicly available documents. We should not leap to conclusions, and I do not believe in knee-jerk legislation. We have in this country some of the tightest gun laws, but of course we should look again at them.

On the issue of what sort of review is right for people in west Cumbria, I will be meeting two of the west Cumbrian MPs whose constituencies are affected straight after Prime Minister's questions in my office, and the right hon. and learned Lady would be very welcome to join us with the Home Secretary to discuss that matter. In the end, we must ensure that we do the right thing by the people of west Cumbria and that they are properly served by the things that we decide as a Government.

Ms Harman: I fully support everything that the Prime Minister said in that answer, and may I say that I am sure that the visit that he and the Home Secretary made to Cumbria was very much appreciated?

Just before the general election, the Electoral Commission published a report showing that despite the efforts of electoral registration officers, there are still serious concerns about the number of people who are eligible to vote but who are not on the electoral register. Given that the Government are committed to major reform of constituency boundaries, will the Prime Minister undertake not to press forward with those changes on the basis of an electoral register that excludes 3.5 million people?

The Prime Minister: First, I agree with the right hon. and learned Lady that it is important that people who are eligible to vote register to vote, and we want to see that sped up and improved. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is taking forward that work. We also want to see individual voter registration, because there has been a great increase in fraud in recent years, but even as that work goes ahead it is important that we have reform so that we have equal-sized constituencies across our country. Those of us who support the first-past-the-post voting system want to make it more fair by ensuring that seats are the same size across our country. Where on earth is the unfairness in that?

Ms Harman: The danger is that if the Prime Minister presses on in the way he has indicated, he will be making the system less fair, not more fair. As he said, the Deputy Prime Minister acknowledged to the House this week that there is a problem with the register. The

Electoral Commission study found not just the number of people who are not on the register, but who they are: a third of all black people, half of all young people, and half of all private sector tenants are not on the register, despite the work that has been undertaken by electoral registration officers. Those people will not be counted if the Prime Minister redraws constituency boundaries now. He says he wants equal constituencies, but does he accept that he cannot have equal constituencies based on an unequal register?

The Prime Minister: I have to say to the right hon. and learned Lady that she had 13 years to sort out the issue of voter registration. What is interesting about what happened over the last 13 years is that elections used to be determined by a few officials in the Home Office. We have now got the vast bureaucracy of the Electoral Commission. It spends millions of pounds every year, employs dozens of people, holds huge great reviews, spends vast amounts of money on advertising, but has not succeeded in its task.

We will press ahead to get people to register, but I have to ask the right hon. and learned Lady this again: what on earth is unfair about equal-sized seats? My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner) has, I think, to look after about 110,000 constituents, but some Opposition Members have about half that. That is simply not fair.

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister has shown that he is not listening to the argument that he cannot redraw the boundaries, which is his Government's proposal, until the problem of the register is sorted out. He has shown that he is not listening to argument, but pressing on regardless. That is not the new politics; it is downright unfair.

May I move to another issue? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Quite a bad example is being set by some senior Members to newcomers—*[Interruption.]* Order. There are far too many private conversations taking place. The public are not impressed: they want to hear orderly exchanges.

Ms Harman: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Before the election, the coalition parties talked about ending what they called the surveillance society. The coalition agreement said that the Government would further regulate the use of closed circuit television, but on Monday, the Home Secretary could not tell the House what that would mean in practice. Can the Prime Minister tell us now?

The Prime Minister: First, I am not surprised that the right hon. and learned Lady wanted to move on to another subject. Let me make one last point on the previous question—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry if it is painful, but it is important. She says that it is not right to redraw boundaries until we have sorted out the electoral register, but I have to point out that we fought the last election on redrawn boundaries, so I think we have a long way to go on that. There was, I have to say, just a whiff of special pleading.

On surveillance, let me be clear that I support CCTV cameras. I have them in my constituency and they are very effective, and when I worked at the Home Office many years ago I championed such schemes, but I think everyone understands that the level of surveillance has become very great in our country. As well as the issue of CCTV, there is the issue of how many different sorts of officials are allowed to enter people's houses without permission. We will be bringing forward legislation to deal with that. I know that the Labour party has given up on civil liberties, and that the right hon. and learned Lady used to be head of what was the National Council for Civil Liberties—that was all a long time ago—but we on this side of the House think civil liberties are important.

Ms Harman: May I ask the Prime Minister the question again, because I was asking not about people entering people's houses, but about CCTV? Can I tell him what Theresa was saying to me on Friday? [Hon. Members: "Theresa?"] Not the Home Secretary, but Theresa from the Poets Corner estate in my constituency. That Theresa is the one who knows about living on an estate that needs CCTV. Let me tell the Prime Minister that such people do not want to be told by this Government that it is going to be made harder to get the CCTV that they need on their estates. I press him on this because it is about people feeling, and being, safe in their communities. Will he guarantee that he will not do anything to make it harder to get or to use CCTV?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Lady should understand that this is all about proportionality and making sure that we have a system that helps protect people while respecting civil liberties. It is extraordinary how the Labour party is becoming more and more authoritarian. Hearing the right hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls) talk about immigration, it seems we have the new Alf Garnett of British politics. It is one of the biggest U-turns that any of us can remember: for 13 years, not a word about immigration or our borders, but now they are all in a race. Perhaps it is time to move on to another subject, and the right hon. and learned Lady can tell us what she thinks about immigration.

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Is the Prime Minister aware of the closure of 12 branches of the Derbyshire building society and its head office in the village of Duffield in my constituency? Can he assure me that he and his Government will do all they can to help those constituents who will lose their jobs—nearly 250 of them—in this small, rural area? Will he please assure us that the Government will do all they can to help these constituents who are being dealt this cruel blow at this difficult time?

The Prime Minister: I understand why my hon. Friend wants to raise this issue. What has happened to the Derbyshire building society is desperately sad, and obviously the Government will stand ready to do all we can to retrain people who have lost their jobs and to ensure that they get the very best opportunities, and also to ensure that we go on having a strong financial services sector. As the Derbyshire building society reminds us, this is not just about the City of London; it is about the fact that millions of people in our country work in financial services, providing a good service, and we need to help them.

Q2. [1327] **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): One of the projects that stands to be affected by the Government's decision to put on hold £600 million of housing investment is the housing element of the redevelopment of the Longbridge site in my constituency, which is important not just to that area but to the economic recovery of Birmingham as a whole. Given that the project is supported by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition that runs Birmingham city council, will the Prime Minister tell me what priority he will attach to the regenerative effects of such housing projects?

The Prime Minister: Everyone wants regeneration to continue in Birmingham, and I pay tribute to Birmingham city council, which is jointly run, I have to say, by Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, who are continuing with the very good work that they do. We want that regeneration to continue. The problem with the previous Government's housing commitments, particularly on social housing, is that they simply were not funded. One of the things that we and the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills have been able to do, in making £6 billion of cuts this year, is plough back some of that money into social housing schemes, which the last Government promised but never funded.

Jonathan Evans (Cardiff North) (Con): Did my right hon. Friend have the opportunity to reflect overnight on the noble Lord Myners's candid and forthright remarks in the other place about the appalling financial legacy left by the Labour party? Does he share my view that Lord Myners's remarks make it clear that the Office for Budget Responsibility should clearly be supported on both sides of the House, and if anything is to be regretted, is it not the fact that he said that after, rather than before, the election?

Hon. Members: Give him a job!

The Prime Minister: That is a good idea, on that performance. It is great to welcome my hon. Friend back to the House of Commons. He is right that Lord Myners, who was hand-picked by the last Government to be a Treasury Minister, put his finger on the button when he said:

> "There is nothing progressive about a Government who consistently spend more than they can raise in taxation, and certainly nothing progressive that endows generations to come with the liabilities incurred by the current generation." —[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 June 2010; Vol. 719, c. 625.]

Those words are absolutely right, but what a pity he did not say it when he was in office and had the chance to do something about it.

Q3. [1328] **Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): I would like to thank the Prime Minister for writing to me today to tell me that the decision on the Nissan grant will be fast-tracked. Waiting for this decision is causing huge economic uncertainty to the north-east economy. I hope that the Prime Minister can help me with a similar cause of concern to my constituents—the issue of whether the rebuilding of Hetton school will go ahead as planned.

The Prime Minister: First of all, having written the hon. Lady a letter, I can now go a bit further and confirm, with respect to the specific grant for Nissan that she raised last week, that the money will go ahead and the investment will be going in. Before Opposition Members jump to their feet, let me explain what the problem is with some of the grants. Before the last election, Lord Mandelson had a giant cheque book, which he went all round the country opening up, spending tens of billions of pounds, which he promised to 200 projects, two thirds of which were conveniently located in Labour marginal seats. Given that so much money was spent, it is only right for a responsible incoming Government to review those decisions one by one and make sure that the money is well spent. Fortunately for Lord Mandelson, someone else is now getting out their cheque book to pay for his memoirs.

Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Opposition Back Benchers must calm down; the hon. Gentleman is entitled to be heard.

Q4. [1329] **Sajid Javid**: NHS managers in my Bromsgrove constituency tell me that they are being strangled by the level of bureaucracy. What action will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister take to make sure that hospitals will never be allowed again to put top-down targets before patient care?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. We all know of cases where targets were getting in the way of proper clinical outcomes and clinical care. Too many people have experienced that in the health service, and our view is clear: if there is no clinical justification for targets, they will go. I can announce today that we will fulfil another important pledge—to have a public inquiry into the appalling events at the Mid Staffordshire hospital. I remember going to Stafford and meeting families, many of which had lost loved ones, some of whom went into hospital for a routine operation, but because the standards of hygiene and the management were not right and, frankly, because targets were being pursued rather than clinical outcomes, people died needlessly. This inquiry is important so that people in Staffordshire can tell their story.

Q5. [1330] **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley) (Lab): "The Coalition: our programme for government" states:

> "We will extend anonymity in rape cases to defendants."

May I ask the Prime Minister why he believes that defendants in rape cases are more deserving of anonymity than those accused of murder, domestic violence or sexual abuse of children?

The Prime Minister: I know that the right hon. Lady cares very deeply about this issue—the key issue of getting the conviction rate for rapists up—as do I. I know that she gave a good speech on the subject in an Adjournment debate. What I would say is that none of us should ignore the fact that somehow there is a problem with this. We know that a lot of people are falsely accused, whose careers and lives can be blighted—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members shake their heads, but in some cases people have committed suicide. One of the proofs is that when the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), now leader of the Labour party, was in office, she commissioned a report into this issue by Baroness Stern,

which found that 8 to 10% of reported rape cases could result in false allegations. Baroness Stern, who looked into the issue, said that defendant anonymity was often raised and that a

"full examination of the issues would be helpful to the debate".

What we are promising is to bring proposals forward so that they can be debated. Let us not ignore the fact that there is a problem, because there is one, and let us see if we can work together to find the right outcome.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): The people of Wootton Bassett in my constituency who, week by week, lead the nation in paying their respects to our fallen heroes seek no thanks or recognition for so doing. When the happy day comes when our soldiers are finally brought back from Afghanistan, however, I wonder whether the Prime Minister and his colleagues would consider repositioning the very fine war memorial from Camp Bastion to the High street in Wootton Bassett in commemoration of the way in which the local people carry out their service?

The Prime Minister: I think my hon. Friend makes an extremely good and positive suggestion. The whole country has seen the incredible devotion of people in Wootton Bassett, who, come rain or shine, are always out on the streets watching as that very sad procession goes by. I think it has stirred people in this country to see that, when it comes to this conflict, whatever we think of it, we all want to support our troops and their families. We all want to do what we can to recognise that. It is not just a Government thing; it is about the whole of our society wanting to recognise what these people do on our behalf. The people of Wootton Bassett are, in my view, right up there among the heroes.

Q6. [1331] **Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): I am sure the Prime Minister is aware that a cross-party group of MPs worked extremely hard in the last Parliament to persuade the Government to adopt new measures to regulate houses in multiple occupation and to license private landlords. Can he reassure me that his Government will not seek to undermine that legislation, which is so important to my city centre community and others?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady has made a very good point. We all know of the problems of houses that are kept badly, and of past problems involving HMOs. I will ask the Minister for Housing to get in touch with her about his plans, so that we can ensure that we get this right.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): The legacy of the former Government's disastrous decision making in Iraq is still plain to see. Will the Prime Minister look at the existing Home Office guidance on the deporting of asylum seekers to Baghdad? A plane has left today. May I ask the Prime Minister to consider the matter again, personally and compassionately, to ensure that we have a firm immigration policy, but remain a bastion for people fleeing political persecution?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly look into my hon. Friend's point. However, I think we should recognise that whatever view we took of the Iraq conflict—and I supported it—at least Iraq now has some chance of stability and democracy. We are actually seeing some progress there. This morning I had a meeting with General Petraeus, who brought me up to date on what he considers to be the latest situation.

It is important to remember that one of the reasons why our brave servicemen and women fought and died in Iraq was that they were trying to make it a more stable country, and a country to which people who had fled it would be able to return. Yes, of course I will look at the specific issue raised by my hon. Friend, but in general, while we are here to offer people asylum when they are fleeing torture and persecution, if we help to make their country safe they should be able to go home.

Q7. [1332] **Tony Cunningham** (Workington) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for his recent visit to west Cumbria. Will he give me a personal assurance that he will do everything in his power to help and support its people, who have suffered so grievously in recent times?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. I know how hard he and other MPs in Cumbria have been working to bring people together after this appalling tragedy. They are, as someone has said, a very tough people in west Cumbria, but also very compassionate, very caring, and a very strong community. They have shown that in the way in which they have responded to these dreadful events.

As I said in answer to the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham, we will meet after Question Time to discuss what should be done next. I think that that is important, and I think it important to recognise that west Cumbria is a part of the country that sometimes feels quite cut off.

Amazing work was done by West Cumberland hospital, which proved itself when facing the most appalling tragedy, and the terrible difficulties caused by the fact that so many people with such awful injuries were coming to the hospital at once. People are inclined to say that it is a bit too small to cope with such events, but it coped magnificently, and I think it proved that big is not always beautiful.

Gavin Barwell (Croydon Central) (Con): The last Government changed the rules so that anyone claiming asylum in this country must do so in person in my constituency. Does the Prime Minister agree that it is wrong to ask one local authority to shoulder what should be a national responsibility, and if so, will the Government review the decision?

The Prime Minister: I should be happy to consider that. I recall that it has been an issue in the past for constituencies surrounding Heathrow airport, and that mechanisms were introduced in an attempt to alleviate some of the burdens. I will ensure that Home Office Ministers get in touch with my hon. Friend so that we can deal with this problem.

Q8. [1333] **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): The European Commission recently reported that European fish stocks were being fished at unsustainable levels, and that 30% were close to collapse. Will the Prime Minister negotiate with European colleagues to seek the abandonment of the common fisheries policy, and, if they do not agree, give notice of Britain's withdrawal from the CFP?

The Prime Minister: That is a question that I am rather used to anticipating from those on the Conservative Benches. I think that even the most enthusiastic supporter of the European Union would recognise that the common fisheries policy has not been a success either in supporting our fishermen or in saving fish stocks. There are good lessons to be learned from other countries that have done better. I have to say though that that sometimes means some very drastic action in terms of closing some fishing areas altogether, but other countries have managed to do that and to regenerate their fishing stocks, so we will certainly take forward those negotiations on, I am sure, a coalition-wide basis.

Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree that we have heard a lot about fairness from Labour Members today, but there is nothing fair about the legacy that the Labour Government have left us: the £75 billion of debt interest that we will have to pay, which we could have spent on public services in all the constituencies represented in the House, including my constituency of Devizes?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point, which is that, if we do not take action to deal with the deficit, we will pay over £70 billion, not repaying the debt, but just on debt interest in five years' time. Think about it like this: all the revenue gleaned from corporation tax—all the tax on every company making a profit in our country—does not even pay for half the debt interest bill. That is the mess that we have been left in, but this Government have the courage to deal with it.

Q9. [1334] **Mr Frank Roy** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): The Prime Minister will agree that cross-border rail services are strategically important to the UK. Will he therefore honour the assurances given to me by the previous Government that east coast main line services will continue to stop at Motherwell and that there will be an increase in west coast main line services stopping at Motherwell?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue. I will certainly look at it. I cannot promise to arrange all the stops on the east coast main line. Sadly, that is a power I do not think I have, but I will do my best.

Q10. [1335] **Nadhim Zahawi** (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): The Prime Minister will know that I am a follower of my beloved England football team. I ask him to do a great thing for the people of England: cut through the bureaucracy and nonsense and fly the flag of England over Downing street for the duration of the World cup.

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that I have had those conversations. There was some question that this was going to have a cost impact, but I have managed to cut through that and I can say that, at no additional cost to the taxpayer, the flag of St George will fly above Downing street during the World cup. I am sure that the whole House will want to wish Fabio Capello and all our team well—for the purposes of this, I am looking at all the Benches here. I am sure that everyone in the House, no matter what part of the UK they come from, will be cheering, "Come on England."

Q13. [1338] **John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Prime Minister for his kind words about the Cumbrian people. Can he say, in relation to his forthcoming gun review, whether he thinks that it is still worth the risk to allow guns used for sport to continue to be kept at home? Will that be considered in his review?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is right that everything has to be considered, including the mental health of people and police visits to their homes, but we have, because of previous tragedies, very strict rules on what people who keep guns at home have to do in terms of very strict security. I remember sitting on the Home Affairs Committee and asking the ACPO representative responsible for the issue how much leakage there was from legally held guns into the illegal, black market. The answer was virtually none, so if we are looking for what the problem is, it is clearly that in our society we have a huge number of guns that we need to get rid of. Clearly, there was an appalling problem in this case, where, as I have said, a switch flicked in someone's head. We cannot legislate against that, but let us look at every aspect and ensure that we have the robust laws that we need.

Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust

12.34 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Andrew Lansley): With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust.

In March last year, the Healthcare Commission's report on Mid Staffordshire and the appalling failures in patient care that it laid bare shocked us all. Three reports later, and I am announcing today what should have been announced then: a full public inquiry into how these events went undetected and unchallenged for so long. The inquiry will be held in public, including the evidence, the oral hearings and the final report. We can combat a culture of secrecy and restore public confidence only by ensuring the fullest openness and transparency in any investigation.

So why another inquiry? We know only too well every harrowing detail of what happened at Mid Staffordshire and the failings of the trust, but we are still little closer to understanding how that was allowed to happen by the wider system. The families of those patients who suffered so dreadfully deserve to know, and so too does every NHS patient in this country.

This was a failure of the trust first and foremost, but it was also a national failure of the regulatory and supervisory system, which should have secured the quality and safety of patient care. Why did it have to take a determined group of families to expose those failings and campaign tirelessly for answers? I pay tribute again to the work of Julie Bailey and Cure the NHS, rightly supported by Members in this House.

Why did the primary care trust and strategic health authority not see what was happening and intervene earlier? How was the trust able to gain foundation status while clinical standards were so poor? Why did the regulatory bodies not act sooner to investigate a trust whose mortality rates had been significantly higher than the average since 2003 and whose record in dealing with serious complaints was so poor? The public deserve answers.

The previous reports are clear that the following existed: a culture of fear in which staff did not feel able to report concerns; a culture of secrecy in which the trust board shut itself off from what was happening in its hospital and ignored its patients; and a culture of bullying, which prevented people from doing their jobs properly. Yet how these conditions developed has not been satisfactorily addressed. The 800-page report by Robert Francis QC, published in February, gave us a forensic account of the local failures in that hospital and the consequences for patients, but, like its predecessors, his report was limited by its narrow terms of reference.

I am pleased to say that Robert Francis has agreed to chair the new inquiry, and he will have the full statutory force of the Inquiries Act 2005 to compel witnesses to attend and speak under oath. Clearly these are complex issues, and Robert Francis has already said he wants to establish an expert panel that can help support him through this process. However, it is important for everyone that the inquiry be conducted thoroughly and swiftly, with the aim of providing its final report and conclusions by March 2011.

I also want to assure the House, however, that we will not wait to take earlier action where necessary. I can therefore announce today that we are going to give teeth to the current safeguards for whistleblowers in the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 by: reinforcing the NHS constitution to make clear the rights and responsibilities of NHS staff and their employers in respect of whistleblowing; seeking through negotiations with NHS trade unions to amend terms and conditions of service for NHS staff to include a contractual right to raise concerns in the public interest; issuing unequivocal guidance to NHS organisations that all their contracts of employment should cover staff whistleblowing rights; issuing new guidance to the NHS about supporting and taking action on concerns raised by staff in the public interest; and exploring with NHS staff further measures to provide a safe and independent authority to which they can turn when their own organisation is not listening or acting on concerns.

In the coming weeks we will introduce further far-reaching reforms of the NHS that go to the very heart of the failures at Mid Staffs. This is not about changes in processes or structures; it is about a wider shift in culture, putting patients at the heart of the NHS and focusing on the things that matter most to them. That includes putting the focus on safety. At Mid-Staffs, safety was not the priority. It was undermined by politically motivated process targets. The first Francis inquiry was crystal clear on that point. It said:

> "This evidence satisfies me that there was an atmosphere in which front line staff and managers were led to believe that if the targets were not met they would be in danger of losing their jobs. There was an atmosphere which led to decisions being made under pressure about patients, decisions that had nothing to do with patient welfare. As will be seen, the pressure to meet the waiting target was sometimes detrimental to good care in A & E."

We will scrap such process targets and replace them with a new focus on patients' outcomes—the only outcomes that matter. We will empower patients with access to information, giving them the ability to hold their own records, to make informed choices and to interact more readily with clinicians. We will put power in patients' hands. Ultimately, if patients had been informed and empowered, and if people had listened to them rather than obsessing about centrally mandated processes and targets, these scandalous failings could not have gone unchallenged for so long.

In closing, I want to say a word about the trust itself. It is so important that the hospital and the trust, which have been under such an intense spotlight, should be able to continue to improve services for the patients they serve and continue to rebuild the trust and the fractured confidence of their community. Staffing there has increased, with more than 140 more nurses recruited since March 2009. Processes are more open and transparent, and monthly board meetings are now being held in public. Results are improving: the hospital standardised mortality ratio there is now significantly lower, and the rate of healthcare associated infections has improved. The Care Quality Commission will, in the coming weeks, provide its considered view on that progress, when it publishes the findings of its "12 month on" review.

We cannot and should not underestimate the task still ahead, and the attention of the trust must not be unduly diverted. That is why I am clear that this further inquiry should not cover ground already covered in the first Francis inquiry, and that it should, as far as possible, ensure that it supports all those staff who are working so hard to bring about the necessary changes. When this inquiry has completed its work and I return to the

[Mr Andrew Lansley]

House to present its report, I am confident that we will, for the first time in this tragic saga, be able to discuss conclusions rather than just questions. We will be able to show that we have finally faced up to the truths of this terrible episode and that we are taking every step to ensure that it is never allowed to happen again. That is a basic duty of any Government. For the people of Staffordshire—many of whose relatives suffered unbearably in the closing stages of their lives—and for the nation as a whole, this is the very least they are entitled to. I commend this statement to the House.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): I begin by thanking the Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr Lansley) for his statement, much of which I welcome. It will be hard for the people of Stafford and for the staff at the hospital to hear that their town and their hospital are in the news again today, and it is important to say at the outset—as the Secretary of State did—that this inquiry relates to historical events at the hospital and that the situation there has been improving ever since. I should like to put on record my own personal appreciation of the role played by the new chair and chief executive of Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust in improving standards at the hospital, rebuilding confidence and rebuilding the important relationships with the local community.

Events at the hospital between 2006 and 2008 represent one of the darkest chapters in our national health service. As the Francis report—which ran to two volumes and more than 900 pages—documented, there were appalling failures at every level, from basic care and human compassion on the wards to a failure in the duty of care at board level towards staff, patients and the whole community.

The NHS and its values are part of what makes our country great, but the NHS is not perfect. When things go wrong, it has a tendency to push people away and bring down the shutters. Yes, it is hard to deal with complaints when they affect matters of life and death, but it is only by holding up a mirror to the national health service that we will get an open, learning health service that learns from its mistakes and ensures that they are not repeated. That is why I took the decision to commission the original Francis report. It is also why, before the election, I signalled the need for a second-stage inquiry, to be held in public, into the actions of the supervisory and regulatory bodies, right up to the Department of Health. I therefore give the Secretary of State the assurance that this new inquiry will have the Opposition's full co-operation, from the very top right the way down.

We published the draft terms of reference for that second-stage inquiry before the election. Will the Secretary of State therefore explain to the House what questions or areas it will consider that were not covered either by the Francis report or the draft terms of reference that we laid before this House and on which we sought comments from a wide range of organisations? Also, what is different about the inquiry that he has announced, compared with the one that we proposed?

How long will the new inquiry take, and how much will it cost? Will he give the House an assurance—as I think that he did in his statement—that he will ensure that it does not distract the trust from the overriding task of ensuring that the hospital continues to make the necessary improvements? Will he also make sure that the trust's leadership can continue to focus on improving relations with the local community?

Will the right hon. Gentleman give me an assurance that the recommendations of the original Francis report will continue to be implemented in full while the new inquiry takes place? He will know that Robert Francis concluded in his original report that many people came forward who would not have done if the inquiry had been held under a different status. I gave Robert Francis the ability to come back to me to ask for further powers if they were necessary, but may I ask for the right hon. Gentleman's assurance today that the status of the new inquiry will ensure that all the people who need to speak to it do come forward and give evidence?

On NHS targets, I was disappointed by the Secretary of State's comments in his statement, and by those of the Prime Minister a few moments ago, as they appear to be prejudging the inquiry that they have set up today. Trusts up and down the country are implementing national standards safely. Indeed, targets are about patient safety: the four-hour A and E target is the basic minimum that every person in this country can expect when arriving at the door of the NHS.

The targets were implemented and brought in because some years ago, people were waiting for hours on end—almost whole days—in A and E departments. If the Secretary of State is resolved to remove that standard in the NHS, which many of the professional health bodies support, will he therefore give us an assurance that we will not see a rise in A and E waiting times? What mechanism will he implement to ensure that?

The trust's board allowed staffing to fall to dangerously low levels, with 120 whole-time equivalents lacking from the wards. I put it to the Secretary of State that that was the main reason for the failures at the trust. I am sure that he will agree with me that not all the staff then working at the hospital are to blame, and that there are many good, decent, hard-working people at the hospital who will again find it hard to see their place of work back in the news today. There will also be many staff across the NHS who will feel that there is a daily focus on their failings but very little recognition of the outstanding professional standards that they show, or of the millions of acts of human kindness that take place in our NHS day in and day out.

In closing, may I ask the Secretary of State to give the House an assurance that he will always present a balanced picture and, in this case, be clear that these were isolated events at an isolated hospital?

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for indicating that he supports this further inquiry, and that he and his colleagues will give it that support. They will know that for more than six years as shadow Secretary of State I always gave both a balanced and positive view of what the staff of the NHS achieve daily on our behalf. That extends to the staff at Stafford hospital, as I have made clear to them when I have visited them in the past. Indeed, I shall be visiting again tomorrow in order to make that even clearer—and I have asked Robert Francis to ensure that as he conducts his inquiry, he does whatever he can not to divert them from continuing to improve care for people in Staffordshire.

The right hon. Gentleman asked what the difference is between the inquiry that I am announcing today and what he said should happen in a second stage Francis report, and I must tell him that there are a number of very serious differences. First, this is an inquiry not under the National Health Service Act 2006 but under the Inquiries Act 2005, so there will be a presumption that hearings will be held in public, and that records of evidence and information given to the inquiry must be made available to the public.

In addition, there will be a power of compulsion in respect of witnesses and evidence. I simply do not accept his assertion that had there been a different legal basis for the earlier inquiry people would not have come forward to give evidence. Either they would have done so or, if they had not been willing to do so, they could have been compelled to do so; that power will be available now. This inquiry will have a power to take evidence on oath and a power under the 2005 Act to make recommendations, if Robert Francis so concludes, concerning not only NHS organisations, which are covered by the 2006 Act, but non-NHS organisations. The terms of reference make it clear that Robert Francis will be able to look more widely. The inquiry will examine, for example, the actions of the coroner and the Health and Safety Executive. Indeed, he will be able to make recommendations in relation to the General Medical Council. He would not have been empowered to do that in an inquiry simply under the 2006 Act.

Finally, may I deal with the right hon. Gentleman's point about targets? The four-hour target is not a measure of outcome; it is not a measure of the result for patients. The result for patients is about their going to an emergency department and their disease, injury or illness being treated successfully. What happened at Stafford hospital provided evidence—we saw other such evidence in many other places—to suggest that the four-hour target was being pursued not in order to give the best possible care to patients, but in spite of what would be the best possible care for patients. Patients were being discharged when they should not have been, and patients were being transferred to inappropriate wards where there was no provision to look after them.

It is vital that we focus on the result for patients. Like me, the right hon. Gentleman knows that the length of wait in the emergency department is not an irrelevant fact for patients. We are therefore going to consider, constructively, how to scrap the four-hour target as it currently exists, and, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said at Prime Minister's questions, work on the basis of saying that what the clinical evidence makes clear directly contributes to delivering the best possible results for patients. We will start that process soon, in making that clear to the NHS. Our approach will go beyond the simple question of how long people wait in an emergency department; it will go to the outcomes being achieved in those departments. That is what putting quality at the heart of the NHS actually means; it means quality and results, not just processes.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for his statement and for the announcement of an inquiry under the 2005 Act. I am also grateful to him and to the Prime Minister for their support for my constituents over the extremely difficult past year. The Secretary of State will recall that I have written to him on a number of matters in connection with this case, but I should like to raise just one now. Can he assure me that the resources needed both for the inquiry itself and for staff cover will be made available to the trust, so that staff can continue the vital work of restoring public confidence in Stafford hospital?

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. Although he has only recently arrived in this House to represent his constituents, I know from my personal experience of our conversations, our meetings and my visits to see him and others in Stafford just how diligently and consistently, and in what a compelling way, he has represented his constituents over the past year or so. In reply to his question, I can tell him that although I have made it clear to Robert Francis that we must do this swiftly—and, therefore, without incurring excessive costs—we must do it successfully and achieve a quality result in order to inform everything we need to do to improve the NHS. We need to go beyond the mere structures and the processes—we have seen all that—to find out why people in all those structures were not focusing on patient safety and quality of care, and how they can be better incentivised, encouraged and required to do that in future. I am sure that my hon. Friend knows that we are ensuring that the additional costs that the Mid Staffordshire trust has had to meet in the course of the first Francis inquiry and now, and in supporting the delivery of better care, are being met with additional resources from the strategic health authority.

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): May I, on behalf of constituents whose families were affected by what happened at Mid Staffs, welcome the continued focus that the new coalition Government are placing on making progress on this issue and on ensuring that what happened before never happens again at Stafford hospital? I pay tribute to the work done by my former colleague David Kidney, who, along with the action group, called for a full public inquiry into this matter; that needs to be put on the record. Will the Secretary of State give me assurances about the make-up of the panel, and perhaps give consideration to making trade union representatives members of it? We need to ensure that all people affected in the provision of care can be properly represented and can be part of that panel in the further inquiry.

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her support for the further inquiry. I should say, first, that I share her view that David Kidney sought to get to the bottom of what happened at his local hospital, and pressed for a further, and public, inquiry. The shadow Secretary of State must know that at the beginning of last September Robert Francis came to him in the midst of his first inquiry to raise the issue of the legal base for that inquiry and the question of whether it should be brought under the Inquiries Act. He wanted the terms of reference to be extended sufficiently widely to ensure that at that stage he could have looked beyond the question of what happened, to the question of why the primary care trust, the strategic health authority, the NHS in general, and other organisations, did not intervene earlier and in a better way. On 10 September last year, the then Secretary of State did not agree that that should happen, but had he done so the first Francis inquiry could have achieved much earlier what the second will now have to do.

Mr William Cash (Stone) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, which was well overdue because the previous Government declined to do what he has agreed to do. I also thank the Prime Minister—a former candidate for Stafford—who took a very active part in this extremely important decision, for which both my constituents and those in Stafford will be deeply grateful. The Secretary of State has rightly dealt with the question of oaths and of compulsion of witnesses. Will he also indicate that expenses relating to the provision of legal representation for witnesses will also be made available? In addition to dealing with issues relating to whistleblowers and targets, will the whole question of self-assessment by hospitals and hospital trusts be considered? Will the inquiry examine those matters? A similar inquiry in 1984 led to a great improvement in the national circumstances relating to hospitals. The same hospital was involved in the legionnaires disease inquiry that Baroness Thatcher incorporated. I again thank the Secretary of State for making this decision, which will be greatly welcomed in my constituency.

Mr Speaker: Although we heard about four questions there, I am sure that the Secretary of State will content himself with one reply.

Mr Lansley: If I may, Mr Speaker, I shall content myself with saying that my hon. Friend made it clear from the outset that an Inquiries Act inquiry was the right idea. He said that more than a year ago, and had we gone down that route then, we would have been much further towards getting to the whole truth now. Matters relating to the Inquiries Act and the panel membership are ones that will now be determined by Robert Francis. I have published the terms of reference to which he will be working, and under the Inquiries Act issues such as legal representation and its funding are determined under those.

Robert Flello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): My constituents who were affected will also be following very carefully what happens in this public inquiry, and I associate myself with what has been said about David Kidney, who worked extremely hard and effectively on this horrific issue.

I am concerned that the horrific failure at this hospital is being used as a hook in a most appalling way for the proposals to scrap targets, which the Conservatives have talked about for a long time. In any system there will always be people who try to manipulate it; in a culture of fear and bullying, as there was in this hospital, that is exactly when systems will be manipulated. Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore take into account as wide a spectrum of advice as possible when he is considering the new outcome proposals, to ensure that whatever system he brings in is not also open to abuse and manipulation?

Mr Lansley: One of the hon. Gentleman's friends says that we should take action on the basis of the first Francis inquiry, and we will, and the hon. Gentleman says that we should not take action on targets. The first Francis report made it clear that targets compromise patient care, so we do need to take action.

The hon. Gentleman asked a further question. Robert Francis and I have had two discussions and the terms of reference are very clear. He is looking beyond the structures and processes to how the culture of bullying, fear and secrecy came to pass, what effect it had and how we can move beyond that. The report will be very important, if it is successful, not just for the people of Staffordshire but right across the country in showing how we can move from a top-down, secretive, bullying culture to one that is absolutely open, transparent, focused on patient safety and entirely responsive to the needs of patients.

Mr Aidan Burley (Cannock Chase) (Con): One of the tragedies is that concerns were being raised about Stafford hospital as long as five years ago but little or no notice was taken of them. A constituent of mine, Barbara Allatt, was until recently a student nurse who helped to expose the appalling neglect of elderly patients at the hospital trust, but rather than her concerns being acted on, she was instead needlessly thrown off her training course. In his statement, the Secretary of State outlined new whistleblowing rights for future staff. Will those rights be extended retrospectively so that staff who spoke out previously, and in doing so put their job at risk, will not be punished again?

Mr Lansley: Of course, by definition, contractual rights cannot be retrospectively applied, but let me make it clear that I will be issuing guidance in terms that I have set out to the House in my statement today—albeit that we might need to do more. That guidance is entirely intended to move the NHS to an open culture that encourages staff to raise concerns. As I said to the Patients Association yesterday, we must have a culture of challenge inside the NHS under which the offence is not to make a mistake, as mistakes are human, but to seek to cover up or ignore a mistake. That is what happens in the best organisations and it must be what happens throughout the NHS.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's promise of early action. Will he tell us how many members of the present board were in post on 18 March 2009 and when he will sack them as he has promised?

Mr Lansley: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me: I know that the chief executive, the chair, the nursing director and others have moved on, but I do not know the precise answer and I will write to him about that. In relation to any individuals, I think it is proper that, having asked Robert Francis to conduct a further inquiry that takes account of all that he discovered in the first report and that covers the same period of time—2005 to 2009—he is free to make recommendations that will bear upon people working inside the trust and in organisations, and upon how they discharge those responsibilities.

Gavin Williamson (South Staffordshire) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for announcing the inquiry, which will be welcomed by many of my constituents and others. I urge the Department of Health always to listen to the relatives of patients, because relatives were saying that this was a problem far earlier than anyone else. Will the Secretary of State, please, always listen to what relatives and patients say?

Mr Lansley: I am glad that my hon. Friend raises this point, because I know from the four occasions on which I have visited Stafford and talked to members of the

Cure the NHS group just what a desperate struggle they had to be listened to. We should therefore be clear not only about changing the culture inside the NHS, so that patients' issues and complaints are treated seriously from the outset in an open and transparent way, but that the patient voice should be strengthened in the NHS. Even people who are literally self-appointed voices for patients should not be dismissed and pushed to the margins. We have to be prepared to listen to patients however their views are brought forward.

Mr Dave Watts (St Helens North) (Lab): The Secretary of State was unclear about his proposals for waiting times. Will he clarify this issue? He seems to be saying that he will do away with waiting times but then introduce a new system. Will the new waiting time be four hours, five hours, six hours, 10 hours or 12 hours?

Mr Lansley: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand. I was very clear in saying that I am going to abolish the four-hour accident and emergency target. I will issue guidance to the NHS shortly, the purpose of which is to amend the four-hour A and E target, alongside others, to ensure that we deliver better quality. That is not just about the time spent waiting in an emergency department; it is about the quality of the service provided and it is based on clinical evidence.

Andy Burnham: That is unclear.

Mr Lansley: The point that I am making is very clear. We are not going to focus on narrow process targets in future; we are going to look at the quality and outcomes provided for patients. I will issue future guidance on that.

Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): The report highlights that there was a breakdown of care at almost every level, from basic nursing care up to high levels of communication. Does the Secretary of State agree that when the patient becomes the absolute focus of every level of care delivery, from basic levels of nursing care right up to top levels of management, it will be more difficult for such a culture to grow in terms of process delivery? Will he guarantee that the report will look at putting back into hospitals the approach of making the patient the most important person and of putting the patient at the centre of every element of care that is delivered?

Mr Lansley: Yes; my hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why I have made it clear that that is the first priority for our Department in how we are going to improve the NHS. As a nurse, my hon. Friend will know that what she describes is absolutely how many people across the NHS want to conduct their professional relationships. They have been so frustrated, demoralised and demotivated by not being able to deliver care in the way that they wish—focusing on the needs and expectations of patients.

Mr Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood) (Con): Is not the important issue that the terrible events in Mid Staffordshire are not purely a local issue, terrible though they are for Mid Staffordshire? It is vital that lessons are learned for application right across the NHS. What were the commissioners doing? Where were the regulators? What price professional accountability? Why was all that allowed to happen over so long? Perhaps the most difficult question of all is this: why was it not the first time that this had happened in the NHS?

Mr Lansley: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why we have to move from all those questions to some serious answers—so that we can have the reform that the NHS so badly needs. I know and he knows that this is about not just a different set of structures, but a change of culture and a focus in the NHS on patients and results for patients to the exclusion of other bureaucratic impositions. There is such immense bureaucracy—PCTs, SHAs and regulators—that everything should have worked perfectly, but it did not. Why? Because in all of that, the underlying pressures in the service were not focused on results for patients. We have to drive towards that conclusion.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr Speaker: There is no giving way involved; this is a statement.

Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Only yesterday, I wrote to him regarding a constituent in South Derbyshire who had gone through a four-hour wait and was then admitted, to make sure that the four-hour rule was not broken, and had to stay in a ward for six hours and see even more people when he could have been on a bus going home much earlier. There are lessons to be learned across the whole country, and I look forward to the report coming through.

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We will take not only the clear evidence from the first Francis report, but evidence from many other places, including that from many of the leading clinical professions that the way in which the four-hour target has been administered has undermined the quality of patient care. We will focus on quality and help the NHS to deliver what it knows is the right quality.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his post and thank him for his two visits to Malvern over the past few years to support the new community hospital that will open in October.

My right hon. Friend mentioned the West Midlands strategic health authority. In the past six months, the authority has required our local Worcestershire NHS to divest itself of its community hospitals. At the moment, the authority is proposing to abolish the mental health trust and put it and the community hospitals into a new trust. Secondly, it has asked NHS Worcestershire to cluster with neighbouring NHS organisations. What are my right hon. Friend's proposals to stop all those reorganisations and focus on patient outcomes?

Mr Lansley: The inquiry will look at both the West Midlands SHA and its predecessor bodies. My hon. Friend will know from what I said a couple of weeks ago that proposals for such reconfigurations in the national health service must now answer to the clinical evidence—the clinical base. They must answer to patients—current and prospective patient choice—and to the referral intentions and commissioning intentions of general

practitioners exercising responsibility for commissioning. That will change the nature of such decisions from a top-down, unaccountable process to one that is much more locally accountable and effective.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The excellent new Secretary of State for Health was right to praise the men and women of the health service, but when things go wrong there needs to be an early-warning system. Does he agree that standardised mortality rates are an indication that something might be going wrong, and that such indicators should be used more often to investigate hospitals?

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. First, the Francis inquiry will go on to understand why one of those hospital SMRs, from 2003, indicated the nature of a potential problem. The SMRs are not a sufficient measure of quality across the board. The National Quality Board has already undertaken some work on how we can ensure that hospital SMRs are consistent and meaningful, and beyond that how we can identify the early-warning signs and act on them. As one of the things we derive from that, I shall be working with the quality board and across the NHS to ensure that we act on warning signs, including looking at potential risks either across the system or in relation to individual trusts.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Will the inquiry cover the sheer volume of bureaucratic paperwork that nursing staff have to complete, which seriously gets in the way of their fulfilling their clinical responsibilities?

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The answer is yes.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to Members for their co-operation. We have got to everybody.

Point of Order

1.13 pm

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I draw your attention to today's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*? It announces a planning policy change on so-called garden grabbing. May I ask you to investigate the circumstances of this case, which appear to be of selective leaking and spin, and will you report to the House your views on that and your views in general on announcements being made to journalists before they are made to Members of the House?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I hope he will not be shocked, and the House will not be horrified, to learn that I have not yet read *The Daily Telegraph* today. However, I am mindful of the fact that there has been a written ministerial statement on the subject by the Government, so I do not think it would be correct or accurate to characterise the situation as one in which the House has not been informed of Government policy. I am happy to look at the piece in question. I will reflect on it. If I have anything further to add that the House needs to hear, the House will hear it, but otherwise I am inclined to leave the matter there.

Identity Documents Bill

Second Reading

1.14 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am very pleased to introduce the first piece of legislation that the new Administration are putting before Parliament. It signals a profound change in the way in which Government will interact with the people they serve.

The national identity card scheme represents the worst of government. It is intrusive and bullying, ineffective and expensive. It is an assault on individual liberty which does not promise a greater good. The Bill is, therefore, partly symbolic. It sends a message that the Government are going to do business in a different way. We are the servants of the people, not their masters, and every action that we take must be considered in that context.

Of course our first duty is to keep people safe. That truism cannot be repeated often enough. We will do whatever it takes to honour that covenant. Sometimes, respecting the rights of the few while protecting the many will be a delicate balancing act. Not on this occasion. We have no hesitation in making the national identity card scheme an unfortunate footnote in history. There it should remain—a reminder of a less happy time when the Government allowed hubris to trump civil liberties.

Last month, the coalition set out its plans to abolish ID cards and the national identity register. The register contains the biographic and biometric fingerprint data of cardholders. In bringing forward this stand-alone Bill, we are now seeking swift approval to enable us to abolish both.

The Government are of course also bringing forward a freedom Bill, and will launch a consultation on the laws that the British people want to see repealed. So the Identity Documents Bill is just our first measure as we begin to restore the balance between national security and civil liberties—the crucial, delicate balance which was so carelessly abandoned during Labour's years in office.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I opposed identity cards from the very beginning and I have not changed my views, but will the Home Secretary bear in mind that in 1996 the Conservative Home Secretary, Michael Howard, announced that the Conservative Government intended to bring in an identity card scheme? It was described as voluntary—whatever that meant. It was not possible to do so for obvious reasons: because of what happened in 1997.

Mrs May: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding us of what was done in 1996 by a former Conservative Home Secretary and what was proposed. That Conservative Government did indeed look at the possibility. We have looked at the idea brought forward by the Labour Government and we do not think that it is right. We take a different view, which is that we should abolish the identity card scheme. The hon. Gentleman referred to his opposition and indeed a number of Labour Members objected to the proposals of their Front-Bench colleagues.

Mr Russell Brown (Dumfries and Galloway) (Lab): The Home Secretary is talking about the abolition of the scheme. Is she telling the House, and the wider country, that the abolition of the scheme will include foreign nationals coming to this country?

Mrs May: No. I shall come to that point later. There are biometric residency permits for foreign nationals and they are completely separate from the identity card scheme. They were rolled into the ID scheme only because the Labour Government were trying desperately to bolster it; they claimed that the residency permits were somehow part of the ID card scheme, which they are not. Those biometric residency permits will continue to exist.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): As one of the Labour Members who opposed identity cards from the beginning, I am delighted that the Bill is one of the first pieces of legislation that the new Government are putting through. Will the Home Secretary say something about people who went ahead and rather stupidly bought an identity card? Does she feel that they should be recompensed or does she think they should have listened to those of us on both sides of the House who said, "This is the wrong scheme and you shouldn't be doing that"?

Mrs May: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. She does indeed have an honourable record of maintaining opposition to identity cards. I will make reference to this point later, but I can tell her now that we will not be offering refunds to all those who chose to get an identity card. [HON. MEMBERS: "Outrageous!"] Labour Front Benchers shout "Outrageous", but we made it clear that we were opposed to identity cards. The Liberal Democrat party made it absolutely clear that it was opposed to identity cards. People knew well before the election what would happen if a Conservative Government were elected.

Alan Johnson (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): Does the Home Secretary recall that the Labour party's manifesto in 2005 had a commitment to introduce a voluntary ID card scheme? Does she recollect that it was the Labour party that won that general election? In what way was it illegitimate—or, indeed, "stupid", to quote my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey)—for people then to buy a card that was legitimate and had been set out in the manifesto of the winning party?

Mrs May: I must make a confession; I did not study the 2005 Labour party manifesto in any great detail because I was too busy promoting the 2005 Conservative party manifesto—*[Interruption.]* I am not trying to rewrite history; the right hon. Gentleman and his party won the 2005 election and introduced the identity card scheme. Let us remember; the scheme was not introduced in the very early stages of the Government's term, but we made it clear from an early stage that if the Conservative party came into government, ID cards would be scrapped. That was clear to people, and the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling)—

Alan Johnson: This is arrogance.

Mrs May: I fail to see how it is arrogant for a political party to make clear to the electors that if it gets into government it will pursue a particular policy, to allow electors to make a decision as to their actions on the basis of that knowledge.

Dr Julian Huppert (Cambridge) (LD): I agree with the Home Secretary. Has there been any estimate of the cost of continuing the system for those few people who already have identity cards?

Mrs May: I am coming on to some of the cost issues but, over the next four years, we will be saving £86 million by getting rid of the identity card scheme, with over £800 million being saved over the next 10 years.

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mrs May: No, I said that I was going to make some progress. I have been quite generous already in taking interventions.

Much of the Identity Cards Act 2006 will be undone but the Bill will re-enact certain provisions in the 2006 Act that do not relate solely to ID cards. Those provisions on offences and passport verification make available powers in relation to the detection and prevention of fraud, and the consular fees provision makes it possible to issue passports at subsidised rates. It will remain an offence to carry an identity document that a person knows or believes to be false or to hold a genuine document that relates to someone else, or that has been improperly obtained. Also it will remain illegal to possess equipment for falsifying documents. Under the Bill, ID cards will be invalidated. Holders will not be able to use them either to prove their identity or as a travel document in Europe. On the passing of the Bill, I will not issue any more cards. Following Royal Assent, cards will remain valid for just one more month.

Mr David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary give way? I am very grateful to the right hon. Lady for doing so. *[Laughter.]*

Mrs May: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr Blunkett: The right hon. Lady paused and I believed she had given way. My apologies for that.

I have an ID card here. Is the right hon. Lady saying that from now on any use of the document to reinforce my identity would be illegal?

Mrs May: I have not said that that is the case from today. I have a rather greater belief in the value of Parliament than the last Labour Government showed. Any provisions will come into force only once the Bill has been approved by Parliament and has received Royal Assent. It is after Royal Assent that cards will remain valid for one more month only. I will be writing to all those who already have a card to inform them of the change, so the right hon. Gentleman can look forward in due course to receiving a letter from me. Let us get this in proportion: fewer than 15,000 people already have a card.

Mr Blunkett: I am sorry for intervening again, but as the House will appreciate, the subject is rather close to my heart. I understand entirely that the document will not be useable for travel purposes once the Bill has received Royal Assent, but I understood the right hon. Lady to say that it would not be valid in offering any proof of identity. Just before that, she said that it would be illegal. I am trying to ascertain whether using this document, which has my fingerprints and photo and is more authentic than my passport, would make me a criminal were I to use it for other purposes, such as opening a bank account.

Mrs May: I followed the right hon. Gentleman's argument quite carefully and perhaps I can reprise what I actually said earlier. Under the Bill, the cards will be invalidated. Holders will not be able to use them either to prove their identity or as a travel document in Europe. On Royal Assent, they will remain valid for only one more month. I did not use the word "illegal", except in relation to those who possess equipment for falsifying documents. I trust that, as a former Home Secretary, the right hon. Gentleman is not intending to hold equipment for the falsification of documents.

Mr Blunkett *indicated assent.*

Mrs May: For the record, the right hon. Gentleman nodded at that point.

The post of Identity Commissioner will be abolished. The public panels and experts groups that were established by the Identity and Passport Service have already been disbanded, and 60 temporary staff in Durham have already been released early.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mrs May: I am going to make a little progress if the hon. Gentleman will wait.

Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mrs May: In deference to the hon. Lady's constituency interest, I will give way to her.

Roberta Blackman-Woods: I am very grateful. The Home Secretary has just announced that 67 people in my constituency were made redundant last week because the Government are not continuing identity cards. What efforts will her Government make to get jobs for those people who lost them this week, and for those who are likely to lose their jobs because the Government are not going ahead with the second generation biometric passports?

Mrs May: If I can just correct a slight inaccuracy of terminology in the way in which the hon. Lady referred to the job losses in Durham, the people concerned were temporary staff on short-term contracts and they have been released early from those contracts. There are implications to abolishing the previous Labour Government's scheme but, as the hon. Lady may know, we as a Government have considerable proposals for helping people who are unemployed to get into work. Our single work programme, which will replace the

previous Government's proposals for helping people into work, will give people much more focused individual help on getting them into the workplace and ensuring that they are retrained and given the skills that they need.

Chris Bryant: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mrs May: No, I am going to make some progress.

The Bill also places a duty on me to destroy all information recorded in the national identity register within two months of Royal Assent. Photographs and fingerprint biometrics will be securely destroyed. This will not be a literal bonfire of the last Government's vanities, but it will none the less be deeply satisfying. The national identity register will then cease to exist entirely.

The Government will always defend the security and integrity of the British passport, in order to safeguard the free movement of its citizens abroad and protect our borders from illegal immigration.

Chris Bryant: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mrs May: If the hon. Gentleman has a little more patience, I will make more progress.

Chris Bryant: How much patience?

Mrs May: That will be for me to judge in due course.

We will continue to work to ensure the free movement of citizens abroad. We are halting work on fingerprint passports—the so-called second generation biometric passports—because we believe, in common with the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, that we can maintain the integrity of our passports by other security measures. Already a combination of physical and electronic security features makes the British passport very hard to counterfeit and forge. A new design with improved physical security features will be issued from 5 October, and we are considering ways to strengthen further the electronic security features.

In November 2008 the previous Administration began issuing to non-EEA nationals the biometric residency permits mentioned in an intervention. I want to reiterate the point that I made in response to that intervention. For purely political reasons those permits were referred to by the previous Government as identity cards for foreign nationals. Let no one in the House be in any doubt. They are not ID cards, and they will continue.

We anticipate that the net cost of the Bill will amount to about £5 million this year, which includes termination of contracts, writing off equipment, contacting cardholders and others to inform them that the project is over, exit costs for staff who cannot be redeployed elsewhere, and payments to contractors for secure destruction of identity information. I regret that another unavoidable cost is maintaining the ability to issue new cards before our statutory obligation to do so is removed. This is yet another example of why we want to act as quickly as possible.

The good news, however, is that the taxpayer, as I said in answer to a previous intervention, will be saved some £86 million over the next four years. Moreover, the public will not be hit with the roughly £800 million of ongoing costs over the next 10 years. To put that in perspective, that is a millennium dome's worth of savings. At any time it is utterly wrong for Government to waste taxpayers' money on a folly. In the current climate, it is obscene.

Chris Bryant *rose—*

Mrs May: I have relented and I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Chris Bryant: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady. In response to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods), she said that the staff were on short-term contracts. I should remind her that she, too, is on a short-term contract, as are all of us. How does she intend to use the provisions of the Bill in relation to the Consular Fees Act 1980?

Mrs May: I shall disappoint the hon. Gentleman by saying that I will not give him a precise answer in response to that point. We are ensuring that we still have those abilities in the Act to allow discounts on applications for passports under the consular fees permission in the Bill. The Bill enables us to retain the ability to do that, should we at some stage choose to do so, but I shall not give the hon. Gentleman a more detailed answer at present. I am sure he can make his points known during the debate if he chooses to catch the Speaker's eye.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mrs May: No. I shall go a little further in my speech. I return to the subject of savings. The Bill is not just about saving money. *[Interruption.]* Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I be the first to congratulate you on your appointment as Chairman of Ways and Means? I look forward to many debates in the Chamber under your wise rule in the Chair.

If an overwhelming case could be made that ID cards would keep us safe without intruding on civil liberties, we would find the funding. But that is not the case. First, if databases are compromised, so too is security. The Labour Government's track record on this was appalling. We all remember the moment the House was told that HMRC had lost data for 25 million people, including their dates of birth, addresses, bank accounts and national insurance numbers, and that was just one example of many. We recognise that some data storage is essential, but these events do not point in the direction of a massive expansion of the surveillance state, which ID cards would necessarily involve.

Moreover, ID cards would not make us safer or beat benefit fraud. Benefit fraud usually involves people lying about their personal circumstances rather than their identity. Turkish and Spanish ID cards stopped neither the Istanbul bombers in 2003 nor the Madrid bombers in 2004; nor did German ID cards prevent terrorists plotting 9/11 in Hamburg. As Charles Clarke, the former Home Secretary, said after the 7/7 attacks here in London:

"I doubt"—

that ID cards—

"would have made a difference. I've never argued . . . that ID cards would prevent any particular act."

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): The right hon. Lady is right that ID cards did not stop the bombing in Madrid, but does she accept that ID cards in Spain allowed the bombers to be traced from the fingerprints on the Atocha bombs?

Mrs May: The point that I am making is a simple one. The last Labour Government claimed that this would be—*[Interruption.]* A shadow Minister on the Front Bench says, "No. we didn't." As I had not said what I was going to say the Government had claimed, I suggest that she is being a little premature, or perhaps she is learning the ways of opposition rather earlier than some of her colleagues.

Many claims were made at various times about what the Government said. One of them was that the purpose of ID cards was to keep this country safe. The examples that I gave show that ID cards do not keep this country safe and are an intrusion into civil liberties. The imposition of an enormously expensive system, which will be a target for computer hackers, might result in greater identity fraud and would not make us safer, cannot be justified.

There is one other objection to such an extension of the state's surveillance powers, and it is one that Labour never understood: it is unBritish. We are a freedom-loving people, and we recognise that intrusive government does not enhance our well-being or safety. In 2004 the Mayor of London promised to eat his ID card in front of

"whatever emanation of the state has demanded that I produce it."

I will not endorse civil disobedience, but Boris Johnson was expressing in his own inimitable way a discomfort even stronger than the discomfort to be had from eating an ID card. It is a discomfort born of a very healthy and British revulsion towards bossy, interfering, prying, wasteful and bullying Government. The coalition Government are determined to do things differently.

I pay tribute to all those who have campaigned so vigorously for the abolition of ID cards. They include NO2ID, Liberty, and the parties that make up the coalition Government. I am also grateful that Members in other parts of the House, including Labour Members, as indicated earlier, have had the integrity to speak out and vote against the issue and, in the case of Labour Members, against those on their Front Bench. Indeed, Labour Members may even find that voting for the abolition of ID cards curries favour with the next leader of their party although, with the notable exception of the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), none of the leadership candidates appears to have taken an interest in civil liberties.

Let me read to the House what the hon. Lady said during her impassioned speech against the Identity Cards Bill in 2005:

"As the evening has worn on, the Government Whips have subjected several of my colleagues to their usual rough-hew methods of persuasion. However, I say to colleagues in the closing minutes of the debate that voting against the Bill would be far from betraying our Government or going against Labour principles, because we would be doing the Government a great service. The more the public hear of the Bill, the less they like it, so the sooner it is stopped in its tracks, the better."—[*Official Report*, 28 June 2005; Vol 435, c. 1248-9.]

I could not agree more.

I urge Members in all parts of the House to vote with their conscience, and to show their constituents that they stand for freedom, sound expenditure and common sense. The case for ID cards has not been made and will not be. It is an extension of state power that we cannot, in any sense, afford. I commend the Bill to the House.

1.38 pm

Alan Johnson (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I feel honoured, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to be the subject of your first pronouncements from the Chair. It will be a pleasure to serve under you.

We on the Labour Benches will not vote against the Bill on Second Reading. Although we do not think the general election was in any way a referendum on ID cards, we accept that the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats have a mandate to abandon the measure. We believe that the 15,000 cards already in use should continue to be a legitimate form of identity, and that those citizens who have purchased them should not be treated in the unfair and arrogant way that the Home Secretary proposed: it is arrogant to punish the public because the Government believe that the public were duty bound to presume a Conservative victory at the general election. That is constitutional nonsense and I have never heard anything so arrogant from a political party in my life.

We think a version of the national identity register must continue to exist in some form, and that second generation biometric passports need to go ahead. However, we will pursue those arguments in Committee and at other stages of the Bill's passage.

In recent times, my party has been consistently in favour of an identity card scheme, the Liberal Democrats have been consistently opposed and the Conservatives have been inconsistent to the point of perversity. The Bill before us to abandon a voluntary identity card scheme, which the right hon. Lady says is intrusive, bullying and unBritish, was in the first semi-Conservative—I suppose we could call it—Queen's Speech for almost 14 years.

The irony is that the previous Queen's Speech under a Tory Administration, in November 1996, included a Bill to introduce a voluntary ID card scheme, following extensive public consultation by the then Home Secretary, Michael Howard, who said that the potential benefits fell into two categories. It is worth repeating them to the House. This was a Conservative Government, proposing a Bill at the Queen's Speech—*[Interruption.]* "Fifteen years ago," says the Minister for Immigration. We will get on to what has changed in the almost 15 years since 1996, and how the problems that led that Conservative Government to put forward an "unBritish, bullying and intrusive" Bill have actually worsened in the ensuing period. However, Michael Howard summed up the benefits succinctly, noting first, the

"direct benefits to the individual holder (e.g. through use of an identity card as a travel card or to provide reliable proof of identity including for commercial transactions)";

and, secondly,

"the wider benefits to all citizens, (e.g. by reducing the level of certain crimes or by providing more efficient or less costly provision of state services)."

That description of the benefits is as accurate today as it was then. The consultation under the Conservative Government found that 64% of the public supported

ID cards, with 36% opposed, and the last Tory Government to be elected to power in their own right—perhaps the last in more ways than one—proceeded to include the measure in the Gracious Speech.

Robert Flello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I, too, very much welcome you to the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Does my right hon. Friend understand the concerns of my constituents, who have been in touch having bought that voluntary ID card precisely for the reasons that he just gave? They saw it as an opportunity to get proof of identity without going down the route of obtaining a passport and to have something in their pocket? Does he also understand their concerns in writing to me and asking me to vote against this measure because they want either to get some recompense for the card that they have bought, or, if hon. Members will pardon the pun, to passport it for use in another way?

Alan Johnson: My hon. Friend should write and tell them that the Government believe—this Government, who believe in the big society and in listening to people—that the scheme into which they bought, which Parliament approved at every stage and which was in the 2005 manifesto of the party that was elected to government, is somehow illegitimate. His constituents should realise that it was their mistake in not presuming a victory for the Tory party at the recent general election. That seems to be the reason.

That description of the benefits to which I referred is accurate, and the consultation carried out by the previous Conservative Government showed overwhelming public support. The Labour Government resuscitated the proposals and subjected them to a fresh, six-month public consultation and further scrutiny in the form of a draft Bill in 2003. The Select Committee on Home Affairs held a simultaneous inquiry, and the outcome of all that was, again, overwhelming public support.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I am trying desperately to understand the right hon. Gentleman's position. He still seems to be for ID cards, but he will not oppose the Bill this evening. What is the Labour party's position on ID cards? Can we expect to see them in a future Labour party manifesto?

Alan Johnson: That is to be determined by the party. However, we cannot suggest that we did not lose the election; we cannot simply oppose every measure that the Government propose. We have to ensure that we consider the will of the people. I do not doubt that the mandate of the two parties in government allows them to introduce the measure before us, but they are absolutely wrong to cancel the national identity register, to say that they will not go ahead with second-generation biometric passports and, most of all, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Flello) said, to take such an arrogant and dismissive approach to the British public.

The Home Secretary said that ID cards would be made a footnote to history, so let us carry on with the history. The Conservative Government proposed ID cards and undertook public consultation; Labour resuscitated the proposal; the Home Affairs Committee supported it; public scrutiny supported it; and the draft Bill gained overwhelming support.

I should at this point mention the strange episode of the ten-minute Bill in January 2002, when the then Member for Broxtowe, now sadly no longer a Member, proposed leave to introduce an identity card Bill. The House will know that on a ten-minute Bill only the die-hard supporters of a proposition will turn up to vote, but among that bunch of ID card zealots, those people who wanted an "unBritish, intrusive and anti-democratic" scheme, we find the former shadow Home Secretary, now the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), the current Leader of the House, and a whole bunch of their Conservative colleagues.

To listen to the Home Secretary speak today, one would never believe that she once walked through the Aye Lobby in support of ID cards. I have to reveal that she did. Members should listen to her speech today, or read it again in *Hansard*, and then recall that the Home Secretary supported Second Reading of the Identity Cards Bill on 20 December 2004; and she was not a Tory rebel: she voted with her party in support of that Bill, whose measures she now seeks to repeal. The Conservatives continued to give their support. Indeed, they supported it under the leadership of Michael Howard at the 2005 general election.

The right hon. Lady now says that people were foolish to go out and buy ID cards, but both main parties at that general election supported ID cards, so the proposition that they should be removed is quite extraordinary. The Conservatives continued to give their support right into the 2005 general election, when Labour's winning manifesto pledged

"to provide citizens with a...secure identity card to protect them...from identity theft and clamp down on illegal working and fraudulent use of public services."

Why does the Home Secretary now believe that it was an infringement of civil liberties, the cause of the end of civilisation as we know it, when she voted for that precise scheme in 2004?

Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way and welcome you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to your position. Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that only a few days ago the head of the TUC, Brendan Barber, said that the scheme would have been an expensive folly and an unwelcome intrusion into people's private liberties and lives? Does he also know that the TUC head said that he welcomed and supported this Government's proposals to get rid of ID cards? Given Labour's current financial circumstances, is it wise to ignore paymasters in that way?

Alan Johnson: The TUC is a lot of things, but it is not a paymaster. I was not aware that Brendan Barber had said that, but if that is his view he is perfectly entitled to express it. I am setting out the views of the current Home Secretary and the Conservative party on Second Reading on 20 December 2004 of the Bill whose measures they now seek to repeal. Indeed, they are not just seeking to repeal that legislation, but describing in extraordinarily derogatory terms anyone who supported it.

I quoted our precise manifesto commitment in 2005. We were in the course of carrying out that commitment, and everyone recognised that it would be a long process, but it began with the Tories' enthusiastic support at the

[Alan Johnson]

2005 general election, and ended with their bitter opposition. How do we explain the Conservative party's change from hard-headed pragmatists to the political wing of Liberty? In respect of the issues that galvanised the Conservatives to act in the 1996 Queen's Speech and support the Identity Cards Bill on Second Reading in 2004, the only change is that the problems that they sought to address have become more acute.

The mantra of the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats is civil liberties, but the Home Secretary should remember that when we talk about civil liberties—our basic freedoms—we are not talking solely about the rights of individuals but about the rights of society as a whole. We are talking about the right to be able to travel freely, the right to have access to efficient and effective public services, and the right to live our lives free from crime. ID cards, biometric passports and the national identity register that supported them were designed precisely to protect those freedoms, but at the same time to help to increase security—the security of each individual's identity, the security of our borders and, yes, an added layer of security in the fight against terrorism.

The Home Secretary might like to be aware, because she mentioned it, that it was not me who first pointed out the link with terrorism—it was the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), who is, I confess, not normally guilty of any inconsistency. During the Second Reading debate in 2004, he said, as shadow Home Secretary at this very Dispatch Box:

> "I would not have countenanced ID cards before 11 September. After that, however, I accept that we must consider them. After 11 September, it is incumbent on all of us to examine carefully any measures that might enhance the nation's security. Identity cards introduced properly and effectively may help to do that."—[*Official Report*, 20 December 2004; Vol. 428, c. 1953.]

That is what he said as shadow Home Secretary.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): My right hon. Friend—I will call him that, because he knows our relationship—is carefully not quoting the rest of the speech or saying what actually happened. What we did at that time was to give the Government of the day the benefit of the doubt because there had just been some terrorist events that obviously brought the country into some risk. We therefore said, "We will support the Government on this, under five tests"—they were very fond of five tests in those days. The five tests were that the Government could control the cost of the programme, which they did not; protect the privacy of the individual, which they did not; manage it competently, which they did not; protect the security of the data, which they did not; and show its effectiveness against terrorism and crime, which they did not. That is why we opposed it.

Alan Johnson *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Before the right hon. Member replies, may I remind people that interventions should be very short?

Alan Johnson: I apologise to my right hon. Friend in this broad coalition, but I do not have time to quote the whole speech. Of course he made those points in that very important debate, after which the Tories walked through the Aye Lobby with us. I do not agree that the tests were not met. My point, however, is that the Conservatives are now in government. They can carry out the proposal that was in the Queen's Speech in 1996 and meet the tests that they set.

That debate took place on 20 December 2004, three years after 9/11 and, unfortunately, seven months before 7/7, and before the airline bomb plot, the liquid bomb plot, and all the other terrorist outrages that we have had to counter. The right hon. Gentleman cannot say that anything has changed in relation to national security except that these problems are more acute. We are at a severe level of readiness. No one on the Government Benches can say, "Well, things have changed since 1996," or since 2004. They have changed—they have got worse, and that has made the case for ID cards stronger.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Alan Johnson: I will make some progress and then give way.

Of course, for the Government, as the Home Secretary said, it is conveniently symbolic to have this debate so early on in this Session of Parliament. It is a symbolic act to prove that the coalition can actually agree on something, as it certainly cannot agree on Europe, the alternative vote, or even the Human Rights Act.

It is certainly true that the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister have been consistently smug in suggesting that a simple ID card scheme will mean the end of civilisation as we know it. Not for nothing are the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister known as the self-righteous brothers, although they are bound to have lost that loving feeling before too long. The Deputy Prime Minister has a Dutch mother and a Spanish wife, so he should know that the claim that ID cards are an affront to liberty and freedom would be greeted with bemusement in Holland, Spain, France, Finland, Sweden, Italy, Switzerland, Germany and all the other countries that have managed to provide their citizens with the cards' pragmatic advantages without becoming despotic oligarchies.

The Bill has provisions to keep the clauses of the 2006 Act that relate to false documentation, and we welcome that, but we need much more than penalties for false documents if we are to win the fight against identity fraud and illegal immigration.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Was it the shadow Home Secretary's intention that it would be compulsory for everyone to have ID cards? If not, how on earth could they help to prevent terrorism, benefit fraud or anything else, given that the people who were likely to commit those acts were unlikely to apply for an ID card?

Alan Johnson: That is a very good point. No, it was not my intention to make the cards compulsory. Indeed, we made it absolutely plain that people could use their biometric passport as an identity document or use an ID card, which was a smaller, simpler, cheaper version. France has a voluntary ID card scheme, as do many countries in Europe that would not go to the compulsory stage, and it helps people to protect and prove their identity, which is the fundamental reason behind it. As I said, it was the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden who mentioned the link with terrorism, not moi.

Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is making a customarily amusing yet powerful contribution to the debate. He is wise to accept the mandate of the coalition Government, whereby they believe that they have a right to dismantle their version of the surveillance state. Does he agree, however, that the Bill does not remove any obligation on any Department to verify people's identity, so there will be no less identity verification going on? If the Government really want to reduce the surveillance state, they should give citizens ownership of their data so that Departments do not continually data-share—there might be more of that as a result of the Bill—and have a transparency register that means that every occurrence of data-sharing that goes on between Departments is in the public domain so that people have the right to challenge it?

Alan Johnson: My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point; he has a good track record in this area. He is highlighting the real issues of civil liberties, which are not only to do with a simple identity card to prove and protect identity but a whole range of other issues that I shall come to in a moment.

Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Alan Johnson: No, I need to make some progress.

If we want to travel abroad, take an internal flight, open a bank account, take up a new job, register with a doctor, get a driving licence or get married, we need to prove our identity. No one would dispute that it is perfectly reasonable to have to provide proof of identity in such circumstances. For those who voluntarily acquire an ID card, it enables them to prove who they are quickly, easily and securely. It provides a universal and simple proof of identity and a convenient end to the disorganised use of a year's worth of photocopied bank statements that people have to hand over—phone bills, birth certificates and so on, all copied to numerous different places because of the ways that people have to prove their identity. The Conservatives agreed about that almost unanimously in 1996 and again in 2004. For those lucky enough to be blessed with youthful good looks—like you and me, Mr Deputy Speaker—it also provides proof of age. For those who are less well-off, it provides a cheap and convenient alternative to a passport for European travel. It enables people easily to access the services to which they are entitled. The fact that a robust and trusted form of identification can be a tool for empowerment is something that the Government have ignored in all their posturing on civil liberties.

Mr Buckland: The right hon. Gentleman talked about other countries in Europe and gave us a long list without deviation, hesitation or repetition, but can he say whether one of them introduced a national identity register? That is unique to this country, and an unprecedented complete disaster.

Alan Johnson: Yes—France.

There was nothing Big Brotherish about the system that we were implementing. We already have the NHS database for those registered with GPs. Incidentally, I note from yesterday's *Independent*—I do not know whether it is true, but if we have read it in the papers, it probably is—that the Government have reneged on their pledge to scrap that database. We already have the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency database for those with a driving licence and the passport database with information on 80% of the people in this country—exactly the same information as is on the ID card.

All that we want to do is make it easier for banks, GPs and employers to verify someone's identity and thereby make it much more difficult for people to create multiple identities and commit identity fraud. That crime costs our economy £1.2 billion every year and has increased by 20% in the first quarter of this year alone. Combating identity fraud protects the security not just of individuals but of all of us collectively. Drug dealers, people traffickers and terrorists depend on access to false documents. Having no simple method of establishing and recording someone's identity simply plays into their hands, as the police have said in numerous submissions, as the Conservative party stated in its pronouncements before the 2005 election and as the public have said in every consultation held by Governments of both persuasions over the past 14 years. The introduction of ID cards was linked to the switch to biometric passports, with all the costs intertwined. The national identity register is crucial to both, for reasons that I shall explain in a moment.

Conor Burns: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the scheme would be successful on none of those points unless it were, in time, to move towards being compulsory? People who are going to commit crimes would not participate in a voluntary scheme. During my early years in Northern Ireland, people were compelled to carry photographic driving licences whether they were drivers or not. That fundamentally altered the relationship between the citizen and the state, in a profoundly detrimental way.

Alan Johnson: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, which has rather bedevilled this debate, as the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden well knows. There was a confusion among the public and politicians about whether the scheme would be compulsory or voluntary, and the whole debate in 2004 and subsequently was about whether future Parliaments would have the opportunity to declare the scheme compulsory. It would have taken a vote of Parliament, but yes, that was implicit in the legislation.

In the debate on 20 December 2004, Charles Clarke, who is sadly no longer in the House, said in his very first address to the House as Home Secretary, "Don't vote for this Bill if you don't want to see ID cards become compulsory." The current Home Secretary voted for the Bill. I can only imagine what she would say if we proposed a compulsory ID cards scheme, having heard her rhetoric about how a voluntary scheme is the end of civilisation. However, she voted for that scheme on the clear statement of the then Home Secretary that Members should vote for it only if they wanted it to become compulsory. I disagree with a compulsory scheme and believe that we can have simple proof and protection of people's identities without it becoming compulsory.

Second-generation biometric passports, planned to commence in 2012, would provide a crucial additional level of security, enabling verification that the person presenting a passport had the same fingerprints as

[Alan Johnson]

those encoded on the chip. Amazingly, the Liberal Democrats appear to have convinced the Tories in their political pre-nup to scrap second-generation passports.

Robert Flello: There were appalling events fairly recently involving British passports being used in state-sponsored terrorism. Would not that extra layer perhaps have prevented that atrocity?

Alan Johnson: My hon. Friend pre-empts a crucial point that I shall come on to in a moment.

There was no mention of scrapping second-generation biometric passports in the Conservative manifesto. In fact, the Tories have not only been in favour of biometrics but wholeheartedly and enthusiastically in favour of them. The hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr Garnier) summed up the matter in 2007 when he said:

"There is not a Conservative Member...who disagrees with the notion that there should be biometric passports."—[*Official Report*, 5 February 2007; Vol. 456, c. 671.]

The Prime Minister himself has admitted that

"there is a need for the use of biometrics on passports".

Why the change of heart when we know that by locking people to one identity using advanced passport technology, we would help protect our country against the use of multiple identities by criminals, illegal immigrants and terrorists? Why, given that updating our passports would bring us in line with the rest of Europe, which has already set minimum passport standards to include facial and fingerprint biometrics, do we intend to allow our country to become an easy target for illegal immigration and our citizens to be subject to onerous checks at airports and ferry ports around the world? We had already introduced facial recognition image biometrics in British passports in 2006, but now the countries in the Schengen agreement are going further and the US has already imposed a fingerprint requirement on all visitors who have not historically required a visa—in other words, those from the UK.

I turn to the important point that my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South raised. In March, when I was Home Secretary and sitting alongside the then Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (David Miliband), the House heard about the inquiry carried out by the Serious Organised Crime Agency, at the request of the Dubai authorities, into how 12 people with joint UK-Israeli citizenship had had their passports cloned without their knowledge. Those were pre-biometric passports. Second-generation biometrics would make such cloning impossible. Indeed, the current Foreign Secretary, who was then shadowing the position, when that statement was made, said:

"The Foreign Secretary said that the biometric passports introduced four years ago are more difficult to counterfeit. Does he consider these new passports to be as invulnerable to counterfeiting as it is possible to make them, or will the Government review whether any other steps are needed to protect the integrity of British passports? Is there any suggestion that British passports are more vulnerable than those of other countries, including other EU countries?"—[*Official Report*, 23 March 2010; Vol. 508, c. 135.]

No, there was not such a suggestion then, but there is now that, amazingly and incredibly, this Government are planning to abandon second-generation biometric passports and leave our country more vulnerable to attack. It is beyond me to understand how the new Home Secretary could have been lulled into that decision. Identity fraud, illegal immigration, terrorism and organised crime are international problems, and it makes sense for Britain to continue working with our international neighbours to tackle them. Biometric passports are part of an international drive to make travel documents more secure. Their electronic security features, including fingerprints, are a significant impediment to forgers and counterfeiters, and we need to keep pace with our neighbours if the UK passport is to continue to be recognised as having the highest integrity.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): I, too, congratulate you on your illustrious elevation, Mr Deputy Speaker.

In Dover, people are concerned that border security has been lax for years. Why did the right hon. Gentleman not put more energy into dealing with the security of our borders? If he had done that rather than dealing with ID cards, maybe we would have had less illegal immigration.

Alan Johnson: That intervention was not worth waiting for. We put considerable effort into securing our borders. As he represents Dover, he will know that the chief constable of Kent has seen the number of illegal immigrants roving around the county reduced by 92% since my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Mr Blunkett) went over and did a deal with Sarkozy, who was then the Interior Minister, and shut down Sangatte. We have taken every measure possible. If the hon. Gentleman is interested in the security of his constituents in Dover, I tell him that I am talking about the current Government abandoning second-generation biometric passports, probably on the basis of a decision at the hippy commune known as the Liberal Democrat conference. That is an incredible decision.

On funding, the Government claim that scrapping the scheme will produce an initial £84 million in savings in the next four years. I would be extremely interested to learn how the Home Secretary came to that figure. On none of the statistics I saw when I was doing her job only three weeks ago does that make sense. Seventy per cent. of the start-up costs for ID cards are linked to first-generation biometric passports, to ensure that they fall into line with international standards. Those costs are unavoidable and the money is committed, so where does the £84 million come from?

Steve McCabe: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Home Secretary needs to publish the detail of those alleged savings? All we have heard today is how she is going to rip-off 15,000 people who have already paid for the card.

Alan Johnson: Indeed—and for the grand sum of £1 million, which she will save by not giving pensioners and students their money back on the cards they acquired because they had the temerity not to forecast a Conservative victory at the general election. We will question that more closely in Committee.

Paul Goggins: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way; I was unfortunately unable to persuade the Home Secretary to take an intervention on refunds.

I am seeking my right hon. Friend's support for a suggestion made to me by one of my constituents, and perhaps the Government will also consider it. If the Government are unwilling to refund those who applied for a passport and paid the £30 in good faith, perhaps they would consider giving a credit to all card holders for the next time they apply for a passport.

Alan Johnson: That is a sensible suggestion, except that some people who have ID cards do not have passports. They are part of that 20% of the population who generally will not have a driving licence or bank account. We used to call them the socially excluded—indeed, the Government are supposed to be wedded to the idea of helping them—and many of them will not have that facility because they do not have a passport, but my hon. Friend's point is relevant, and I shall address it further shortly.

Roberta Blackman-Woods: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Home Secretary must also cost in the additional cost in unemployment benefit that must be paid to my constituents if they do not manage to secure alternative employment when they lose their jobs because of the Government's decision?

Alan Johnson: My hon. Friend might get an answer to that from the Home Secretary. Perhaps those staff should not have had the temerity to take those jobs, because they should have known that the Conservatives were going to win the next general election. This is the new, bizarre world in which we are living.

Abolishing the national identity register would save very little for three reasons: first, all the information held on our existing passport database will continue to be held; secondly, that information will need to be held securely, as it is now; and thirdly, we will still need to collect and securely hold the fingerprints of foreign nationals on a database.

The Government's claim that scrapping ID cards will save £800 million in operating costs over the next 10 years is utter fantasy. We always proceeded on the basis of full cost recovery and made it perfectly clear that over 10 years, the operating costs of ID cards would be recovered through fees, so there would be no charge on general taxation over that period. However, if there are no ID cards, there is no charge for ID cards, and therefore no way of recovering the costs. By cancelling the scheme, the Government remove the income stream but leave the cancellation costs, which the taxpayer will be forced to pay, and let us not forget the continuing cost to the economy of fraud, abuse of the NHS, illegal immigration and unauthorised working. By cancelling the scheme, the Government will make not a saving, but a substantial loss.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that our black and Asian British constituents will come under suspicion, because some in authority will assume that they ought to have the card that foreign nationals must carry? We will have a return of the sus laws, because there will be double standards: one towards black and Asian migrants and British citizens who might be suspected of being migrants, and another towards other British citizens. Can the Home Secretary or a Home Office Minister assure us that there will be no increase in stop-and-search or sus law-type provisions against black and Asian British citizens?

Alan Johnson: That precise point has been made by Liberty, which opposes ID cards—*[Interruption.]* An hon. Member says that Liberty does not make that point, but it does, on the basis that ID cards for foreign nationals will be compulsory. Although it is a card with fingerprints and biometric identification, we cannot now call it an ID card, which is really silly—it must be called a "permit" or "warrant" or some such thing. Liberty says that either everyone should have a card, which is novel for Liberty, or no one should have one.

Dr Julian Huppert (Cambridge) (LD) *rose—*

Alan Johnson: I will not give way because I am about to conclude.

My final point is that the Government intend not only to stop issuing cards, but to make the 15,000 already in circulation illegal. I find that despicable, and I do not think that that is too strong a word. How can any Government seek to punish hundreds of thousands of its citizens for having the temerity to take advantage of a scheme that was pledged in a manifesto, supported in law and introduced in an entirely legitimate way? *[Interruption.]* The Home Secretary is chuntering from the Front Bench, but I will gladly take an intervention.

Mrs May: If I heard the right hon. Gentleman correctly, he claims that somehow we are going to punish "hundreds of thousands of citizens," but actually, fewer than 15,000 people hold those cards. Perhaps he would like to correct the record.

Alan Johnson: Fifteen thousand is a significant number of people—*[Interruption.]* On Monday, the Deputy Prime said that he had made a slip of the tongue when he told one of my hon. Friends that the Government will certainly campaign for a yes vote in a Welsh referendum to devolve powers to Wales, and I think I am entitled to make a similar slip of the tongue. Of course I am talking not about hundreds of thousands of people—it would have been if the scheme had gone on a few months longer—but thousands, and 15,000 is a significant number of people.

Those in possession of identity cards ought to be able to continue to use them as a legitimate form of identification, and to travel in Europe and access services. At the very least, they should receive a refund, or the Government should take up the suggestion of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Paul Goggins) and offer a discount off future purchases. The Government should be ashamed of themselves for even thinking that they could treat people with such off-hand arrogance, and they must look again at that aspect of the Bill.

The Opposition remain unconvinced by the Government's arguments for scrapping ID cards. The money saved will not pay for 3,000 extra police officers, as the Lib Dems claimed. In the long term, the proposals will cost us more money, hamper the efforts of the police to tackle identity fraud, and weaken rather than defend civil liberties. Illegalising cards that have already been issued will penalise those who bought them in good faith, including pensioners and students. Scrapping second generation biometric passports will threaten our borders and encourage illegal immigration, because our passport technology will lag behind that of our European neighbours. I urge the Government to rethink this expensive, misguided and spiteful little Bill.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. A limit of 12 minutes on speeches has been applied by Mr Speaker.

2.18 pm

Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to address the House for the first time, and in this fascinating debate, on a day when we are both maidens together—I would not comment on which of us is the fairer.

As is customary, I pay tribute to my predecessor, Sir Peter Viggers, who served as a Member of the House for 36 years, having been elected in 1974. Most notably, he was a junior Minister for Northern Ireland, and over the years was a member of the Select Committee on Defence and the Treasury Committee. I wish Sir Peter and Lady Viggers a very happy, restful, long and happy retirement, and my sincere hope is that they are both able to reflect upon many long years of public service, and not upon the events that dominated the last 12 months of the previous Parliament.

Another notable predecessor was Lord Palmerston, who may well have approved of the latest coalition: having started political life as a Conservative Member of Parliament, he crossed the Floor of the House to join the Whigs, was elected as the first MP for South Hampshire in 1832 and of course went on to become Prime Minister. As a humble new girl, and the first woman to represent Gosport, I am conscious of being a bit behind the drag curve. Being 13 years older—I do not admit that freely—than Lord Palmerston when he was offered the job as Chancellor of the Exchequer, and given that I did not catch the Prime Minister's eye three weeks ago, when he filled that job, I suspect I will drop further behind my illustrious predecessor.

It is customary in a maiden speech to speak glowingly about one's new constituency. Although a duty, it is also an enormous pleasure, because Gosport could be described as my dream seat. The Gosport constituency includes not only the historic town of Gosport, but the charming seaside resort of Lee on Solent, the beautiful coastal village of Hill Head and the equally lovely rural village of Stubbington. The man I call "Mr Gosport", Councillor Peter Edgar, tells of a Gosport legend in which King Stephen and his brother Bishop Henry de Blois were on a little medieval ship that was caught in a fierce storm in the Solent. In danger of drowning, they were rescued by some brave fishermen who took them ashore in Gosport, at which point the bishop struck the ground with his stick and named the place "God's Port Our Haven"—that is where Gosport got its name—and rewarded them with profitable markets and fairs. It is a good story—royalty in danger, a brave rescue and a good reward—and will always remain part of the story of Gosport. So, too, will the true story of Bishop Godfrey de Lucy, who in 1204 was commissioned by King John to build a fleet of ships to recapture Normandy from the French. So began Gosport's 800-year history as a vital part in the defence of the realm. Indeed, England has never been involved in a major conflict without Gosport playing its part, right up to the modern day: we have just welcomed back 33 Field Hospital from Afghanistan.

There is a common misconception that Gosport is near Portsmouth, but as my constituents will explain, it is Portsmouth that is near Gosport. Gosport and Portsmouth fought on opposing sides during the civil war, and I am proud to say that on that occasion Gosport was on the side of Parliament. Gosport is a constituency of contrasts. It may be part of the affluent south of England, but it has pockets of shocking deprivation. I have met kids in my school visits who talk of things that young children should never have to experience. Thinking of my own seven-year-old son, it makes me so determined to work hard and change things for them.

Conversely, we have stunning waterfronts, the beauty of Stokes bay looking over to the Isle of Wight and the Falklands memorial gardens, with their amazing views across the harbour. There is also evidence of Gosport's distinguished military heritage everywhere: HMS Sultan, which was one of the earliest Royal Flying Corps airfields in the country, and the military hospital Haslar, which first received patients in 1754. It later took patients from conflicts such as the battle of Trafalgar, and Queen Victoria described it as the noblest of institutions.

Reading my predecessor's maiden speech in 1974, it staggers me how many of the Royal Navy establishments that he described have been stripped from Gosport in the past 30 years—not only that noble hospital at Haslar, but submarine base HMS Dolphin and Daedalus air base. We still have a range of military facilities including for engineering training and helicopter maintenance, but the prospect of shutting any more of those bases would be a disaster for my constituency. Any thought of moving the Royal Navy engineering school at HMS Sultan to Wales would be a huge upheaval for those from Portsmouth-based ships and their families, as well as a vast and unnecessary drain on the defence budget. If amalgamation of engineering training is so vital, why not bring the Royal Air Force and Army to Gosport and save huge amounts of money? We would welcome them with open arms, and it would save a huge sum.

Of course, the crowning glory of Gosport is its very special people, with their strength of character, warmth of spirit, good humour and generosity—not to mention their immaculate good taste at election time. However, recent Governments have starved the peninsula of infrastructure. We are the largest town in Britain with no railway station. Our one major access road, the infamous A32, has no dual carriageways and is blocked for much of the day. That is made worse as much of the population has to commute out to work because huge swathes of housing were built to match the targets of the previous Government but no jobs were created to match them.

Also under the previous Government, the wonderful Haslar hospital was closed. It was not only the last remaining military hospital in the country but a well-used community resource. Now Gosport is inadequately served for accident and emergency and other services, and this great hospital sits there in a mummified state of limbo at a time when we need military hospitals so badly. This is why I have chosen to talk in this debate: the billions of pounds already spent on identity cards were badly needed elsewhere for roads, better housing and to save that hospital. The good people of Gosport should be free to get on with their lives, with their jobs and with raising their families, and not have to share information about themselves unless it is for a good reason. They should not have every personal detail stored on a national

register. It is appropriate for me to support the abolition of identity cards as a small gesture towards acknowledging the freedom of this nation's people, given that Gosport has done so much to deliver the freedom of both this and other nations around the world.

2.26 pm

Mr David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinenage) on a feisty maiden speech, demanding that her constituency get a greater share of resources and investment from the Government, and I wish her well in that endeavour. I also congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your election. I intend to be brief, because my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary's speech was excellent and put forward in considerable detail a great deal of what I would otherwise have needed to say. I speak as the former Home Secretary who published the Bill to which he referred extensively and which was supported by senior Conservative Members. However, I do not want to cover old ground; instead I want to admit to one or two mistakes, and touch on what may have happened since.

I need to be contrite enough to congratulate Phil Booth from NO2ID, Dr Whitley from the London School of Economics identity project, and others, for the tremendous campaign that they have run, over the past five years in particular, to stop this scheme. I congratulate them because they changed the culture and atmosphere around, and attitudes towards the scheme and its intentions in a way that those of us initially involved could not have conceived. In doing so, they have persuaded large swathes of the normally well-informed population, including vast swathes of the media, that the identity cards scheme and the second generation biometric register were intended to impact on the public and intrude on their civil liberties in a way that was never intended and was never going to happen. That they were wrong should not mislead us into misunderstanding what can happen in a vigorous democracy, and how careful we have to be in explaining our intentions and taking on arguments openly.

It is because we have such a vigorous democracy that we have reached this situation and are accepting that—for the time being, at least—the proposition is dead. However, the issues will not go away. The issue of second generation biometric passports will not go away because the rest of the world is moving around us, and because they are a more authentic and therefore verifiable way of securing our identities. My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East (Mr Watson) is right to say that we need to find and develop simpler ways of securing, presenting and owning our own identities, in a manner that was not possible 10 years ago but is becoming possible now.

That is so particularly for specific purposes. In the end, I believe that our person will be our identity, and that we will be able to walk through electronic border controls and present ourselves, not a card or passport. It will automatically register our biometric fingerprints, our irises—in the future; at the moment the technology is not up to it, but it will be—and use facial recognition based on digital technology, which will avoid fraud.

I have a card here; I am very proud of it. I have been offered a lot of money for it on eBay. I have agreed with Simon Davies of Privacy International that we could frame it and put it in a gallery. I do not intend to auction it off because my grandchildren will want to hold it in their hands. They will say, "Granddad, what was so terrible about this card that you paid £30 for it? Did it involve you actually having to give deeply private information that was going to be shared with the rest of the world, or be intruded upon by criminals who were going to steal the information that was registered when you took up the card?" I will have to say to them, "I'm terribly sorry, but that didn't happen. It was never going to happen, but people believed it was going to happen." My grandchildren will say, "Did they really believe that? Do I understand from reading the history books that people believed it was going to cost £2.5 billion, and that they were going to employ 3,000 extra police officers?" I shall say, "Yes, they did." My grandchildren will ask, "Did they go to school, granddad? Did they do mathematics? Did they have any grasp of economics?" I shall say, "No, they were substantially driven by the Liberal Democrats," and that the Deputy Prime Minister from 2010 onwards, who was the leader of the Liberal Democrats, actually believed his own rhetoric.

I have a lot of time for the new Home Secretary. I like her personally, and I do not believe that she believed a word of the adjectival hyperbole with which she started her speech. She does not believe that the scheme was going to cost billions or that money that had never been raised would have been spent on projects that could not be funded because the money being spent on the register and the ID card was not coming from the taxpayer or from those purchasing the passport and the ID card. She does not believe that, but she has been forced to, because of the coalition agreement, which the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats sat down one afternoon to work out. Presumably, the new Chief Secretary managed to persuade the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), now the Foreign Secretary, that he had got it completely wrong, making it necessary to do away not only with the ID card—which, as the Home Secretary said, is symbolic—but with second generation biometric passports. The Foreign Secretary was persuaded that afternoon, and the Government and the country are now lumbered. What an odd way to carry on.

I do not know whether the new Chief Secretary has any grasp of economics, but he must now know, as the Conservatives now know, that there were no billions of pounds available to spend on anything else, whether on hospitals in Gosport or anywhere else. There was no pot of gold to draw on. We are apparently going to save £5 million a year over 10 years. Well, that is really going to knock a hole in the deficit and provide the cash for the deficit reduction strategy!

I have in my other hand my existing passport, which is totally forgeable, and is not really worth the paper it is written on. When I went to Europe twice this last month, they were really happy to have my ID card, because it has biometrics on it and it is more authentic, ensuring my identity is proved.

What have I learned from the last eight years? First, we need to explain more clearly what is beneficial to the individual rather than to the state. Secondly, we need to be absolutely clear about the costings so that they are not rolled up over 10 years and people's individual purchase is not confused with taxation. Thirdly, we need to ensure that people do not believe that additional data is going to be taken that would previously not have been available for the passport or for the DVLA driving licence.

[Mr David Blunkett]

Incidentally, the BBC managed to get a driving licence for Freddie Forsyth, who wrote "The Day of the Jackal", and for me. I promise the world that at no point in the future will I ever use the driving licence that the BBC obtained on my behalf in order to drive around this country. I would have been a much greater risk to the people of Britain than identity cards would ever have been in terms of intruding on their lifestyle, their liberty and their well-being. When I took out the ID card, the only thing I had to provide over and above the information for my passport was to pick from 25 options something relevant to my past that only I would know, which I could offer if my identity were to be challenged and a further check had to be made. That is all—no information that could be transferred for other purposes, no intrusion that criminals could get hold of and use beyond what they already had access to in other ways, nothing nefarious that would in any way intrude on my or anyone else's civil liberties. The truth is, however, that people believed otherwise. They believed that there would be those problems, that the card would cost a lot of money, which could be spent on something else, and that the register and biometrics were not a priority at the time.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, but this is typical new Labour arrogance: everybody else was wrong, and they were right. What has been described are these benign, nice and inexpensive cards, forgetting the fact that they hold up to 50 pieces of information that would be stored and shared. That is what new Labour were enthusing about with these identity cards. Can the right hon. Gentleman not accept that perhaps the rest of us have got it right and he has got it wrong?

Mr Blunkett: I thought I had accepted this afternoon that I and many others got it wrong, but not my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) or our admirable, and honourable, Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), who did a fantastic job in the time she was in post in getting the message across. I have already indicated that we did not explain the issue. The hon. Gentleman illustrates the position extremely well in saying that 50 bits of information were required. If he had gone along and got himself an ID card, he would have realised that that was complete and utter bunkum, but this has been repeated so often that people started to believe it. I challenge anyone who has an ID card, who went along and gave the information to be placed on that database to stand up this afternoon and challenge me. I will give way quite happily if people believe that they can justify the claim that this mega-amount of information had to be provided over and above what was required for the passport.

In the end, however, if people believe something in a democracy, that is what counts. I remember saying at 3 am Friday morning after the general election, "If you're defeated, you're defeated." When defeated, it is right to go back, think again and work out how to develop sensible arguments that protect civil liberties, and protect the nation's well-being as well.

2.38 pm

John Hemming (Birmingham, Yardley) (LD): I congratulate you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on your well-deserved appointment, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinenage) on her excellent maiden speech.

I support the Identity Documents Bill, but one of the difficulties is that it should really be called the Identity Documents and Register Bill. It is the register aspect that I would like to concentrate on. Section 10 of the Identity Cards Act 2006 deals with

"Notification of changes affecting accuracy of Register".

The claim that maintaining a database and any changes to it has no cost is ludicrous. There is obviously a saving from not having to change the database.

Under section 10(1):

"An individual to whom an ID card has been issued must notify the Secretary of State about...every prescribed change of circumstances affecting the information recorded about him in the Register".

Under section 10(7):

"An individual who contravenes a requirement imposed on him by...this section shall be liable to a civil penalty not exceeding £1,000."

Essentially, what that means is that once the information dealt with in schedule 1 is on the register, anyone who has an ID card—whether they are compulsory or not—is under a duty to notify and will be fined up to £1,000 if they do not inform the Government of those changes. Perhaps that was the stealth tax that was going to get the Government out of the financial mess the country was in. If we are talking about £1,000 fines for 60 million people, that comes to £60 billion, which is a good start: there is a third of the deficit gone. The reality is that all the debate, on the basis of which public opinion was formed, has been about the card and its cost. Once people start being fined for not telling the Government about changes, the position becomes much more difficult.

Schedule 1 of the 2006 Act is relevant to the subject of the 50 pieces of information, although the amount of information required obviously depends on the individual. The requirement for the individual's "full name" is straightforward, but people change their names by deed poll from time to time, and if they do not tell the Government, they must pay a £1,000 fine. Next, the schedule refers to

"other names by which he is...known".

People may have nicknames. If someone fills in an election nomination paper with a name by which he is known, but does not tell the Government for the purposes of the identity card, he will have to pay a £1,000 fine.

There are requirements for "date of birth", "place of birth" and "gender" to be recorded. "Gender" is an interesting one. Under the Identity Cards Act 2006 (Application and Issue of ID Card and Notification of Changes) Regulations 2009, people can register two genders if they wish. I shall say more about that later.

The schedule also refers to

"the address of his principal place of residence".

To be fair, people do need to tell the various authorities where they live, for electoral purposes and the like. However, paragraph 1(g) refers to

"the address of every other place in the United Kingdom or elsewhere".

Someone with a holiday home in France must tell the United Kingdom Government where it is. If he sells it and does not tell the Government where he has moved, he will have to pay a £1,000 fine. It is a good way of raising money. A great many people, including many in the House, have more than one residence—they may have to work away from home—but if they do not tell the Government where that other residence is, they must pay £1,000.

The schedule demands

"a photograph of his head and shoulders (showing the features of the face)".

The right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Mr Blunkett) and my hon. Friends the Members for Somerton and Frome (Mr Heath) and for Cambridge (Dr Huppert) may wake up one day and decide that they would like to use the razor to a greater extent than usual. If they take such action and do not tell the Government, they must pay a £1,000 fine for not sending another photograph.

The passport system is simple and straightforward. Every 10 years, people must renew their passports and send in a new photograph. At one stage the Government got into a real mess with babies. They required a baby not to have its mouth open when being photographed, and people had to send in 20 photographs before one was considered acceptable. That was a serious problem. Under the ID card system, such people would fall outside the time limits specified in section 10 of the Act, and would have to pay a £1,000 fine.

My daughter decided to dye her hair green. Obviously that is a change, involving not just the price of the dye but a possible £1,000 fine for dyeing her hair green and not telling the Government. Let us suppose that I decide tomorrow to put on a dress and call myself Doris. The statutory instrument requires me to tell the Government that I am calling myself Doris and have an alternative gender. If the day after that I decide to call myself Ethel and do not tell the Government, I will have to pay a £1,000 fine. The Government are definitely making good progress in getting rid of the deficit: this is a very good stealth tax.

It is all a question of whether the Government serve the citizen or the citizen serves the Government. One of my constituents was stopped by the police on the Coventry road, which—as those who are acquainted with Yardley will know—is a very big road that, unsurprisingly, leads to Coventry. Everything, including his insurance, was perfect, but the wrong box was ticked on a form, and he was subsequently prosecuted and convicted of an offence that he had not committed. It took a lot of doing for us to reverse the conviction and remove it from the system. That is an example of what can happen when things are done for the convenience of the state rather than the convenience of the citizen. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) said that this was not Big Brother, but I think that having to tell the Government every time one does something is a bit like Big Brother.

During the general election campaign I cut my finger on a piece of paper, and obviously that changed my fingerprint. Schedule 1.2 is headed "Identifying information", and subparagraph (c) refers to fingerprints. If I had had an ID card and had not told the Government that I had cut my finger, I would have had to pay a £1,000 fine. Members may laugh, but such things happen. The purpose of speed cameras was to make money out of the fines. If a Department is targeted to be self-financing, it will look for solutions such as another change that should have been, but has not been, put on the identity card register.

There is no point in my reading out all of schedule 1, which is available to Members, as are the regulations which amend schedule 1. More than 50 pieces of information may be required, but the main issue is the sudden creation of a major duty for the citizen to tell the Government everything that he or she does. We all know how good the Government are at keeping information secure. They can get a little memory stick and lose a number of bank accounts, for instance. There is also the question of access to the information. The Data Protection Act may make it an offence to sell access to any of the databases, but when there is a single database in a single place all the information is tidily collated, and it may be worth someone's while to obtain and pass to someone else information such as where a holiday home is in France, what name a person uses when wearing a dress, the colour of a person's hair, or a national insurance number.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): I am the proud owner of an ID card, and I went through the process of filling in the application form. Yes, I did give information such as my name and address, but there were huge parts of the form that I did not have to fill in, because I had already provided that information in order to obtain my passport. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that we should not give such information in order to obtain a passport?

John Hemming: When we apply for a passport, every 10 years, we provide a new photograph. I, for example, am a little bit follicly challenged, and at some stage I must recognise that.

Mr Watson: Shave it off then.

John Hemming: If I follow the hon. Gentleman's advice and shave it off, and then do not provide a photograph for the ID register, I will pay a £1,000 fine.

It is recognised that passport photographs go out of date. That is why children's passports do not last as long as adults' passports. But, having applied for a passport, we do not have a duty to tell the passport office that we have moved to a new address, or that the location of a second home has changed. There will be no £1,000 fine in such circumstances. The real difference is that individual citizens are threatened with a fine of up to £1,000 if they do not inform the Government's ID card department of such changes. It could be said that the most intrusive aspect is not the ID card itself, but the maintenance of the register and, in particular, the duty for the individual to update the register.

I think that all the other aspects have been ably dealt with. A voluntary scheme is unlikely to achieve anything in terms of preventing crime, particularly serious crime. People who are willing to die in the process of committing crime will not be frightened of a £1,000 fine for not giving a photograph of themselves to the Government. We have heard no good arguments for how ID cards and the ID database would prevent crime. What is clear is that the identity register is massively intrusive. The duty that it places on the citizen to inform the Government

[John Hemming]

of every change is an extreme step, forcing people to serve the Government and make things convenient for them by providing such information. It is obvious that this is all about convenience in the provision of services. The public interest is defined as the achievement of more efficiency in providing public services. The basic point is that the Government are here to serve the citizen; the citizen is not here to serve the Government.

2.50 pm

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your election and thank you for the opportunity to make my maiden speech. It is a privilege—an interesting one—to follow a fellow Birmingham MP, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (John Hemming), who made the point very well that was brought out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Mr Blunkett) that there are those who believe in caricatures and myths.

Birmingham, which I am proud to represent, is a remarkable city, the birthplace of local government and municipal enterprise. Under Joseph Chamberlain and the visionary Victorian pioneers, Birmingham city council provided gas, water and electricity. The council built some of the first swimming pools because it understood the link between health and well-being. Some of those pools are still in use, including the great Moseley Road baths. Birmingham city council even established a municipal bank.

In the 20th century, under visionary pioneers such as Dick Knowles, the national exhibition centre, the national convention centre and the national indoor arena were remarkable examples of municipal enterprise and partnership with the private sector, which brought millions to Birmingham.

Birmingham remains the industrial heartland of Britain: 100,000 people work in manufacturing. Birmingham's manufacturing contributes billions to our economy and to the quality of life and the culture of Birmingham itself. That is captured by the legend in the municipal museum,

"By the gains of Industry we promote Art."

Birmingham is indeed a city of culture that deserves to win the accolade of European city of culture.

Birmingham is a city of diversity. As the proud son of Irish parents who left the emerald isle to escape poverty and to build a better life, I feel at home with what is the largest Irish community outside London, the Erin Go Bragh Gaelic games club, the magnificent St Patrick's day parade and enjoying the craic in the New Inns. I feel at home in a city that celebrates its diversity: the Afro-Caribbean community and its churches, Vaisakhi, that great Sikh festival that brought 100,000 people to Birmingham's Central park, and St George's day, celebrated with passion in the working men and working women's clubs, with more flags of St George being flown than I have ever seen before—English people proud of their identity and rightly recapturing the flag from the brain-dead bootboys of the BNP.

Birmingham is characterised by Brummie pride. There is a distinct ethos of hard work and enterprise, of smiling in adversity, of community and solidarity. I have attended excellent events such as that for Help for Heroes. These are proud people in proud communities in Erdington. Castle Vale, which I am privileged to represent—entered through Spitfire island, rebuilt under the remarkable Robin Corbett—is still a remarkable community to this day. It has a great community spirit; 5,000 people turned out recently to celebrate the life of a young girl who died of asthma and to raise money for charity so that no more would follow that terrible fate. Among the great communities of Erdington are Pype Hayes, the Asian community in Slade road, the traditional Green, Perry Common and Kingstanding.

Erdington is a constituency with manufacturing in its blood. Sadly too many workplaces have gone to the wall: Fort Dunlop, Cincinnati and IMI. However, there are still great industrial enterprises such as the Jaguar plant, the jewel in the crown of manufacturing excellence; GKN; Valor Fires, recently the winner of the Queen's award; and small but dynamic companies such as Guhring.

Erdington is a stronger, fairer, better place thanks to 13 years of a Labour Government. The schools were rebuilt and new children's centres were built, including the Gunter school and children's centre, giving kids the best possible start in life. We have world-class health centres such as that in Stockland Green. Thousands of homes have been renovated as a consequence of Labour's decent homes programme, including those on the Lyndhurst estate.

For all those advances over 13 years, Erdington has enduring deep-seated problems, including high unemployment. I have seen the impact of that. An excellent craftsmen from LDV lost his job and five years on was desperate to get back into work. A young builder from Marsh lane was almost in tears with frustration because he could not get a job in the industry for which he had been trained. Often there is still poor housing, long waiting lists and a lack of affordable family housing, which divides families and breaks up communities.

Crime is down thanks to Labour's investment in the police and the excellent police community support officers in Erdington, but there are still too many examples of unacceptable antisocial behaviour. Too many people in Erdington were left behind, including those in Kingstanding. People lost their jobs three or four times in the 1980s and some of them never went back to work again. Two generations have grown up in workless households.

Erdington is a community that believes in the power of community, solidarity and self-help. I mention the excellent Enta project. Recently I was privileged to be with young men and women who had been brought back into the labour market by that excellent organisation, which believes in the legend of that song "You Raise Me Up". But Erdington is a community that knows this: the deep-seated problems of jobs and housing are incapable of resolution without the power of good government.

For 25 years I fought great battles for working people in Birmingham. I am a Labour man proud of my trade union background, but I have worked with those from other political parties: the admirable hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Peter Luff), who chaired brilliantly the recent Select Committee inquiry into the scandal of the Kraft takeover of Cadbury's; Baroness Shephard, who stood alongside me and my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Jim Sheridan) in the drive to take the Gangmasters (Licensing) Bill into

law, ending modern-day slavery; and the right hon. and learned Member for North East Fife (Sir Menzies Campbell), with whom I fought to save Rosyth dockyard from closure in Scotland. Therefore, where the Government get it right, I will work with them, but where government, national or local, gets it wrong, I will stand up for the people of Erdington as their champion, fighting their corner, making a difference for them and with them, and defending that which matters to their lives. There can be no rolling back of those great advances that we have made. Yes, choices have to be made, but I will resist any notion of asking those who are least able to bear the burden to pay the price of the misdeeds of the bankers.

I have seen that at first hand. A young schizophrenic approached me in Erdington high street and said, "Jack, for 10 years I could not get out of my home. Now I can, helped by a local project. They are going to help me to get back into work, but what will I do when they close the project because of city council cuts?" Therefore, my message to the Government is this: if they cut the future jobs fund, they will deprive the unemployed of Erdington of hope; if they cut the child trust fund, they will deprive parents of modest means of the ability to pass on to their children assets for the future; if they cut Labour's expansion of university places, it will not be the stockbroker belt of Surrey and Sussex that suffers, but the young working-class kids of Erdington who will be deprived of the chance to become the first in their family to go to university.

I pay tribute to my predecessors: Robin Corbett and Siôn Simon, who have served the people of Erdington well, and I hope to follow in their footsteps. I have one other message to Government: do not step back from what Labour has done in recent years on industrial activism—that necessary partnership between industry and good Government. Everyone now understands, in the aftermath of the financial crisis, that we must rebalance our economy, no longer be heavily dependent on the financial sector but again rebuild the real economy, including our manufacturing base.

Locally, I have seen this in Castle Vale. The admirable chief executive of the Castle Vale community housing association says that we have rebuilt the housing and built a community, but we have a desperate shortage of jobs. That is why my No. 1 priority will be jobs and manufacturing—and I have to say that the subject of ID cards did not come up once in the 4,000 doorstep discussions I had throughout the general election campaign.

My priority will be jobs and manufacturing. I want us to preserve what is left of our manufacturing base, which is why I will promote a "Cadbury's law" so that we protect vital British industrial assets from hostile takeovers by foreign multinationals. That is why I will stand up for the future of the Jaguar plant in my constituency, and that is why I will work—with Government, I hope—to promote the hi-tech industries of the future. I want green manufacturing in Birmingham and a green investment bank for Birmingham, but as I know from experience of dealing with major manufacturing companies, there is a simple reality: manufacturing will flourish only if there is a partnership between good government and these world-class companies.

Historically, Birmingham was the laboratory of the world and the workshop of the world, combining British genius, enterprise and hard work. Too often now, however, it is British genius, but made in China. For both Birmingham and Britain, the single biggest task is the renaissance of our manufacturing industries, and I say this to the Government: do not walk away from Birmingham's great industries, and do not condemn this generation to the fate suffered by that of the 1980s. In the 21st century, we must not have a generation of young people with no work and no hope. Birmingham, Erdington deserves better.

3.2 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I congratulate you on your election, Mr Deputy Speaker, and thank you for giving me this opportunity to make my maiden speech. I also congratulate the previous maiden speaker, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), not only on his excellent speech but, if I am not mistaken, on becoming the first Member of this House to make his maiden speech while his wife, the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), was not only present in the Chamber but sitting before him on the Front Bench.

It is a big step for anyone to represent his cathedral city in this House. Many previous maiden speakers have alluded to the difficulties of filling the large shoes of their predecessors. In my case, that is literally true as both of my feet would probably fit into one of Parmjit Dhanda's shoes. I pay tribute to him for the work he did on behalf of Gloucester, his great interest in Gloucester City football club and his contribution to the relocation and rebuilding of Gloucestershire college. I also respected his enthusiasm—although I did not share it at all—for the regionalisation of many things, including government, planning, the police and fire control centres. In these respects at least, I hope that small is beautiful.

It is appropriate that I am making this maiden speech on behalf of my Gloucester constituents during the Second Reading debate of the Bill to abolish ID cards, which are certainly a vivid example of the misuse of both parliamentary time and taxpayer money.

The main issue in my city and others like it is not dissimilar to that described by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington: we are a great working city which now has record youth unemployment and too many families with no working role model—in fact, there are occasionally three generations living entirely off benefits. I believe that everyone in Gloucester will support me in our main endeavour today—to increase business growth in order to generate more jobs, especially for the young, and that this will in turn generate the tax revenues that fund the front-line services that are so crucial for everyone in my city.

Let me try to put our work in context. Gloucester first appeared on the map through two early attempts at European integration: first, it was the Roman colonia of Glevum, and it was then at the forefront of a large Norman military and religious building programme, which has left us with the glories of Gloucester cathedral. However, as Conservative Members know so well, economic development rarely follows Government plans, and our next phase of mass tourism was created by the unfortunate and regrettable homophobic act of regicide against Edward II in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael). The numbers of pilgrims then arriving in our city have only recently been exceeded, with another pilgrimage after the filming of Harry Potter in our cloisters.

[Richard Graham]

Our true business adaptability was shown during the industrial revolution, however, when we created, first, the world's deepest canal, and then Britain's most inland port, to bring raw materials to Gloucester to make things. That is where my city has excelled: we have always made things. We manufactured wagons during the age of the railway to carry everything from coal to maharajahs, with slightly different degrees of comfort, and most spectacularly we built the world's first jet fighter, the Gloster Meteor, which was exported to 14 countries.

Today, we face different times and challenges. Like many other constituencies, our business sector has a strong retail and financial element, but we continue to manufacture despite the large drop in our manufacturing sector during the last 10 years. Some 15% of Gloucester's gross domestic product still comes from manufacturing, including health products and large quantities of materials for the aerospace industry such as insulation, coatings and cylinders, and almost every ice cream that every Member has eaten in this country comes from the Wall's ice cream factory in Gloucester.

It is as a symbol that I am today wearing something manufactured in Gloucester. The shirt I am wearing was made two days ago on the Cross in the heart of our city by Gloucester cutters and machinists, and I am proud to say that the company that makes these wonderful shirts will shortly be opening a retail space in Bombay, demonstrating that Gloucester will soon be exporting to India again.

At the same time as this greater diversity in manufacturing and business enterprise, we have seen a growing diversity of our residents. I thought it would be useful as a new Member of Parliament to have lived and worked in 10 countries and to speak the languages of eight of them, but the people of Gloucester speak 46 languages and so, in this as in so much else, I still have a lot to learn.

It will be of interest to Members to learn that many of our residents from overseas come from close to the Indian port of Surat in Gujarat, which was, by wonderful historical irony, the port where Elizabethan sailors from this country first landed in India some 450 years ago. I welcome all my friends from Gujarat, and also more recent arrivals. I am proud to have been invited as the guest of honour at the opening this weekend of the new association for Tamils and also to an event by the Polish community.

Today, the truth is that all of us, whatever our origins, face severe difficulties in handling the record youth unemployment and in trying to re-grow our economy to provide jobs for our young people. That is why all my constituents will welcome measures taken by this Government to stimulate business, which we must remind ourselves is the sole source of growth, providing jobs and then tax revenues for the services that many Members are calling for in our different constituencies.

The most famous book written about Gloucester is Beatrix Potter's "The Tailor of Gloucester". Some Members will remember the sad moment when the tailor runs out of money and finds that there is "no more twist". In his case, he was bailed out by the mice, who in the dead of night brought both the cloth and the needles and finished his sewing for him, but today we cannot trust entirely to the benevolence of the mice in Gloucester to re-stimulate our economy, and therefore I welcome the changes that I am sure this Government will make in order to bring about that re-stimulation.

So I promise the constituents of Gloucester, whom I am so proud to serve, that I will work ceaselessly, especially to help business growth that will provide job opportunities and generate tax revenues. To those ends, I intend to create a new all-party parliamentary group on urban regeneration—which links so many of these issues together—and I shall work with Members on both sides of the House to explore new ways of contributing to the solutions in that area. If we can successfully stimulate micro-regeneration on the streets, as well as macro-regeneration through projects and new investment, it will be possible for the people of Gloucester to take greater pride in our city and for hon. Members and people all round the country to see that, like our cathedral and our rugby club, our entire city belongs to the premier league.

3.11 pm

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): I am grateful to you for calling me to make my maiden speech today, Mr Deputy Speaker. I should like to congratulate the hon. Members for Gosport (Caroline Dinenage) and for Gloucester (Richard Graham) on their excellent maiden speeches, and, especially, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) on his passionate and informative speech.

I believe that a Member of Parliament once described maiden speeches as lasting 10 minutes, beginning with a few nice words about the previous Member—often the most difficult part—followed by a description of the constituency and an indication of the Member's own parliamentary obsessions, and concluding with a passing reference to the subject at hand. I can assure hon. Members that I have no difficulty in paying tribute to my predecessor, Martyn Jones. I have known him for 24 years; indeed, I campaigned for him when he was first elected in 1987, in what was then the parliamentary constituency of Clwyd, South-West. Martyn was rightly proud of serving as Chair of the Welsh Affairs Select Committee, and of all the painstaking and detailed work he did to ensure that money left lying in dormant bank accounts found its way to good causes. Many hon. Members who served alongside Martyn will recall his distinctive bow ties. Indeed, one of the first messages I received after my election came from a well-wisher who ended his note with the rather startling comment:

"Long may the tradition of bow tie-wearing Joneses representing Clwyd South continue."

I am afraid that I might have to break with that tradition before it becomes too entrenched.

Clwyd South is not one community but many, and that is something that we are very proud of. It has agriculture, industry, tourism—including a world heritage site at Pontcysyllte aqueduct—natural beauty, including the breathtaking Horseshoe pass, and a world-famous international music festival in the Llangollen international eisteddfod. It was also the home of Wales's first ever national Welsh language youth festival, the 1929 Urdd eisteddfod, at Corwen. It is the home of the great centre of the co-operative movement at Cefn, and of the site of the citadel of Welsh music, culture and non-conformity at Rhosllanerchrugog. We also have the historic base of a former iron and steelworks at Brymbo, which was where my father worked. Sadly, the steelworks itself

closed almost 20 years ago, with its blast furnace being shipped off to power the economic revival of China. My constituency also has a history of coal mining, including mines near Chirk, Bersham and Hafod.

There is a history of coal mining in my family, as there is in many families from my area. My paternal grandfather was killed in a major mining accident in Gresford in 1934. My maternal grandfather, also a coal miner, started work at the age of 12. A year or two later, my grandmother had left school and was caring for her parents and siblings. Because of childhood illness, my mother was not allowed to sit the 11-plus examination. She left school and went to work at 15, having to train in her own time to become a medical secretary. All those people, and many others like them from my home community, experienced a poverty of finance and of opportunity in one way or another. It was the kind of poverty that brought together ordinary people in communities across the United Kingdom to seek election to this House to change things for the good. Without such people, many of the opportunities that people of my generation have enjoyed would not have been possible.

That type of poverty—of finance and of opportunity—has been well documented, and rightly so. But there was another type of poverty in my home community that is less well known. It was the poverty of a child going into their local school and not merely being denied the opportunity to be taught in their own language, but in many cases being punished for speaking it. Indeed, in the 19th century, there was the common punishment of the "Welsh Not", a piece of wood worn around the necks of children who spoke Welsh, who would later be caned. It might shock hon. Members to learn that, even after the use of the "Welsh Not" ceased—indeed, as recently as the 1930s and 1940s—children in the communities that now make up Clwyd South and in many other parts of Wales were punished for speaking Welsh at school; and even after those barbaric practices ceased, there was a sharp decline in the use of the Welsh language. It took decades before its use was finally accepted as mainstream.

Today, I rejoice that I can swear my oath as a Member of Parliament in Welsh, but in doing so, I pay tribute to people such as my former head teacher, Mrs Mair Miles Thomas, who fought for the Welsh language at a time when it was not fashionable to do so. They were ordinary people in the mould of Mrs Rosa Parkes, and their commitment and dedication to civil rights deserve wider recognition.

I know that, for many Members, part of the art of a maiden speech is naming every single community in their constituency, but for Clwyd South that would not be possible, such is the profusion of villages and small towns spread over a vast terrain of 240 square miles. In today's debate, we have heard much about the protection of the rights of the few, and I have found much of that debate interesting and informative. When one considers the nature of constituencies such as Clwyd South, one is indeed considering the rights of the few. It is not difficult to understand why, over the years, local campaigners have spoken out against proposals drawn up in metropolitan areas, apparently with our best interests at heart, whether for the deregulation of the bus services in the 1980s, for a rural school, for a post office, or for a game plan drawn up by metropolitan policy wonks to "equalise" us all into communities of 70,000 people, regardless of sparseness, terrain, or other local factors. Those of us who care about our rural communities will not be railroaded in that way.

That is why I also hope that those who have to make undoubtedly difficult decisions will not consider the rate of value added tax as a mere statistic to be increased at will. In many areas such as Clwyd South, where small businesses form the backbone of the local economy, the net result of high rates of VAT would be an intense struggle in many cases, and bankruptcy for the local builder, the plumber, and the small business person in others.

On that note, and having made those points, I pledge to do my best to serve the people of the communities of Clwyd South and to contribute to the life and work of this House. Diolch yn fawr.

3.19 pm

Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): May I add my congratulations on your recent election, Mr Deputy Speaker, and thank you for giving me this opportunity to make my maiden speech? It is a great honour to serve Finchley and Golders Green, and I have found the trust placed in me quite humbling as I walk around this building. I should also like to thank the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) for telling the House of the interesting and emotional journey that has led her here, and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) for his passionate support for Birmingham and for the manufacturing industry that he seeks to recreate. I should also like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) for his evocative description of that fair city.

First of all, I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor. Dr Rudi Vis was not of my party, but I do regard him as a friend of over 20 years. He served this House for 13 years before retiring a few weeks ago, but he sadly died less than a week ago. He will be a sad loss to public service. He was a diligent public servant, in this House and also in the London borough of Barnet, where we both served together. Sadly, he leaves a wife and teenage children, but I know that they can be proud of his record of public service. He served his community of Finchley as a local councillor, and represented the wider community of Finchley and Golders Green in this House.

I should like to comment on another of my predecessors. Those hon. Members in the Chamber a couple of days ago will have heard my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Jacob Rees-Mogg) claiming that his constituency gave the country the first king of England. I cannot claim that for Finchley and Golders Green, but perhaps I can claim that we gave the country the latter-day Boadicea—in one Margaret Hilda Thatcher. In my view, my noble Friend is the best peacetime Prime Minister that we have had. In this current economic climate, we could learn much from her resolve in addressing the economic crisis that she inherited. Then, unemployment and inflation were rising, and our public sector spending was out of control.

Perhaps the task ahead for our Government today is slightly greater, as Baroness Thatcher never managed to cut public spending. She was able only to slow its growth, yet we have laid out plans to cut public expenditure—something of a daunting task. Like her, however, I believe that we must return to sound money and good housekeeping, and to protecting our cherished

[Mike Freer]

freedoms. Throughout her premiership, she remained an active and effective constituency MP, and I shall be fortunate if I achieve a fraction of what she achieved through my campaigns to improve breast cancer screening for local women, to promote infrastructure investments on the north circular road, and for the free schools programme, which are so wanted and deserved by my local population.

Finchley and Golders Green is no longer the suburban seat that Margaret Thatcher knew. It is now metropolitan London. We have huge pockets of wealth and pockets of deprivation. We have the Hampstead Garden suburb, the largest conservation area in Europe where houses can cost from £80 million downwards. Within miles, however, we come to pockets of deprivation on our estates that need regenerating. We also have Brent Cross Cricklewood, which is the largest regeneration scheme in the UK. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government will soon give the green light to it.

We also have the finest schools in the country. Barnet council is a net importer of pupils from our neighbouring boroughs, which clamour to send their children to our local schools. If I may, I should like to mention one fine school: Christ's College, which produced my noble Friend Lord Sachs, the Chief Rabbi, and of course our own Mr Speaker Bercow.

Finchley and Golders Green is not known for manufacturing or farming, and neither does it have a fabulous cathedral about which I could wax lyrical. However, it does have the highest level of graduates in London and we rely on, and contribute to, the knowledge-based economy.

Perhaps it was always thus. Those colleagues who still use fountain pens might be pleased to know that, in 1832, Dr Henry Stephens invented blue-black ink, and that he was based in Finchley. I am pleased to say that he went on to become the Conservative Member of Parliament for the neighbouring seat of Hornsey, which is now held by our coalition partners in Hornsey and Wood Green.

We are also home to the European headquarters of McDonald's, which I am sure hon. Members will have heard of, and to the Pentland Group, of which they may not have heard. However, I am sure that they will have heard of some of their brands, such as Berghaus, Ted Baker, Lacoste, Red or Dead and Speedo. The latter brand is quite prominent in the popular press this week. The Pentland Group is also the greenest and most innovative company in the UK. The way that it turns goods produced by local manufacturing companies into global brands is quite remarkable.

Finchley and Golders Green is now a vibrant metropolitan area, with one of the most diverse communities in the UK. I have the largest Jewish population of any constituency in the UK, at some 25% of my electorate. However, living harmoniously alongside that very large Jewish community is a large and growing Muslim and Hindu community. Historically, those communities have not always seen eye to eye, yet our area enjoys beacon status for community cohesion.

It is that community cohesion that has led those communities to cherish their historic rights and freedoms. Many of our faith communities oppose ID cards, albeit for different reasons. The Jewish community opposes them because of their history and experience in Nazi Germany, and the Muslim community does so because of their experience post-7/7 and post-11 September 2001.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) once commented that ID cards had been touted around from Minister to Minister until one was found who was gullible enough to accept the idea. The ID cards were a solution looking for a problem: they were meant to combat under-age drinking first of all, then identity theft, fraud and illegal immigration, and now terrorism. However, they would do little to reduce the numbers of those who work or employ illegally. Employers are already required to check documentation. Illegal employment is due to weak enforcement and poor compliance by both the agencies involved and employers.

As a former banker—and I have to confess that my family are somewhat confused as to whether going from banker to full-time politician is a move up or down—I can tell the House that I have seen at first hand how organised crime can produce counterfeit documents that not even the Government could produce through their official agencies. I have seen instances of identity theft and fraud that have been based on such counterfeit documentation, and that leads me to believe that no ID card would counter those crimes, as organised crime will beat the system.

Moreover, the use of ID cards in Madrid did not prevent terrorism there, and it would not have stopped the bombers on 7/7. In my view, we are right to abolish ID cards, as they shift the balance away from citizen to the state and give the Government access to data that we do not know will be kept secure—and neither do we know how that data might be used.

Sixty years ago, Finchley played a role in abolishing the last ID card system, which was introduced during the second world war. On 7 December 1950, one Clarence Willcock was driving down Ballards lane in Finchley—the very road where my constituency office is based—when he was stopped by the police and asked to produce his identity papers. He refused. He was then prosecuted and convicted. He appealed, and the Lord Chief Justice hearing his appeal said that ID cards were intrusive and undermined the relationship between law enforcement and the people. He was right then, and he is right today. The result was that ID cards were scrapped.

Sixty years ago, a resident of Finchley instigated the scrapping of ID cards. Today, I am pleased that this resident of Finchley will be doing his bit to scrap the latest version of ID cards.

3.28 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I congratulate you on your appointment, Mr Deputy Speaker. I can already sense you melting into that Chair, and I wish you many years in the role. I can also see the other Mr Deputy Speaker bursting to get on to that Chair, dressed in what can only be described as the best of Deputy Speaker finery.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) on a fine maiden speech. He had some remarkable predecessors and he paid a fitting tribute to Rudi Vis, who was very much respected and liked across the Chamber. We have heard some

other fantastic maiden speeches, including a fine and passionate one from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey). He brings vast experience to the Chamber and I look forward to hearing many more robust and meaningful contributions from him as this Parliament progresses. The hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) gave a passionate defence of the Welsh language, and my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) and I are similarly passionate about the Gaelic language. We hope to hear many more speeches on that theme as she makes her contributions in Parliament.

I enjoy the maiden speech season. It is great because we hear all these fine tributes to former colleagues and are given an encyclopaedic tour of the UK's constituencies. We have several more maiden speeches to hear and I must say that I could hear one every day for the next Parliament if so many are as fine as the ones that we have heard in the past few days; all the speeches have been excellent, and I look forward to hearing some more this afternoon.

I congratulate the coalition Government because they have been as good as their word. The Con Dems have condemned Labour's hated identity cards to the scrap bin of history and I say well done to the coalition Government. Is it not bizarre, even in these days of political cross-dressing, that it has taken a right-wing Conservative Home Secretary to scrap perhaps the most anti-civil libertarian measure of recent times, which was proposed and introduced by a Labour Government?

David T. C. Davies: I hate to give the hon. Gentleman a politics lesson, but he ought to know that right-wing Members of Parliament have always been supporters of liberty and that we have had to defend our liberties from the authoritarians on the left.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that. I observed with great interest the Conservatives' new interest in civil liberties when they were in opposition. We must hope that they maintain it in government and do not go back to form, because the Conservatives have not got a great track record on these issues.

Dr Huppert: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that what he has just said explains why it is misleading for the Labour party to describe itself as a progressive party?

Pete Wishart: I shall leave it to the Labour party to decide how it wants to describe itself, but what on earth were Labour Members were thinking about? What were they trying to do with ID cards? What was a left-of-centre, notionally socialist, party doing introducing ID cards? ID cards were the low water mark of Labour's anti-civil libertarian agenda and the high water mark of Labour's attempt to usher in a new surveillance society. Thank goodness the cards have been stopped and Labour has not got away with it.

Listening to the right hon. Members for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Mr Blunkett) and for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson), one would have thought that they were introducing nice, cuddly, friendly, inexpensive little things that would not bother a soul. The truth is that ID cards would have changed for ever the nature of the relationship between the citizen and the state. ID cards, and the much more dangerous national register, would, for ever and a day, have put the onus on the citizen to have his information shared. They would have changed the relationship around entirely, so I am pleased they have gone.

Where on earth did these things come from? I wish to be charitable—you know me, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am charitable when I can be—so I should say that perhaps they were an incoherent, bizarre, knee-jerk response to the events of the past decade. One can imagine the conversation around the Cabinet table, with the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough saying, "Listen boss, I have a new idea that will show that we are actually doing something—ID cards. They will upset the civil liberties brigade, but that plays well with the focus groups. They will certainly wrong-foot the Tories." One can just picture the enthusiastic nodding of Messrs Reid and Clarke as they thought that they had come up with a cunning plot to get one over on the Tories and seem as though they were doing something. That is what it was all about—I am being charitable to them. They wanted to be seen to do something in the face of the dreadful events at the beginning of the previous decade.

Of course, time passed and the cards did upset the civil liberties brigade, but time also proved that, for tackling terrorism, the cards were as much use as Emu without Rod Hull. They would have done nothing to tackle terrorism. We have seen the events in Spain and Turkey. Fair enough, I accept that, as hon. Members have said, there were convictions based on the use of ID cards, but the cards did nothing to stop those events. The story had to change: the cards could no longer exclusively be about tackling terrorism, but had to be about more than that. Seemingly, they were about tackling identity fraud and illegal immigration and would even help people to play the lottery. They would be not so much ID cards but supercards—the cure of all society's ills. The problem was that nobody believed a word of it. Despite the ridiculous rewriting of history about what identity cards were and what they were intended to be, everyone knew what they were. It was the difference between the state and the individual.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I do not want to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's speech, which we are all enjoying, but does he accept that the ultimate irony in all this is that although ID cards were to remedy all of society's ills, as he has outlined, they were to be voluntary at first? There was to be an attack on social security fraud, terrorism and criminality, but people had to volunteer for it.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman is right. That contradiction was even acknowledged by Labour Front Benchers as being the thing that would do ID cards in. What was the point of them if the scheme was to be voluntary? Could anyone see Mr Terrorist popping off to his post office voluntarily to apply for an ID card? That was never likely to happen. It was a ridiculous idea and the Labour party knew that, as has been acknowledged by its Front Benchers.

Labour persisted with the scheme, but that approach and all the talk about the new things that ID cards would do only further confused the already sceptical public about what the cards were all about. The right

[Pete Wishart]

hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle is right that ID cards were quite popular in their early days. At first, about 80% of the public thought that they would be a good thing, but that number slowly went down over the years as the public became familiar with what the cards were to do and as they heard the arguments and saw the costs escalate year after year. What ID cards became for new Labour was not so much some great suggestion that it was bringing to the British people as a political virility signal—something that a dying and decaying Government had to push forward to be seen to do something.

When I was preparing this speech, I had no idea what the right hon. Gentleman was going to say. I did not know whether ID cards were to be dumped or to be the first inclusion in the next Labour party manifesto. Indeed, I still am not sure exactly what the Labour party's position is on them. We know that it is not voting against the measure tonight. What I have heard from Labour Members so far is that they think that ID cards are still a good idea, but the way that they have described them is like no other description of them that I have ever heard.

I had thought that ID cards would be subject to the same sort of revisionism that has been seen with some of the Labour leadership candidates. I thought that they might go the same way as the Iraq war or Alf Garnett's immigration policies, but, no, it seems that they are still to be a feature of Labour's new vision and version to reconnect with the British public. They will be there to try to reconnect with the British public.

Mr Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): Might the hon. Gentleman be being a little harsh on the Labour party? That might seem an odd thing to say, but this idea has rested since time immemorial in the Home Office, which pulled it out yet again in Michael Howard's Green Paper, which was defeated. There is a long history of the state—the Crown—seeking to number and identify every citizen in this kingdom.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman is spot on. He has made a better assessment of the functions and uses of ID cards than we have heard from Labour Members.

I come to where we are now. I welcome the Bill, but a few issues concern me and I say this with all sincerity to the Minister for Immigration. I am still concerned that foreign nationals are expected to have ID cards. It might be called a permit or something else, but it seems to me to be quite like an ID card. I wish that the Government would do away with the whole scheme. Why keep an element of a discredited scheme? All I can see is some kind of divisive legacy to Labour's ID cards if they are kept for foreign nationals. I hope that he will reconsider that.

I want to ask a bigger question. What are we to make of the Conservatives as the champions of civil liberties? That is great, but it certainly does not chime with experience. Throughout the last few decades, the Conservatives were totally illiberal when it came to proposing legislation, although they found a new thirst for civil liberties in opposition. I hope it stays.

I know you will be thinking, Mr Deputy Speaker, that all those Liberals will protect us and make sure the Conservatives do the right thing when they are presented with the first national security brief that comes their way. However, although the Minister for Equalities is part of the Home Office Front-Bench team, most of the senior positions seem to be reserved for our Conservative friends. I wonder whether perhaps the Liberals are not trusted on the key issues for the Home Office; for example, the views of some Liberals on immigration might not chime so well with Back-Bench Conservatives. I am concerned that the Liberals have some work to do to make sure that those guys are kept on the right track. That is their job, because if the Conservatives go back to form, we may be in a bit of trouble. Only recently, the Conservatives opposed the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000, so the Liberals will have a tough job keeping the Conservative party on track.

But today is not a day to be churlish. There is good news. We have what we wanted—the end of ID cards. It is good riddance to bad rubbish. It was a dreadful, dreadful idea. I still do not know what Labour was thinking about. Now that Labour Members are in opposition, I hope they acquire a thirst for civil liberties again and that the party goes back to what it used to be when its members championed civil liberties.

Let us never again have a situation when any Government propose such anti-civil libertarian measures. Campaign groups have done an extraordinary job in bringing them to our attention. NO2ID and Liberty have been fantastic at informing the British public about the ID card proposals, and I pay tribute to their excellent work. I hope that the Minister for Immigration and the Front-Bench team will look at some of the outstanding issues such as ID cards for foreign nationals

Today is a good day. We have wanted rid of ID cards since they were first suggested. They have not been available for any Scottish services. To people who took out ID cards and want compensation—sorry. They should have at least identified that the cards were controversial before they bought them, and they should not be entitled to compensation. They took the risk of buying ID cards; it was their decision.

Today is good news. Let us make sure it continues, but let us keep watching the Conservatives like a hawk.

3.42 pm

Kris Hopkins (Keighley) (Con): May I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your new position? I also congratulate the other maiden speakers today.

I did not think I would be following up a line about Rod Hull and Emu in my maiden speech. I have a lot of respect for the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart). I have met him many times and agree with many of the things he said. Following the suggestion of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, perhaps the hon. Gentleman and I can sit together during World cup matches and support England.

I want to say a few words about identity documents. As has been pointed out, I do not believe that terrorists will volunteer to get an ID card. I do not believe that after the public's initial enthusiasm for ID cards they wanted to be taxed again for more paperwork.

Many supporters of identity cards suggested that they would address illegal immigration. During the election campaign in Keighley and Ilkley, immigration was a big issue. Sadly, that was because many people

had lost confidence in the Government's addressing illegal immigration to this country. At that point, sadly, some people considered supporting right-wing extreme parties, as people in Keighley have done in the past. What was actually required to address the issue was not an ID card, but a strong, robust and sensible position on immigration—capping numbers and making sure that we secured our borders. The good news is that we did offer that, and the public listened and believed us. The two right-wing fascist groups that stood in Keighley were severely trashed.

I would like to compliment the work of my predecessor, Mrs Ann Cryer. I have known Mrs Cryer for many years and, politically, we first met when she was campaigning to save Oldfield school—at the time, the smallest school in the constituency—which the local Labour council was trying to close. She intervened, spoke to the Secretary of State and gained support to save the school. I was a councillor in that ward at the time—I still am, in fact—and many local people appreciated her intervention.

Mrs Cryer campaigned vigorously for the rights of women. At one event I remember attending, there was a significant proportion of members of the Muslim community. They had been segregated into women and men. Ann insisted on only addressing the women in the room if they were to be segregated. It was a powerful statement to the men in the room that the women did not need to be treated in that way.

Members will know of the work that Ann did in highlighting the abuse of young women by men in my constituency, and her work is being continued. Sadly, the abuse is still going on and the work of the police and social services is seeking to address it. The final piece of work by Ann Cryer about which the House will know is forced marriages, which are not to be mixed up with arranged marriages. Forced marriage is a vile activity that Ann fought against for nearly all her time as an MP. I am sure that she will continue the fight in retirement. I offer my wishes that Mrs Cryer has a long and happy retirement.

The family name will of course be kept in the Chamber for some time to come, in that the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) has been elected. I met him for the first time in 32 years a couple of weeks ago. He and I went to school together. He was the Labour candidate in the mock elections in 1979 and I was the agent for the Conservatives. [Hon. Members: "Who won?"] Sadly, he won on that occasion. In the same year, his father, the late Bob Cryer, won the parliamentary seat by 78 votes, the first time that Keighley had not gone in the direction of the Government of the time.

I am from the village of Oakworth, and live there. Before I leave the Cryers, I should say that Ann, Bob and John are all from Oakworth and, obviously, they have all become MPs. I have the great privilege of representing my town as well. The first MP for Keighley was from Oakworth. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr Pickles), is from Oakworth. The son of the local vet, one Alastair Campbell, is also from Oakworth. The Notting Hill of the north, possibly? Or maybe there is something dodgy in the water.

I have listened to many maiden speeches over the last couple of days and many Members have talked about their constituency being the jewel in the crown of the country. They are wrong; mine is. The place I represent has Brontë country: Haworth, the wuthering heights and the wildness of the moors. Ilkley moor looks down on the town of Ilkley, a beautiful place with a great sense of identity. There are also the great towns of Keighley and Silsden. It is an immensely diverse place with great wealth in parts of it. Sadly, there is also great poverty. Keighley Central is one of the most deprived wards in the whole country, to the extent that some people are still using outside toilets, which is a disgrace in the 21st century.

In parts of the constituency, life expectancy is nine years longer than in other parts. Educational attainment is low, particularly among Muslim young men and boys, who are not achieving their potential. Unemployment is high. Drug dealing and drug abuse is a big issue. I have the great privilege of representing a beautiful place which is immensely diverse, with a great populace and huge social issues that need to be addressed. On our estates, there is third-generation benefit dependency. Many young members of our Muslim community are not ambitious or aspirational and do not have the opportunity to break out of the poverty in which they live.

I believe that education and skills are the way forward. To benefit from that—Ann said this and I repeat it—our young people must come to school speaking English. There is a huge issue associated with that, not just in the Muslim community, but in the white community. Understanding of the English language is poor in many of our white working-class areas. That needs to be tackled.

Until a couple of weeks ago, I had the great privilege of being the leader of Bradford council, which is a tremendous honour. Bradford is a place of massive challenge, but also a great city. I put on record my thanks to the chief executive, Tony Reeves, and his staff for the tremendous work that they do, particularly in education and with looked-after children, which is extremely important to his team.

I took on the responsibility of attempting to address community cohesion in Bradford. We were asked how such an academic philosophy can be put into practice. The answer is through an educated work force, decent homes, and people being healthy, having jobs and living in a safe environment. Then, when communities are brought together, they do not simply tolerate each other, but respect each other. I want to aspire to promoting and achieving that during my term as the MP for Keighley.

Finally, I am former Private Hopkins of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment and I am extremely proud of that. It is now amalgamated into the Yorkshire Regiment, which gets its new colours next week. I have watched this place making decisions, and sometimes not being able to make decisions, about war. We send our guys and our women to war, and it must be a legal war. I am very much aware of my responsibility in sending those young men and women to war. We must give them the right equipment and, when the conflict ends, look after and care for them.

I support the end of the identity document. I also intend to support the Government in addressing the huge financial deficit in the coming years as the MP representing Keighley and Ilkley.

3.54 pm

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): May I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on being elevated to your position? I thank you for giving me the honour of making my first speech in the House on today's date, 9 June, which has some significance in my locality. May I congratulate also those other hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today? They include the hon. Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinenage), my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) and the hon. Members for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) and for Keighley (Kris Hopkins).

I particularly welcome the hon. Member for Keighley and his maiden speech, because I know that he, as a former leader of Bradford city council, will bring local government experience to the House, albeit from a different political perspective from mine. Furthermore, Mr Deputy Speaker, you need not worry about me undermining the British film industry by giving away any secrets about the demise of the house elves in my constituency, as happened last week.

It is with enormous pride that I stand here, honoured to represent the people of my home town, Gateshead, where I have lived for more than 30 years. In doing so, I am conscious of the fact that I follow in the footsteps of a formidable predecessor, David Clelland, the former MP for Tyne Bridge, whose constituency formed half the new constituency of Gateshead. The other half of the constituency was represented in the previous Parliament by my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), who, I am glad to say, is still with us.

David Clelland was not only an excellent representative of the people of the Tyne Bridge constituency and a first-class Member; he was and remains a personal friend. Having worked with David for more years than I care to remember, first as Labour party colleagues, subsequently together as councillors and, most recently, he as MP and I as deputy leader of Gateshead council, I know all too well the great passion that David has always devoted to representing the people of Tyne Bridge and, in particular, Gateshead. David would be the first to say that his work was both an honour and a privilege. However, I want to place on the record my gratitude and that of the people of Gateshead for David's contribution, both as a councillor and as a Member of Parliament, to making Gateshead an even better place to live.

The mantle of representing Gateshead has now fallen to me. Gateshead is truly a great place, made all the better by the people who live there. The fact that this is a debate on the Identity Documents Bill may be a flimsy pretext for saying that, of course, the people of Gateshead and of Tyneside are very proud of their distinct north-east identity. None the less, it is true—and we do not need any documents to prove it. One of Gateshead's most famous inhabitants in the 19th century—possibly fictitious, but well known—was a young lady by the name of Cushy Butterfield, whose description in song gives us some insight into the Tyneside males' mindset at the time:

"She's a big lass and a bonny lass and she likes her beer.
And they call her Cushy Butterfield and ah wish she was here."

At the beginning of my speech I mentioned today's date, 9 June, which has great significance for the people of Tyneside, for it was on 9 June that the people of Tyneside went to Blaydon races, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson). And, in the words of the song by Geordie Ridley, the people took the bus from Balmbra's, a music hall in central Newcastle, and proceeded on their way, meeting many trials and tribulations along the road. I shall return to Blaydon races in due course, but I am here to represent Gateshead.

Yes, it is a town—soon to be a city, I hope—that has had many problems. Having been heavily dependent upon primary industries, heavy engineering and manufacturing, the town suffered all the social and economic problems associated with the decline of those traditional industries, yet the resilience and fortitude of the people of Gateshead simply do not allow for self-indulgent moaning. The former Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, who was spoken about warmly in an earlier speech, once famously described the people of the north-east as "moaning minnies", but I can honestly say that nothing could be further from the truth.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Gateshead suffered from some of the worst unemployment rates on the United Kingdom mainland. Educational attainment was to say the least poor, if not very poor, and in every social and economic indicator or league table, if it was good news Gateshead was near the bottom, and if it was bad news Gateshead was inevitably near the top. However, the renaissance in Gateshead over the past 20 years has been remarkable, and a testament to the support of the previous Government and, more importantly, to the clear strategic leadership of my colleagues on Gateshead council.

One example is the rejuvenation of Gateshead quays. Where once there stood derelict warehouses and empty factories, now there stands the iconic Gateshead Millennium bridge, BALTIC, the centre for contemporary art, and the magnificent Sage Gateshead, designed by Sir Norman Foster. To the south of the town centre, and just over the border into the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon, stands Antony Gormley's Angel of the North. We also have, in the ward that I have represented on the council for 27 years, Saltwell park—a shining example of a Victorian municipal park visited by more than 2 million people annually. These are not just glittering buildings and monuments without substance or purpose—no, they are all internationally acclaimed and recognised, part of Gateshead council's vision to transform Gateshead. Indeed, the Sage Gateshead, which I know that many Members have visited for conferences over the past few years, has been acclaimed as one of the most acoustically perfect concert halls in the whole world.

With this transformation we have witnessed an unprecedented reversal of fortunes in comparison with the Gateshead of the '70s and '80s. From being among the areas with the worst educational achievement, Gateshead is now towards the top on many measures. In almost every aspect of life, Gateshead has been transformed. Education, housing, social care and employment—all have been transformed by the support from a supportive Government and with leadership from a truly inspirational council, but most of all by the resilience, fortitude and hard work of the people of Gateshead themselves.

There is still poverty. There is still hardship. There are still too many lives untouched by change. But to anyone who doubts that Britain has got better since we took over from the Tories in 1997, I say this: come to Gateshead and see what the people here have achieved. Those are not my words, but those of the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Tony Blair, five years ago at the Labour spring conference. Indeed, our current Prime Minister was gracious enough to acknowledge that his party had been well received on their visit to Gateshead at the same venue—and yes, I truly would welcome him back to my constituency should he take up my offer to return with his party's conference in the future.

As I consider the task of representing the interests of Gateshead, it is that record of achievement that I will be defending. Having been deeply involved, as the former deputy leader of Gateshead council, in Gateshead's renaissance, I know how substantial the changes have been. However, I also know just how fragile this recovery could be. Gateshead's strength is its people—their intelligence, their hard work and, most of all, their caring and deep sense of community. We are, and will always remain, remote from the economic centre of the United Kingdom and from the European and world markets. In a free-market global economy, Gateshead needs governmental support. In the north-east, more than 30% of the work force is employed in the extended public sector; in my borough of Gateshead that figure is probably closer to 40%.

Like many others in the north-east, I remember all too vividly the social unrest and devastation that was the 1980s: soaring unemployment, poverty, frustration, increasing alienation and a crippling sense of hopelessness. Gateshead, and indeed Britain today, is a far better place, and it is my duty to the people of Gateshead to ensure there will be no return to those bad days. I will play my part. I will speak up for Gateshead and its people. I will ensure that the interests of the people I represent will not be forgotten or overlooked. I know that my former colleagues in Gateshead council will also play their part.

As for the new Government: be warned, I will be watching. My colleagues and I will no doubt scrutinise every single proposal that comes out of Government. Our aim will be to ensure that the social costs of deficit reductions caused by a recession that was caused by the greed and incompetence of bankers and speculators are not simply passed on to the poorest in our communities.

I know that the responsibility of governing is great, and the new coalition will meet its tribulations along the way, but if they follow the example of the Tyneside folk on their way to Blaydon races, they may survive, for a time:

"But gannin ower the Railway Bridge
The bus wheel flew off there
The lasses lost their crinolines
And veils that hide their faces
I got two black eyes and a broken nose
In gannin to Blaydon races."

But undaunted they went on:

"Now when we got the wheel back on"—

because the wheel does come off occasionally—

"Away we went again
But them that had their noses broke
They went back ower hyem
Some went to the dispensary
And some to Doctor Gibbs
And some to the infirmary
To mend their broken ribs."

But the bulk of them carried on, and went to Blaydon races.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the people of Gateshead, whom I am very proud to represent.

4.4 pm

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Thank you for calling me to make my maiden speech, Mr Deputy Speaker, especially on the day when you take the Chair for the first time. May I say how personally pleased I am to see you in the role?

I should like to start, as is customary, by referring to my predecessor in what was then the constituency of Elmet. Mr Colin Burgon was a Labour MP from 1997 until he retired at the election just gone. It would probably be fair to say to anybody who knew Mr Burgon that our politics probably could not have been further apart if we had tried. This was a man who was well and truly on the left of the Labour party and indeed had a passionate interest, and I believe still does to this day, in Venezuela and Hugo Chávez. However, although we were so diametrically opposed in our politics, I always found him to be courteous and an honourable Member of Parliament who looked after his constituents. During my time as the candidate for the new Elmet and Rothwell constituency, he was more than willing to pick up the phone, discuss constituency matters that may have come my way and return calls—an honourable man indeed.

I was looking through Mr Burgon's maiden speech and noticed it to be full of historical references to the Elmet constituency, which does not surprise me because he was a scholar of history. Being an engineer, I am little able to emulate such a speech, but I can tell Members that the Elmet and Rothwell seat, as it now is, has had many boundary changes, starting with the Great Reform Act in 1832. I am the first ever Conservative MP to represent the town of Rothwell, which was its own constituency between 1917 and 1950, and I am very proud indeed to do so.

As I said, the constituency started to get some of its boundaries in the Great Reform Act of 1832, and there have been no fewer than 10 boundary changes bringing us up to the recent election. However, many people have stopped me in this place and asked, "Where is Elmet and Rothwell?" The Rothwell bit gives it away, but the Elmet bit does not. It is actually a Leeds constituency, and I like to describe it as the piece of countryside between Leeds and North Yorkshire. Members may be interested to know that Elmet was actually the last Celtic kingdom in England, and I shall draw on that fact later.

It is interesting that I am classed as a Leeds MP, and that is why I felt it appropriate to stand up in this debate to make my maiden speech. We are talking about the abolition of the Identity Cards Act 2006. If identity cards had been in place, they would not have stopped the 7/7 bombings in 2005 in any shape or form. Of course, the people involved came from Leeds, which took a very hard hit, not least in the international press, which described the north of England as some derelict wasteland and asked whether it was any surprise that

[Alec Shelbrooke]

terrorists came from it. It was described as some sort of third-world country. However, I can assure Members that Leeds is one of the most vibrant cities in this country, and one for which I was very proud to be a councillor for six years while we were governing the city. I am now exceptionally proud to be a Member of Parliament within it.

My predecessor, and his predecessor, my former Conservative colleague Spencer Batiste, who was the MP from 1983 to 1997, were both honourable gentlemen. After what went on in the previous Parliament, we all need to be honourable Members and bring faith back to politics.

As I have said, my constituency is the slice of countryside between Leeds and North Yorkshire. I will probably send my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams) into apoplexy by saying that after the boundary changes, the old kingdom of Elmet actually stretches across into North Yorkshire. That causes some concern, because people say to me, "Oh, you must represent me in Sherburn-in-Elmet", but I do not, because that is a North Yorkshire village and is part of my hon. Friend's seat. I therefore lay down a marker at this early stage that that may be something to consider.

Many colleagues have offered advice on making a maiden speech and said, "This will be one of the most important speeches that you ever make in this House. It will be the one that is read for time immemorial by every successor you have in the seat, and people might look it up if you go on to greater things." Nobody reads the third speech made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, but they do read his maiden speech, so I am putting down a marker for anybody who might come along to research my maiden speech: if you go and have a look at my third or fourth speech, you might have a slightly better idea of who I am as a politician, because the maiden speech is a somewhat daunting process, and hopefully, MPs relax as they grow into their role.

I should like to outline to the House two priorities for me in this Parliament, the first of which—increasing job security and job numbers—I hope will be a successful policy of this Government. I am lucky in that although my constituency suffers unemployment, it is not massively affected by it. However, my constituents are very worried about the jobs they are in, which I heard time and again, and about securing the economic recovery and job security.

There are great areas of regeneration in my constituency, and there are some innovative, technological companies, some of which, including the LNT Group in the town of Garforth in my constituency, have excellent apprenticeship schemes. The LNT Group is an excellent company, and gives people real opportunities. Recently, it hired people who had unsuccessfully tried their hand at private business, in small enterprises. Those people were able to find employment with that well-regarded local employer. That is just one story about the companies in my constituency. I very much hope that I can work closely with the Government to ensure that the policies we introduce will benefit all my constituents, as well as the country.

I mentioned regeneration in the constituency. It is a strange constituency, in the sense that the northern part of it is very affluent and has a lot of farming history, and as we move south through the constituency, we move into former mining areas. I will not shy away from the fact that those mining areas were affected, not least in 1994 by the closure of the last colliery, at Allerton Bywater. However, Allerton Bywater as a village is now starting to move forward, and already I am involved in casework with Business Link in Yorkshire that could help to secure 10 jobs in that small village and regenerate it. Such regeneration is important, and those are my key priorities in this first term.

However, I have a long-term aim, and I made it quite clear to my constituents in the election that although it is a promise and something I want to move forward, they will not see any results for a very long time. Indeed, by the time they see results, I may well not even be the Member of Parliament for the area. I am talking about rail links. More than 30,000 people in my constituency, in a major metropolitan city, have absolutely no rail links whatever, after the branch lines were removed in the Beeching review. The town of Wetherby serves a huge number of people in the commuter belt to Leeds who must all travel down the A58 and, latterly, the A1 link road.

However, rail links are not just about allowing those people to travel to Leeds more efficiently and effectively; they will also ease-up the congestion that blights everyone in constituencies on the east side of the city. Therefore, I am laying down that marker. I will be working with Network Rail and taking a keen interest in the high speed rail policy as it moves through the House. Let us be honest, in the economic circumstances, the chances of us getting a branch line rail link built to Wetherby and surrounding villages, just to serve them, are pretty slim. However, high speed rail is a major national project, and there would appear to be opportunities to branch off that line to serve people in my constituency much more effectively and efficiently.

I shall close by drawing on what I said earlier. We need to restore faith in politics, and I think we are making a good start with such a great intake of new MPs, and with returning hon. Members realising that much work needs to be done to improve this place. I just hope that as we move forward in this Parliament, my constituents will be very proud to call me their Member of Parliament.

4.14 pm

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): To avoid any misunderstanding, I make it clear that I am not making my maiden speech—I did that quite a few years ago! I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) for his fine speech, and to everyone else who has spoken today, including my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) and for Gateshead (Ian Mearns). They will I am sure all make valuable contributions to the House and the parliamentary party.

I have opposed identity cards from the start, and I dispute with the Home Secretary, who gave the impression that the Conservatives hold the high ground, that they—and they alone—have stood against identity cards from the beginning. That is not the position. Inevitably, if we are frank, there have been divisions within the two main parties over identity cards—some being for, some opposed. My right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary

referred to a ten-minute Bill put forward by a Conservative Member, but I shall go back further. In July 1988, a ten-minute Bill was proposed by another Conservative Member, who is no longer in the House, with the purpose of bringing in identity cards. It is interesting to note that the Bill was defeated, even though the Conservatives had a majority, and that not one Labour Member voted in favour. Everyone who voted for the unsuccessful Bill was Conservative, so no high-ground propaganda please, because it serves no purpose. Incidentally, taking part in that Division 22 years ago, in the No Lobby of course, was someone we all know—Tony Blair. I think his views somewhat changed later on.

As my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary said, in August 1996, when Michael Howard was Home Secretary, it was announced that the Conservative Government intended to introduce an ID cards scheme. So, again, there is clear evidence that the Conservative party, at one stage, considered ID cards to be essential. The Conservatives thought that not for dubious reasons, but for the same reasons my party concluded—wrongly, in my view—that ID cards were necessary. My opposition persisted when the Labour Government decided to bring in the cards. Moreover, under a Labour majority, a comprehensive inquiry was conducted by the Home Affairs Committee, and I was the only person on that Committee who voted against the scheme. Conservative Members voted with Labour Members in favour of ID cards in 2004.

I have always taken the view that my opposition is absolutely firm, except for one factor: if I could be persuaded that ID cards would help in the fight against terrorism, I would change my mind, because I believe—I am sure the same applies to all Members of the House—that the security and safety of our country and people must come first. Were there such evidence, I would reluctantly support ID cards. However, as has been said enough times today, there is no evidence that terrorism would be prevented by ID cards. The atrocities on 7 July 2005 would not have been prevented. Reference has been made already to the atrocity a year earlier in Madrid, where more than 100 people were murdered by al-Qaeda, and there is no evidence that ID cards in Spain could have prevented, or did prevent, such atrocities.

As to the argument sometimes put forward that, although identity cards would not and did not prevent such atrocities—I only wish they could have done—they nevertheless helped to bring the culprits to justice, I have to say that there is very little evidence for that. We need to bear in mind, of course, that for years, Spain faced a different terrorist campaign from ETA, but again identity cards have hardly helped in any way.

The police remain in favour of identity cards, but no one is surprised by that. In making his maiden speech earlier today, the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) made a valid point about what happened in 1952, I believe, when a person refused to show his identity card to a police constable. What happened to the person was upheld by the courts and identity cards were abolished.

Mr Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): No, the person was found guilty; the law was the law. In the judgment, however, the reason why the law was intolerable was given: its maintenance for a security or emergency situation such as war should not prevail in peacetime. It was the Churchill Government, elected in 1951, who then did away with that law.

Mr Winnick: The hon. Gentleman, who is my constituency neighbour, and I never agree on economic issues, but we tend to share certain views on civil liberties. He is right in what he says about the Churchill Government, and I am sure that the Attlee Government would have done the same, had they been re-elected in 1951. We are going back a long time, but I am not aware that the Conservative Opposition in the 1945 Parliament argued for the abolition of identity cards. I am glad that those cards were abolished; I did not want to see them come back after half a century.

Dr Huppert *rose—*

Mr Winnick: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I want to move on to function creep, which is another factor. In evidence to the Home Affairs Committee, the point was made that when identity cards were introduced in 1939—and rightly so in the circumstances of those days—there were three reasons for doing so: conscription, national security and food rationing. By 1950, there were no fewer than 35 stated purposes as to why an identity card was necessary, one of which, incidentally, was the prevention of bigamous marriages. We have not heard an argument in the recent debate that ID cards are necessary for that purpose.

Dr Huppert: I am sorry to intrude on an Attlee versus Churchill argument, but the hon. Gentleman should perhaps remember that Clarence Willcock was a Liberal candidate, and when asked to explain what he did, he said:

"I am a Liberal and I am against this sort of thing."

That is a clear precedent. Had there been a Liberal Government at that time, ID cards would definitely have been scrapped.

Mr Winnick: The chances of having a Liberal Government in 1950 were as remote as having a Communist Government, but be that as it may; the hon. Gentleman has made his point.

It has sometimes been argued that biometrics provide an additional important difference from previous identity cards in Europe, but when evidence was given by experts—their expertise was not in doubt—before the Home Affairs Committee, considerable technical doubt was thrown over the extent to which biometrics would necessarily always be reliable. As for the national identity register, I have listened over the years to the arguments as to why it is necessary and all I can say is that, again, I have not been persuaded. It is suggested that such information is necessary for national insurance and passports and therefore why should we worry about it for identity cards, but surely the difference is that, although the other documents are not the subject of any controversy, identity cards are, because in the main they are one step too far, which remains the view held by many people in this country.

I am not arguing—it would be a foolish argument—that if identity cards had been introduced into Britain, we would have become a sort of semi-police state. That is absolute nonsense, but I do believe that they would have

[Mr Winnick]

been an infringement of civil liberties. When we look at other European countries and fellow members of the European Union that do have identity cards, we find that they are certainly not police states. Some have a very dubious past, but we are very pleased that they are now no less democratic than we are. They have a different history, and our history—one that I want to see maintained—suggests that in peacetime we should not have identity cards, as they do not do what they are supposed to do. I wish that the whole issue had not been raised either by the Conservatives or by Labour over the past 22 years.

I have many differences with the Conservative Government. Only yesterday I gave an indication of my feelings about the cuts: along with my Labour colleagues, I will defend the position of those who are least able to bear the burden. There will be many battles with the Conservative Government, and, as I have said, we will not hesitate to defend the people who sent us here. However, I am pleased that identity cards are to be abolished.

Who knows what may happen in four or five years, but I think it most unlikely that we in the Labour party will employ identity cards as one of the features of the next general election campaign. I want to see the issue buried for good. There is no necessity for identity cards, and I hope that, at long last, both sides in the House of Commons will reach the view held by me and by a number of other Labour Members that we should not have them in peacetime.

4.26 pm

Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): I congratulate you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on your magnificent election victory and elevation to the Chair. I am delighted to be able to give my maiden speech today, and pleased to be able to speak in a debate on the Identity Documents Bill, but given that this is my maiden speech, I hope you will forgive me if I drift into one or two other subject areas.

I have enjoyed the excellent contributions made by many maiden speakers today, particularly those of my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) and my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Kris Hopkins), who has just disappeared from the Chamber.

There is no greater honour, privilege or responsibility than being elected to Parliament to represent the constituency in which I grew up, was educated and have lived for most of my life. Selby and Ainsty is a new seat, which the Boundary Commission had the very good sense to create and, hopefully, will have the very good sense to keep. It is a largely rural seat with more than 100 villages and hamlets covering the area between York, Harrogate and Pontefract in the south. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell that the residents of Sherburn-in-Elmet are more than happy with the current boundary arrangements.

Selby is the largest settlement in the constituency. It is a market town, and although it was originally a shipbuilding town on the River Ouse, its economy is now largely based on agriculture, tourism to our stunning abbey, and its status as a commuter town for Leeds and York. We have significant historical connections with America, as can be seen in the 14th-century Washington window of Selby abbey, which bears the Washington family arms and is believed to have been used as the basis for the American flag, the Stars and Stripes. I urge all hon. Members to visit the abbey to see that wonderful spectacle.

The bulk of the new constituency consists of the old Selby seat. I pay tribute to John Grogan, the former Member of Parliament for Selby, who was the first and last Labour Member to represent the constituency. I have always found him extremely courteous, and he has been an excellent local MP and advocate for Selby both in Yorkshire and in the House. Despite our obvious political differences, he and I share a number of interests. Given that the brewing town of Tadcaster is in the constituency, it is difficult not to be a fan of beer. In fact, you do not get to be my size without being a significant fan of beer. We are both also passionate supporters of Yorkshire county cricket club. He and many other hon. Members—perhaps even including you, Mr Deputy Speaker, although you represent a Lancastrian seat—will be thrilled that the world's greatest cricket club is riding high again in the county championship. Mr Grogan has expressed an interest in returning to the House and I wish him well in that endeavour, although not too well if he is considering a return to Selby.

I pay tribute to John Grogan's predecessor, the late Michael Alison, who represented Selby and its predecessor Barkston Ash in the House. The fact that I took an interest in politics is down to him. I saw at first hand, as a child in the 1970s, the help that he gave my parents in attaining a grant to install central heating in our home. Some years later, I had the opportunity to repay that good deed. It was during the 1992 election. I received his campaign leaflet through my door with a hand-written note. I was very impressed, so I called his agent and asked whether there was anything that I could do to help Mr Alison's campaign in the election, however small. That offer of help was my first political mistake, as the following day around 1,000 leaflets arrived on my doorstep with a note that read,

"Please call the office if you need any more."

In addition to the Selby district, the remainder of the new seat is referred to as Ainsty. There is not an actual place called Ainsty but, like Elmet, it is an ancient wapentake. The area is made up of four wards from the Harrogate borough and takes in villages west of York, skirting around Wetherby and Harrogate. The area was previously served in the House partly by David Curry, who diligently served as MP for Skipton and Ripon for 23 years, and partly by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh), who was the only ever Member for Vale of York. I welcome her, albeit belatedly, back to the House.

Sadly, over recent years, we have seen an increase in unemployment and our area has lost many businesses, including chemical factories, the paper mill and the short-lived Selby coalfield. I have personal experience of redundancy and the despair that it can cause, so trying to get people back into work will be a personal priority for me.

Coal mining has now disappeared from the constituency. As the grandson of a coal miner, I was thrilled to receive help from former coal miners canvassing and delivering leaflets in my election campaign, although not all the people from former mining communities

have supported my endeavours and candidacy. May I share with Members a quick story that involves a recent family funeral in a village called Grimethorpe. Some Members may know that that is not yet a Conservative stronghold in South Yorkshire, but my cousin approached me to say that it was the first time that he had ever shaken hands with a Tory and that it would be the last. He went on to say:

"thee grandfather would be turning in his grave if he knew tha' wants to be a Tory MP".

I would like to think that my grandfather might also have been secretly proud. I know that my late mother would have been.

The Selby and Ainsty seat does its bit for energy production with two large coal-fired power stations: Drax and Eggborough. Drax alone provides 7% of the UK's electricity needs. It has plans to build three new large-scale dedicated biomass plants alongside the co-firing facility at its existing coal-fired station, which could result in Drax becoming responsible for supplying at least 15% of the UK's renewable power and up to 10% of total UK electricity. The total renewable capacity could be enough to power 2 million homes, which is the equivalent output of 2,000 wind turbines.

Regular readers of the *Selby Times* and *The Press* in York—I am sure that there are many of those in the House this afternoon—will be aware that in the seat there are several controversial applications, including for onshore wind farms and incinerators, which are causing great concern to local residents. A total of 30 turbines are in planning, each over 400 feet high and taller than power station cooling towers. More are being scoped by developers. If all the applications go ahead, the landscape of our district will be blighted by a forest of windmills that will do little to meet our desire to reduce carbon emissions. I agree that wind power should play a part in a mix of renewable sources, but it would be a better idea to install them where the wind blows fairly regularly: offshore.

Residents elsewhere in the constituency face many different challenges, including several unauthorised Traveller encampments, where land has been bought and camps set up without permission. One of them is even masquerading as a caravan sales site, and just below that sales sign there is another sign saying, "Enter at your own risk." That is not the most welcoming marketing slogan for a supposed caravan retailer. Local authorities must be given more powers to prevent such law-flouting, and I am encouraged by this Government's proposals to curtail the ability to apply for retrospective planning permission and to create a new criminal offence of intentional trespass. Law-abiding citizens are expected to jump through hoops if they want to build anything in rural areas, and it is plain wrong that certain groups get special treatment to bypass the rules.

Small businesses are the lifeblood of the community in my constituency, and they are the engine room for any local economy. Like everyone, they have been hit hard by the recent downturn. They have been overtaxed and burdened with red tape. There is no better illustration of this than my county council's decision to ban on health and safety grounds Selby traders from placing an A-board on the pavement outside their premises. In the midst of a recession, I can think of no more ridiculous piece of over-zealous bureaucracy than to threaten small firms with large fines for daring to advertise their wares to potential customers.

There are in my constituency the sites of two of the bloodiest battles ever fought in England: the battle of Towton in 1461 in the war of the roses, which resulted—quite rightly—in a decisive victory for the Yorkists, and the battle of Marston Moor in 1644, where Cromwell's parliamentarians prevailed. I am not an advocate of a return to civil war, but I am an advocate of civil liberties. Under the previous Government, there was an unprecedented attack on Britain's historic freedoms, and I am convinced that an ID card would be a further infringement of those freedoms. I promise that for as long as I sit in this House I will fight hard for the interests of my constituents, although my methods may be slightly less bloody than those adopted at Towton and Marston Moor.

I am grateful to have had this opportunity to address the House for the first time, and I thank the good people of Selby and Ainsty for putting their trust in me. I intend to repay that trust with all I have.

4.38 pm

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): I am very grateful to have been given an opportunity to make my maiden speech in this debate. Whatever disagreements different Members and political parties may have about how to tackle crime, terrorism and identity theft, we can all agree that they are issues of great concern to our constituents, and it is for all of us to address them. I congratulate every Member who has made their maiden speech today. They were truly excellent speeches, which I must now follow.

Let me begin by paying tribute to my predecessor, Geoff Hoon, who represented Ashfield for 18 years. Geoff was a barrister by trade but was born and bred into a long line of railwaymen, and I know that the values he learned from his family shaped his political outlook. Above all, he was determined to put those values into practice as a Minister. He spent six years as Secretary of State for Defence, making him the second longest-serving Defence Secretary to date. Much of that is known about Geoff, but less well known is his passion for pop music and his encyclopaedic knowledge of bands of the 1960s and '70s. Geoff Hoon was very serious about his music, and, to be honest, he would probably cringe if he looked at the music on my iPod.

Ashfield is a constituency shaped by industry, and proud of it—and those industrial roots have shaped those privileged enough to represent it. Everywhere I went during the election campaign, I was reminded just how large the shoes are that I have to fill—including those of Frank Haynes, who, after years below ground as a miner, represented Ashfield in this House from 1979 to 1992. In doing my research, I learned that Frank was famous for having one of the loudest voices in the House of Commons. When I promised the voters of Ashfield that, if they sent me to Parliament, I would shout up for them, I was speaking metaphorically. Frank clearly promised the same thing, but meant it quite literally. He was loved by many in Ashfield and by many in this House. Everyone tells me how popular he was. His key quality, which I shall always try to emulate, was that he was always himself. I love the image of him asking Margaret Thatcher a tough question at Prime Minister's questions and calling her "duckie", which is the legendary term of endearment that Nottinghamshire folk use every day. I am assured that the Iron Lady smiled.

[Gloria De Piero]

I am the first Member of Parliament to begin serving Ashfield with no local men underground mining for coal. Our most famous sons were from mining backgrounds. They include Harold Larwood, a Nottinghamshire and England fast bowler who left school at 14, before the war, to work in the mines. His statue still stands today in Kirkby-in-Ashfield. D. H. Lawrence was born in the town of Eastwood and was the son of a miner who could barely read. He called Eastwood "the country of my heart". It is not only the decline of mining that has hit Ashfield hard. I am delighted to be here as the first woman to represent the constituency, because women played a full part in building Ashfield's prosperity by working in the textile industry, but one by one the textile factories have gone the way of the pits. Yes, new jobs have been created, but too often they do not pay as well or offer the job security of those they replaced, and there are not enough of them.

Ashfield could be forgiven for thinking that its best days were behind it, but my mission in representing the people of my constituency in this House is to prove that that fear is misplaced, because the thing that has seen Ashfield through good times and bad is its sense of community. Indeed, I could say that the big society is alive and well there. For us, that is not a smart phrase invented by those from the leafy lanes of Notting Hill: one can smell it in the novels of Lawrence and see it there today. Every village has its community hub: the Stanton Hill community shop, the Huthwaite community action group, the Eastwood volunteer bureau, the Kirkby volunteer bureau, the Acacia avenue community centre and the Friends of Colliers Wood—I could go on and on. We do not just look out for each other in Ashfield; we stand up for ourselves, too, as those involved in the Kirkby and Sutton area residents associations prove every day by trying to keep the green fields in Ashfield green. D. H. Lawrence might be our historical hero, but it is the local heroes who are alive and well today who I want to support and pay tribute to. We can read about them each week in the *Ashfield Chad* and the *Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*.

I came from a pretty poor background, and I believe that it is thanks to my party speaking up for people from backgrounds such as my own that I was able to go to university, have a successful media career and today speak from these green Benches. I believe that Governments can and should help to transform people's lives for the better. Of course it takes individual effort and the support of the family, but there is something else that transforms people's lives, and that is community.

I know that it is fashionable for some on the Government Front Bench to talk about community, and I am delighted that they have rediscovered the word—along with "society"—but I am not convinced that they really understand it. They have presented a false divide between the big society and big government. I am arguing for an enabling Government who help people to come together and look after their interests. It is not a matter of choosing between society and the state; it is about binding the two together, for then, truly, the whole is worth more than the sum of the parts. The result is an empowered community and a flexible, responsive, enabling state, working together, rather than one replacing the other.

It is ironic that the so-called new politics, which suggests that state and society are somehow opposed and that one can flourish only if the other withdraws, should so precisely mirror the mistakes made by the worst of old Labour, which sometimes gave the impression that the state knew best and should dictate what happened. Underneath its rhetoric, the new politics represents the flip side of the same coin. Its adherents seek to trumpet society at the expense of the state, which the Conservative party says should be smaller as a matter of principle. I do not know whether its supposed partners agree with that, but I guess that we will find out eventually.

It is dogma to suggest that, if we roll back the state, the big society will flourish in its wake. Places like Ashfield need strong communities and strong government. If that means big government, then that is fine if that is what is needed. We do not need big government for its own sake, of course, but we do need strong and active government, for a purpose. After all, were Sure Start or community support officers examples of big government? Is a Government-initiated apprenticeship one?

Today, Ashfield needs a new economic backbone to enable local people to develop their talents and become the D.H. Lawrences and Larwoods of the future. We need it to promote the talents of people who come from Ashfield and ensure that those talents stay in the area to develop its future economic strength.

We know that tough economic times lie ahead. Ashfield can cope with a lot, but it is up to Government to help us. Ashfield is a place with a tremendous sense of community, but we need the Government to help us on the way. Ashfield has a big heart and lies at the heart of England. We will be as strong, vibrant and successful as we were in our heyday, but such a renaissance will happen only with a strong state and a strong society working hand in hand. If hon. Members on the Government Benches cannot see that and make it happen, when we get our chance, we will.

4.46 pm

Dr Julian Huppert (Cambridge) (LD): Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Deputy Speaker, and congratulations on your election. It is nice to see so many elections in this place at the moment.

It is a great honour to follow so many maiden speeches from hon. Members on both sides of the House. I pay particular tribute to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero), who gave a very confident and stylish description of Ashfield and the value of community in that area.

On the subject of ID cards, it is also a great privilege to follow the hon. Members for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) and for Walsall North (Mr Winnick). They have been steadfast in their stance on this matter, and have agreed with the Liberal Democrats that ID cards have always been wrong. I am delighted to follow them.

Identity cards have always been a passion of mine. I was a very early member of NO2ID and was very involved in its campaigning. I pay tribute to the work of that organisation—to Phil Booth, for his work nationally, and to Andrew Watson, the eastern co-ordinator.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) said that the issue of ID cards did not come up in his constituency during the election. In my

constituency of Cambridge, one of the largest of the 35 hustings that we held was organised by NO2ID, along with Oxfam and Amnesty International. The subject came up at almost every one of the other hustings that we had.

The ID card proposal also caused me to be involved with Liberty, which was mentioned earlier. I was elected to its national council, partly through my interest in identity cards and my understanding of what was happening. I am therefore delighted that one of the first steps of this coalition Government is to get rid of identity cards, finally.

Why do I oppose ID cards? I have always thought that there are three main reasons why we should not have them: the issues of principle, practice and price. We have talked about the principle, and we have heard how Clarence Henry Willcock, the Liberal from Finchley and Golders Green, objected in 1950. He was the last person to be convicted under the National Registration Act 1939, and his case led to a change in the law.

What was said on appeal is particularly interesting. Lord Goddard, the Lord Chief Justice, said that the use of identity cards

"tends to make people resentful of the acts of the police, and inclines them to obstruct the police instead of assisting them."

That was true in 1952, and it is true now.

That deals with the question of principle, but what about identity cards in practice? They, and the much worse identity register, are part of a complex Government IT project. We know what happens to such projects—they tend not to work very well, they cost too much, there are a security problems, and they are hard to implement. I hear some complaints from Opposition Members, but my comments are not just targeted at the previous Government, because this is a general problem of Government IT projects across the world. Mission creep is also a problem, because one starts off by collecting only a little information and gradually more and more is obtained. That has occurred in too many instances.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): On mission creep, is my hon. Friend aware that when this matter and a statutory instrument were being debated, the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr Campbell), who is in his place, expressed an interest in using any spare capacity on the chip to store other information, but he was not able to tell us what that information would be? Is that not a good illustration of how mission creep might arise without people realising it?

Dr Huppert: Indeed it is, and I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I was not aware of the history of that debate, but what he describes is exactly the sort of problem that occurs: extra information ends up being stored and what starts off as—possibly—a semi-innocent project becomes more and more sinister. A lot of work has been done on this by a colleague in Cambridge, Professor Ross Anderson. I pay tribute to his work on that and on summary care records, which also relates to Government IT systems. I hope that hon. Members will sign my early-day motion 186 and persuade this Government not to go ahead with that awful project too.

The price of ID cards was also an issue, and we heard some argument about the exact cost to the public purse earlier. I say to the shadow Home Secretary that it is not just the public purse that matters; we should also care about the cost to all the people who had to buy the cards and would have continued to buy the cards under the Labour Government's scheme. We are limiting the cost to them as much as we can, as well as limiting the cost to the public purse. As we have heard, there would have been continued costs for them in the form of fines and the cost of keeping the database going.

This Bill is not exactly as I would have drafted it. As a new Member, I certainly would not have written it in this particular style, but I suspect that I will have to get used to that. I would like clarity to be provided on a couple of points as this Bill goes through the rest of its process. We have discussed mission creep, and I am very concerned about overly broad descriptions. We have seen from the previous Government how something that seems fairly good in law can be taken wider and wider until we find that somebody can be convicted for making a joke on Twitter. We must be careful about what we say, and I hope that we will have a chance to explore what "relevant information" means in clause 10(3) and exactly how that is to be controlled.

I would also like to understand more about clause 4, in particular subsection 2(b), which makes it an offence to use documentation for "ascertaining or verifying" information about somebody. I wish to understand exactly what that means. If I were to take a family member's passport to someone else to prove who they are, would that be an offence? I have concerns about that, given how the provision is drafted. We should explore that in Committee, when I am sure the Government will make it clear how I have misinterpreted that and why I should not worry.

The other issue that should come up in our discussion is identity cards for foreign nationals—or any other such term that we might use. I disagree with some of the comments made about that, because I consider that such cards are discriminatory. We should be getting rid of all these identity cards, whoever they are for in this country. They are discriminatory and they involve the same problems that we have discussed: they do not work very well, and they involve the same problems of cost, practicality and keeping a database secure. I hope that this Government will examine that issue, either later during the passage of this Bill or in a future Bill.

Someone who did buy an identity card has asked me what now happens to it and to the money that they spent. That is a fascinating issue, and I should be interested if the Government were to work out what the cost would be of maintaining the entire system and all the back-up systems to service the 15,000 people in that position. That involves issues relating to interaction. *[Interruption.]* If, as the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) is suggesting, it is free, that would also be useful to know.

I was interested to hear the shadow Home Secretary's line that no changes should be made when a new Government come into power, and that it is somehow wrong ever to change anything that has happened. I seem to remember Gordon Brown changing a few things when he came into office in 1997, and that affecting decisions previously made on tax changes. We cannot have a system whereby Governments cannot change decisions made previously for fear that they might affect people inadvertently.

In general, I support this Bill and I am delighted to see it, because it is a wonderful start of real liberal

[Dr Huppert]

values in this new coalition. It is a real start on rebalancing the relationship between the citizen and the state, and I hope that it will be the first of many acts of a reforming, progressive Government.

4.54 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your election and on the fact that you are sitting in the Chair. I wish you many years as a Deputy Speaker of the House.

It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert). He reminded me that that is where I first joined the Labour party when I was a student. It is also where I first met and heard a speech by the Secretary of State for International Development and where I met the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr Letwin) and the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington). All of them are now in the Government and one of them has my old job as the Minister for Europe. The hon. Member for Cambridge gave a very intelligent speech, and I am sure that he will make a huge contribution to the House in the years to come. Cambridge has always been a swing seat and I congratulate him on making sure that he kept it for his party at the last election.

We have had some magnificent maiden speeches. In fact, it should be compulsory for older Members to come and listen to the kind of speeches that we have heard. The hon. Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams), who is just about to leave the Chamber—I am not trying to stop him—has not only made a wonderful maiden speech, but already covered himself in glory by having been on the victorious side in the tug of war between the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The cup is displayed in the Tea Room, I think. I am not sure what it is to be filled with, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I am sure that you, he and all of us will join in ensuring that it is emptied.

I first met my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) as a member of the national executive committee of the Labour party. When I first heard her speak, I knew that she would become a Member of Parliament, but I had no idea that she would speak so eloquently in her maiden speech in the House. She made a brilliant speech in which she paid tribute to Geoff Hoon, who was a very good friend to all on both sides of the House—we wish him well in his career. I know that my hon. Friend will be able to make a huge contribution in the years to come. I congratulate her and all the hon. Members who made their maiden speeches and then had to disappear to recover from the great experience of addressing the House for the first time. They were so good that I wish I could rewrite my maiden speech and give it again, but that is probably against the rules and even you, Mr Deputy Speaker, with your new powers would not enable me to do that.

Let me concentrate on the Identity Documents Bill and recognise the presence on the Labour Front Bench of the former Minister with responsibility for ID cards, my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier). She appeared before the Select Committee on Home Affairs in the last Parliament and, in her own style, gave us important information as to why the scheme would be successful when it was fully implemented. I note that the Opposition's position is not to oppose what the Government propose to do tonight, and we are right not to oppose them, because the proposal was clearly a Conservative manifesto commitment. Together with their coalition partners, the Conservatives command a large majority in the House, as we saw in yesterday's votes. The Government have decided that their first home affairs Bill should be on ID cards, and it is right and proper that we in the Opposition should accept the will of the people.

I hope that as the Bill proceeds through Committee some of the comments that have been made by Opposition Members will be taken into account. There are three areas that I want to raise with the Minister, whom I welcome to the Dispatch Box. His official title is the Minister for Immigration, but I know that he is covering the Front Bench for the rest of his team today. It must be very pleasant for him to sit in the Home Office with the permanent secretary and all those fine people bearing in mind what happened to him in opposition and I wish him a long stay at the Home Office.

When the Minister winds up, if he is to do so, will he answer a few factual points that would be of value to the House in making its decision tonight? First, can he give some clarity as to the number of identity cards that have been issued so far? The figure of 15,000 has been given. I am afraid that I do not know what the process is—are cards still being issued, or did that stop with the election of the Government? Of course, the Government aim to stop the cards, but is the process ongoing? Will the number reach 15,000-plus? It would be sensible to stop the whole process immediately even though the House has not yet made a decision, because it would be completely unfair for members of the public voluntarily to get identity cards that we shortly after take away from them. If the Minister could give us clarity on that point, I should be extremely grateful.

Steve McCabe: Does my right hon. Friend think it would be useful to seek clarity for people whose applications may be in the system? They may have already paid. What will happen to them? We heard earlier that they will not get their money back.

Keith Vaz: Absolutely. We need to know the numbers in the system, but as the Home Secretary made it clear that money would not be returned, I do not think we need further clarification about that.

It would be helpful to know how many foreign nationals have received what are no longer to be regarded as identity cards. The Home Secretary said that that process would continue and we understand the reasons why, but if there is to be differentiation of foreign nationals and those of us who are British citizens, we need to be clear about it. Looking at some of our previous debates, we see that one of the criticisms the Government made when they were in opposition was that there was differentiation of foreign nationals and British citizens. Presumably, we now have a completely different process, but no doubt the Government will continue to issue those cards.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), who told me he would have to leave the Chamber, mentioned a Home Affairs Committee report from a previous Parliament when I was not the Chair—it was my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton,

Itchen (Mr Denham)—although I think the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) may have been a member of the Committee at the time. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his unopposed election as Chair of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs. Unopposed election is a good form of democracy, although unfortunately it did not apply to other Select Committees. I wish him well and I hope that he will take to his new chairmanship some of the excitement of serving on the Home Affairs Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North made great play of the fact that he was the only member of the Select Committee to vote against identity cards, and that all its other members—I now see from the list that they did not include the hon. Member for Monmouth, although there were other Conservatives—voted for them. The overall conclusions in chapter 6 of the report are clear. Even then the Committee said, in paragraph 280:

> "However, the introduction of identity cards carries clear risks, both for individuals and for the successful implementation of the scheme. We are concerned by the lack of clarity and definition on key elements of the scheme and its future operation and by the lack of openness in the procurement process. The lack of clarity and openness increases the risks of the project substantially. This is not justified and must be addressed if the scheme is to enjoy public confidence and to work and achieve its aims in practice."

Although I do not have to defend the decision of a Committee that I was not chairing at the time, it is worth noting that even at that stage the Committee registered concern about some aspects of the scheme.

In the Committee's report on the surveillance society, published in May 2008—when the hon. Member for Monmouth was a member and an important participant in the Committee's deliberations—we again raised concerns about data and data loss. We have heard an unequivocal statement from the Home Secretary that every bit of data will be destroyed at a suitable time, when Parliament has its view and the Bill becomes law. I am concerned as to what happens to the data between now and then. Although I do not seek a ticket to the ceremony for the destruction of the data that have been gathered so far, I am sure someone in the Home Office press department will be thinking up something suitable. Simply cutting up an identity card will not be good enough for the coalition. After the impressive press conferences given by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister that we have seen so far, we expect something more for the destruction of the data. I just hope they will be kept safe until then.

In our report on the surveillance society in May 2008, we pointed out our concern about the huge amount of personal data that were being retained. The former Minister with responsibility for identity, my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch, was very good when she gave evidence before the Select Committee and was clear that she was absolutely satisfied that the data were safe. But we conducted our review at a time when, as the Home Secretary said, a lot of discs were going missing. We were very concerned, although we of course accepted my hon. Friend's assurances; one always accepts the assurances of a diligent Minister when he or she appears before the Select Committee, especially someone as erudite as my hon. Friend. Our concern remains that there are a lot of data still being held and this matter needs to be addressed.

David T. C. Davies: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who has been an excellent Chairman of the Select Committee. I suggest to him that if we were unable as a Parliament to look after our own data on the activities of MPs, it will be difficult for the public to have any confidence that we will do a better job with their data.

Keith Vaz: The hon. Gentleman is right; we have to be very careful with data protection and the way in which we look after data. We have not had a lost disc for some time; at least, not for the last three weeks, which is pretty good. The last major loss was several months, if not a year, ago. Maybe the civil servants and others with responsibility for all this will ensure that no further discs will be lost in the future. I hope that we will have assurances about how that will be done.

In conclusion, although the Home Secretary made a terrific case against identity cards—she is always very good at putting the case—the Opposition will not vote against the Bill. Speeches from people such as me should be relatively brief; that is why I will not take up my full allocation of time.

Pete Wishart: Does the right hon. Gentleman have any idea as to the position of the Labour party now on ID cards? We understand that Labour will not vote against the Bill. Will ID cards be part of the programme of the Labour Opposition?

Keith Vaz: I look forward to finding out when my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch replies to the debate. Until the election, we were very much in favour of ID cards. When she replies, she will tell us. I am trying not to second-guess my hon. Friend, who is pretty good at her job. I will let her speak for herself and tell the House what she thinks the official Opposition's position is.

I hope that we will tread carefully in the next few weeks and that we will take forward the suggestions that have been made. I know that it is in the nature of new Governments to feel that they should do things very quickly and urgently and it is obviously up to the Government what legislation they put before the House. But I hope that they will take advice from former Ministers who have been involved in these issues and will read carefully the reports of the Select Committee in the last Parliament.

5.8 pm

Mr Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I join in the warm welcome you have received this afternoon. It is hard to believe that 25 years have passed since we first fought socialism in south Wales. My congratulations to you.

I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me in a debate that is close to my heart, one that has been a long time in coming. I have been passionately opposed to identity cards and to the national identity register for a number of years. However well intentioned a Government may be towards safeguarding our identities, data and personal information, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. The 2006 Act did not reach its logical conclusion and was not implemented to its full potential but it set out an alarming framework that would have led to the sort of society in which I do not think many of us would want to live.

[Mr Robert Buckland]

The shadow Home Secretary taught me much today about how to defend the indefensible. The best form of defence is attack. I am a new student of the politics of the Chamber and I am grateful to him for teaching me that lesson. However impressive his presentation was, it could not get away from the sad fact for him and the Opposition that the policies that they implemented and the Act represented by them was flawed, unwelcome and an infringement of the natural rights that we as citizens should expect to have. It represented a dangerous reversal of the burden of proof between the individual and the state.

No longer were the Government there at the behest of all of us, governing with our consent. The logical conclusion of the Act was that ultimately we would have to prove our own existence. Why do I say that? Because in the Act was the presumption of accuracy—the presumption that all the information and registrable facts that could have been entered on that register were accurate. If it recorded the fact that I was Mrs. Robert Buckland, I would have had to prove that I was not. What an absurd, almost Kafkaesque situation that would have been. I can assure the House that I am Mr. Robert Buckland, and it would be ridiculous to have to prove that.

Like the hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert) in his excellent speech, I pay tribute to the campaigners of NO2ID. They worked assiduously, with great enthusiasm and conviction. I pay tribute to all that my local group in Swindon, a non-party political group of concerned individuals, did. They organised petitions, campaigned on the streets and sought to persuade legislators in this place and more widely of the error of that policy. They succeeded in moving public opinion considerably on from where it was only five years ago. It is a significant achievement, which was recognised by the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Mr Blunkett), the former Home Secretary, in a thought-provoking and intelligent contribution, as we would expect from him.

The issue gives rise to strong emotions and passions. In an intervention, I suggested earlier to the shadow Home Secretary that the national identity register was unprecedented. We will have to agree to differ on that. It is, in my view, entirely unprecedented because of the sheer number of registrable facts that would potentially have had to be entered by the individual. No other country in the world had attempted that, and the Government, in their gradual withdrawal from the rather grandiose suggestions at the beginning of the life of the 2006 Act, seemed to recognise that there was an inevitability about the danger of trying to create a super-database—one database trying to deal with all that information.

Reality dawned a little too late on the previous Government and their attitude to data retention. It is not just a matter of Kafka or George Orwell. There was an element of low farce in the implementation of the 2006 Act. The Act received Royal Assent on 30 March 2006 and immediately repealed the parts of the Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981 that made it a criminal offence for a person to have a false passport or immigration document in their control. Sections 25 and 26 of the 2006 Act made it a criminal offence for a person to have a false identification document in their custody or control. In other words, the successor provision dealt with and covered the lacuna or loophole that would have opened up with the abolition of the relevant parts of the 1981 Act. That is all well and good, but unfortunately a mistake was made, because the commencement order that brought the new provisions into force was not passed until 7 June 2006. More than two months went by during which no criminal offence of having a false identification document existed in England and Wales. Clever lawyers—better lawyers than me, perhaps—brought that matter to the attention of certain court proceedings, and I know of at least one set of proceedings that came to an undignified halt because of that alarming loophole.

I said low farce, but the situation was more serious than that, because it meant that, potentially, people went undealt with by the criminal justice system for the serious offences—let us not forget—of possessing false identification documents, including passports, for which custodial offences would normally and quite properly follow. I am glad to see that no such danger arises from the Bill before us, because the provisions in section 25 of the 2006 Act, on the criminal offences surrounding the possession of false documents, have been retained, and the transitional provisions are carefully worded to ensure that no such loophole ever opens again. The 2006 Act was yet another sad example of legislation passed without due consideration for those who have to operate it. A number of people who work in our criminal justice system had their hearts in their mouths when they were considering prosecutions brought in that two-month—nine-week, to be accurate—period.

The arguments that were deployed in favour of the identity card scheme shifted like the sands of time. We started with an argument about benefit fraud. From my experience of dealing with benefit fraud over a number of years, it is axiomatic that most of it occurs not because of false identification documents, but because of wrongful declarations about living status. That argument went by the wayside. We heard an argument based on immigration, which also went by the wayside; and then the argument became a credit-card argument about convenience—a one-stop-shop offering people access to services. None of those weak arguments stacks up when we balance them out with fundamental freedoms and liberties, and that is why I am delighted that this Government's first act is to bring forward a Bill to repeal the 2006 Act.

The 2006 Act represented government at its worst: overweening, over-ambitious, arrogant and out of touch. We now have a chance to redress that balance. I look forward to the death rites being pronounced upon the 2006 Act, and I will play my part, however small, in making sure that that is done.

5.18 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and congratulations on being elevated to your post. I also congratulate the hon. Member for South Swindon (Mr Buckland) on his maiden speech—*[Interruption.]* I apologise. I am not sure what the parliamentary term is for a second speech, but I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his almost-maiden speech. I should have known by how assured he was that, in fact, it was not his first speech.

I am here to contribute to this debate because I believe in identity cards and think it quite wrong to

back away from something for which I have campaigned on behalf of my constituents for the past 10 years. I predict that, whether the current Government or a future Government are in place, we will be back here within five years, because of the way the world is developing: it is becoming a smaller place, ID fraud is increasing exponentially, and in the first quarter of this year we saw a 20% increase in ID fraud cases and prosecutions. As a result, our constituents will be demanding a new way of securing, and being able to prove, their identity. We can call that system ID cards, or anything we like—but we will be back here arguing the case, because the world will not stand still while we procrastinate or talk about freedom in the terms that we have heard today.

Another reason why we will be back here is that our partners in the EU and internationally will demand that we come back. They will not accept our scrapping the second generation of biometric passports, because they will require ever greater and ever more solid proof that we can substantiate our identities in our passport system. We can make as many stands at the beginning of a Parliament as we like, but these practical problems will arise.

I support ID cards because my understanding of the words "freedom" and "liberty" is very different from that of many Members of this House. My understanding comes from a constituency where people work hard for very little and are frightened of crime and antisocial behaviour. They fear crime more than they are likely to be victims of it. For them, freedom lies in community and in the ability of the police, the Government and the state to protect them as individuals. That is why, in all the consultation I have done in my constituency—and I have done much over the years—they overwhelmingly support ID cards.

It is, in my view, wrong to talk about wanting to tighten up the immigration system so that we know who is in this country unless we have an ID system. Nobody has been able to explain to me how we will be able to tell who is here without such a system. Nobody has been able to explain to me how we will get rid of NHS tourism without some way for people to demonstrate their right to access those services. At the moment, the NHS is ill equipped to be able to carry out the function of understanding and pursuing who is entitled to NHS treatment, because of the ability to create fraudulent documents. As somebody who spends hours every week on immigration casework, I still cannot tell what is, or is not, a fraudulent document.

For those practical reasons, I think that we will see an inching towards ID cards. I hope so, on behalf of my constituents, who have, in all the work that I have done with them, overwhelmingly supported their introduction. I understand the position of those on my Front Bench—accepting that the parties who won the election clearly made a manifesto commitment to remove ID cards. However, I believe that people in Mitcham and Morden will be disappointed that we have rowed back from this, just as we appear to want to put more controls on CCTV and a DNA database. People want to feel secure and protected. They see that their environment and their world is changing. Simply standing still and not bringing in measures to protect them is not the answer.

5.23 pm

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): May I, too, Mr Deputy Speaker, offer my warmest words of congratulation to you, Sir, on your elevation? I have been well aware of the dignity and gravitas that the Deputy Speaker can bring to important occasions ever since he acted as my best man about 10 years ago—but that is another story.

I also offer my warmest words of congratulation to the Home Secretary and to the other Home Office Ministers. It is fitting that a Government who promised to make law and order a top priority have today introduced a Bill that is about both law and order, and supporting and protecting human rights—real human rights, that is, not the ones that Labour Members sometimes talk about. I have taken a great interest in that matter through my membership of the Home Affairs Committee and in my work as a special constable with the British transport police.

I have heard all sorts of claims about the benefits of ID cards, and we have heard some of them today. We have heard about how they would defeat terrorism, prevent people from claiming access to benefits, solve criminality and all sorts of other things. The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) came out with a new one when she talked about NHS tourism. I tried to bring that issue to the attention of Health Ministers in the previous Government on several occasions and was assured that there was no problem at all, so at least we are getting somewhere if the Opposition now accept that there is a problem. The hon. Lady also talked about illegal immigration, but perhaps she did not hear the Home Secretary's speech, which made it absolutely clear that people coming into this country will still require a form of identity document—not the ID card, but another form of identification. That issue therefore does not even begin to arise.

There was a gaping hole in the argument that the previous Government advanced, which was that the cards were always going to be voluntary. That, of course, meant that they would have been ineffective, because the people who fiddle their benefits and break the law would not have applied for them. Everyone could see that glaring hole in the argument. There would have been some argument for having ID cards—although I would not have supported it—if they had been compulsory, but that was not suggested, or at least it was not talked about openly.

My personal view is that if ID cards had been introduced in a voluntary form and the programme had continued, somewhere along the line it would have become compulsory to have them. Otherwise, there really would not have been much point in them. There have been times when, working as a police officer, it has been hard to ascertain someone's identity. Had they had an ID card and been compelled to carry it at all times, that would have been quite useful, but the previous Government were not willing to say whether it would be compulsory to have one, and if so, whether it would be compulsory to carry one at all times and on all occasions.

I could have foreseen the cards being rolled out on a voluntary basis at first, and then, when the take-up had reached about 60% or 70%, the Government making them compulsory. They would then have had the problem of whether to enforce the law strictly and ensure that

[David T. C. Davies]

people carried them all the time. I suspect that there would have been all sorts of civil disobedience, with protestors deliberately going out of their way not to carry ID cards and the police not being terribly enthusiastic about prosecuting a lot of otherwise law-abiding students for a minor infringement of the law. Prolific criminals would not have carried the cards, and we would have spent thousands of pounds dragging them before the courts and fining them 75 quid or so, which they would never have paid. Then somebody in government would have said, "Hold on a minute, this is outrageous. The *Daily Mail* journalists are ringing me up all the time saying that we've got this law and nobody's obeying it, so we'll have a target. We'll tell the police to go out and prosecute a lot of people." Then, a lot of pensioners and otherwise law-abiding people who had unfortunately forgotten their cards one morning would have been stopped and fined large sums of money. The whole thing would have been chaos, because this country is just not ready for it. I am glad that we have got rid of it.

It was something of an anomaly that although the Labour party talked about human rights rather a lot, they gave us a so-called Human Rights Act that in my opinion was nothing more than a spurious means for all sorts of people involved in terrorism and on the fringes of criminality to sue the Government for large sums when their "human rights", as they put it, were not respected. At the same time, all sorts of law-abiding people were having their liberties infringed in all sorts of ways, one of which was the introduction of ID cards.

I say to Members such as the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who was so passionate about the matter, that we on the right of politics have always believed in liberty, and we do not separate social liberty from economic liberty. I do not believe that we can have a truly libertarian Government when half our gross domestic product is being spent by the state. I look forward to my Front-Bench colleagues introducing further Bills that will reduce state interference in our lives socially and economically. As we have a great big happy family now, with people whose views are as diverse as mine and those of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert), I say to Opposition Members—even the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), with whom I have served on the Home Affairs Committee for several years—that they should come and join the true libertarians on our side of the House, and we will continue to cut red tape, look for ways of reducing costs and support real human rights and, most importantly, liberty for all British people.

5.29 pm

Mr Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and may I take this opportunity to welcome you to your elevated status in the Chair? I commend hon. Members on both sides of the House for their maiden speeches, and welcome the Home Secretary and other Home Office Ministers to the Dispatch Box.

I wholeheartedly support the Bill for three reasons, the first of which is basic principle: I believe in a country in which the state is accountable to the citizen, not the other way round. ID cards would reverse that relationship through the national identity register, a central database that hoards vast amounts of personal data on every citizen and that is open to the sprawling arms of Government, who would be able to widen access still further by order, not primary legislation. In addition, the database is run by the state sector, which has an appalling record on safeguarding our personal data. Despite all the spin from the previous Government, they planned eventually to have a compulsory ID card regime: they would not rule out making it impossible to renew or apply for a passport without one.

My second reason for supporting the Bill is that ID cards simply cannot, will not and could never do what it says on the tin. They were proposed in the aftermath of 9/11, initially as a preventive counter-terrorism measure—not any old kind of counter-terrorism measure—yet we know that ID card regimes in Germany, Spain and Turkey did not and could not stop the 9/11 bombers who were based in Hamburg, the Istanbul bombers in 2003, or the Madrid bombers in 2004. Next, it was said that ID cards would stop benefit fraud, yet as we heard earlier from the Home Secretary—persuasively—most benefit fraud involves lying about personal circumstances, not identity. It was then claimed that ID cards would help to tackle illegal immigration, which is an equally spurious reason—it was scarcely credible given that under previous plans, foreign nationals would not need an ID card for the first three months of any stay.

Last year the Government changed tack altogether and tried to sell ID cards as a way to help young people to access services. A cost of £30, with a potential fine of £1,000 if they move home or marry and forget to tell Big Brother, is the last thing the average young Briton needs today, which helps to explain the very low take-up. However, in retrospect the most extraordinary thing is the long journey that ID cards have travelled from security panacea to friendly service provider. This is a veritable chameleon of a project that seeks to hide its real nature with every change in presentation.

My third reason for supporting the Bill is cost, and we have heard plenty in the debate about the billions of pounds it would cost to maintain and run the scheme. Although the future cost of ID cards was always much higher than the previous Government could ever bring themselves to admit, there is a further point to make: the flawed design and inherent vulnerability of the database to fraud, as attested by expert after expert, represent a massive contingent liability that this Government and the taxpayer should relinquish at the very first opportunity.

In sum, ID cards are intrusive, ineffective and ludicrously expensive. This is Labour's great white elephant of a project that has been left lumbering around Whitehall, and Britain can well do without it.

5.34 pm

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): May I, too, congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your recent elevation and successful election? May I also congratulate the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero), my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams) and all other hon. Members who have made maiden speeches this day? Having done it so recently myself, I well recall how nerve-racking it is.

I shall not detain the House for long, but I wish to make a couple of points, the first of which is the

concern of the people of Dover and Deal about ID cards. Surprisingly, during the election campaign, this issue was often raised on doorsteps in my constituency. People said, "Look, the thing with ID cards is they are a bit of a continental thing. Not so long ago—65 or 70 years ago—we were opposing people who wanted to come to Britain and impose that kind of regime on us, and we are not very keen on that." We believe in freedom, democracy and liberty; and we care strongly about that.

We also feel that the ID cards were very expensive. Would it not have been a better use of Government resources to have improved and strengthened border control in this country? People in Dover are very clued up on these issues. Many of them work for the UK Border Agency and often say, "The thing is, studies by the London School of Economics show there are about 863,000 or so people in this country unlawfully. They do not seem to have ID cards." They say, "There's not much point in having ID cards if they're voluntary, and if they're compulsory it would simply be unacceptable. It would be better to secure our national border security."

I note that the previous Government were reducing our border security at Dover. Immigration officers were being fired, and the idea was to replace them with less experienced officers. Many people in the local UKBA office came to me expressing serious concern, and I hope the current Government will review that situation and perhaps consider better ways forward. The previous Government did other things that people in Dover were concerned might weaken our border security. That is important. It is not just about illegal visitors, but about human trafficking, drug running, and guns and weapons coming through our borders. It is about preventing terrorists from getting into the country. It is an issue not just about illegal visitors, but about national security.

I listened with great interest to the shadow Home Secretary when he said that the ID cards scheme was voluntary, that 15,000 people have applied for one, and that it would be unfair on those people because they were volunteers. I have had an e-mail from a constituent, Naomi, who works for the UK Border Agency. She wrote to me saying:

> "I am a very disgruntled immigration officer from the Dover area...As a staff member of the Home Office, I was actively encouraged to apply for my ID card, which I duly did...Had I not worked for Home Office (Immigration) and been based mainly in juxtaposed controls, I would not have bothered with it. I was told that the Home Office would not contribute to us getting our cards, but they wanted us to get them."

We have heard from the shadow Home Secretary that this was a voluntary scheme, but it seems to me that some public sector workers might have been less volunteers and more volunteered. It would have been wrong to impose a flagship Government scheme on public sector workers and to have volunteered them for that kind of thing. It would be wrong in principle for that to have happened. During her winding-up speech, I hope that the shadow Minister will explain whether it was truly a voluntary scheme, as regards people in the UKBA and, no doubt, other public sector organisations, or whether they were volunteered. It would be wrong, for a bit of spin and public relations, to have volunteered people for something that they did not want, because they already had a passport, driving licence and all the other required identification that make ID cards completely useless and unnecessary.

5.38 pm

Mr Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I add my heartfelt congratulations to those expressed by others on your elevation to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. I also add my congratulations to all those whom I have heard make their maiden speeches today. I well remember how awful mine was. By contrast, theirs shame me. Fortunately, the height of these Benches prevents the world from seeing that one's knees are trembling, and mine certainly were—my mouth was dry and I have never dared read the speech again. I hope that the section of the Common's files are burnt down. I can express only my admiration for the maiden speeches. Certain things said had a theme that related to the Bill that we are debating today, as well as to the purpose of maiden speeches.

I am proud to be in this House with a large number of new Members who were elected to represent distinctive constituencies. They will judge the national interest on behalf of those they represent. That is no easy task, unless they always follow the guidance of the Whips. In fact, it turns upon Members sometimes, because the making of law and the holding of Governments to account is what we are involved in. The judgment involved in creating criminal law, which is behind the Bill before us, is a very solemn responsibility.

I have always maintained that the function of this House and the history of this nation is the long march of everyman to safeguard liberty. It was not easily won, but it was accomplished, as is seen in the changing nature of this House from first being merely the King's House and then an oligarch's House in the 18th century to the early stages of the 1832 Reform Bill—even if the Deputy Prime Minister is not as familiar with his history as he might have been—and then to the great achievement of Disraeli's Reform Bill of 1867, from which we became a free people. John Bright, whose statue stands outside this Chamber, on his annual visit to Birmingham all those years ago asked why Englishmen should be slaves in their own country. That is what led to the 1867 Bill. The majority of people in England did not have the vote at that time—an Englishman in Canada had it, as did an Englishman in the United States, South Africa and Australia—but they had it after 1867. That is the heritage for new Members, and I maintain that the main reason we are here is to defend that liberty.

Sat on the Front Bench is the Minister for Immigration, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green), who saw what the power of a misdirected state could do when an assault was made on the integrity of this House. When measures are brought before this House by the Executive, supposedly to protect our liberty, we should be mindful. That is where the great difficulty comes—the clash of loyalties between "the urgency of now", to quote an American President, and the urgency of the issues that sometimes confront us.

We make much of playing across the House and there has, of course, been an aggrandisement of the state in some of the pettiest of ways. In the face of an emergency, rushed through—in less than half an hour, I believe—was the infamous section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911. That happened because of the threat of war at the time. That legislation was done away with by Douglas Hurd and the then Conservative Government in 1989, but similar provisions were re-formed in the new Bill, saying that anyone, including the Crown—even the gardeners

[Mr Richard Shepherd]

in the royal parks—who released any information had committed an offence. That was it. It created a great dampening rug over British society. It was as if knowing the number of teaspoons in the Ministry of Defence would somehow reveal to enemy forces our readiness for war, as the numbers employed by the Ministry could be guessed. That is an example of the sort of nonsense that went on, showing how difficult it was to do away with secrecy.

This is where the identity cards issue comes in. We have looked at how it came about. It was in a sense a continuation of what had happened in the first world war through a national registration system. It ceased immediately at the end of the first world war, but in 1945 it did not cease. It suited the socialist Government at the time, who believed that this would somehow enable them to plan better. That was what was really behind it. That was when we saw the "reason creep" that we now see in the Identity Cards Act 2006 that we are about to abolish. It crept and crept, and then a perverse citizen—glory be to God for dappled things!—challenged a policeman. Of course he was rushed to court, and of course he was found guilty. He appealed, but the Lord Chief Justice is also tied by laws, the laws that we make, and the man was guilty. It was a prima facie case: he had not been prepared to show his identity card. But the uproar in public opinion created huge agitation, and the incoming Churchill Government did away with the law. So our history is important when it comes to these matters.

I saw examples in the 1980s. I must speak very cautiously, however, because we have security anxieties in this country—there is the Northern Ireland situation, for instance—but we have done terrible things in terms of that central principle of the liberty of the individual. We all know about 42 days and 96 days, and the outer reaches of arresting people without their knowing the offence with which they are charged. It took the judges of our land a long time to find that that was improper, although the requirement for every citizen to know who accuses them and with what they are charged is so basic to our common law. We are, in a sense, the custodians of that common law and of that noble tradition. I am thinking not just of England but of Scotland, and the declaration of Arbroath. These islands are the centre of that liberty.

The original Bill—that monstrous Bill—was introduced because we were in a panic, or rather the Government were in a panic. We have a press that heightens and dramatises every incident, and we have almost lost our character in the way in which we respond. This city was bombed—indeed, this Chamber was bombed and destroyed—in the war, and I believe that 20,000 people were killed in one bombing incident.

I come from the west midlands, which includes Coventry and Birmingham, and other Members represent other industrial centres around this island that were bombed. Hundreds died—hundreds. So serious was it that the national Administration did not want the figures to be known in case they resulted in widespread panic. Those are the difficulties involved in the judgments that Governments must make, but I am no sympathiser with Governments who introduce measures for putting information on central databanks like that of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, which we cannot get at.

I can only think of a young man who had some difficulties, and the attempt to extradite him to the United States. What was his offence? He had accessed the national security computers at the Pentagon. That is now serious in our world—very serious—but if one individual living in London, or wherever, can access that information, who cannot access a national databank? That is what this is about. The very first principle of what I call civil liberties but what is now called human rights—secondary, tertiary and so forth—is the autonomy of the citizen, which is what that impinged on.

No one doubts that the action was mandatory, and the reasons given changed frequently. Whatever new emergency arose, this was the answer to it. Michael Howard presented a Bill to deal with benefit fraud, and Peter Lilley—is he in the House of Lords, or is he still here?—did for it in the Cabinet. That is why the Conservative sense of liberty is something to be proud of. Front Benchers panic, and Back Benchers are the brake on that.

The Labour party failed abysmally. I give credit to the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick)—it is true that he opposed these measures throughout—but do not doubt that Conservatives also opposed them throughout. We watched the dancing princes of new Labour as they asserted that the very life of the nation was threatened, but we are still here. The test of the life of the nation being threatened is part of the Human Rights Act, and they trampled all over that. It is not the Human Rights Act that matters. What matters is what we, a sovereign Parliament, hold to be appropriate.

I see the hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert) sitting there. He had the most distinguished of predecessors, who is missed because he forensically and quietly argued the case for liberty. So did my friend from Grantham, Douglas Hogg. That case was argued across the House. We had right on our side. The conversion of my party to remembering and asserting those rights, freedoms and liberties is expressed in the first legislation to be brought to the House in this Parliament. I commend the Government for that. It is testament to something important that this House is on the move again.

5.51 pm

Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): I add my congratulations to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on the distinction and honour that the House has seen fit to give you. It is a signal honour and I am absolutely convinced that you will perform your functions accordingly.

I thank those who have made their maiden speeches today, and must say how impressed I have been with them. Having given mine only a couple of days ago, I all too well recall the nerves in doing so. I also congratulate the Home Secretary on introducing the Bill, on the honour of her appointment and on the appointment of the Home Office team. This Bill is signally important because it will repair some of the damage that the Labour party has done to our civil liberties. On the liberty of the individual, Winston Churchill once said that those who ignore history—those with short memories—will be condemned to repeat it. Thanks to 13 years of Labour Government, since 1997 no fewer than 404 acts or forms of behaviour have become

unlawful. Human rights have been damaged by 13 years of Labour. It may have introduced an Act calling itself the Human Rights Act, but it has damaged human rights in this country. People do not feel as secure or as safe as they have done historically. That is the responsibility of Labour following its governance of this country.

When identity cards were introduced in 1918, they were a knee-jerk reaction; the country was deeply concerned with the war situation. The Government recognised that they needed to be removed as soon as the situation improved. Identity cards were reintroduced in 1939. The mistake was that, after the war ended in 1945, identity cards were allowed to continue apace. That resulted—the case has already been alluded to in the Chamber—in a famous episode where a man in the street, when challenged by a police constable, refused to show his identification papers. He is recorded as having said to the constable, "No, I am a liberal." What he was indicating was the illiberality of having to show, on the demand of a constable in uniform, identification papers just on mere suspicion. I am given to understand that the grandson of that man is now one of my hon. Friends newly elected to this Chamber, and that is a signal distinction. That incident led to a case that has been alluded to, which went before the High Court of Justice, where the matter was explored in some detail and the public were, of course, outraged. That led, under Churchill's Government, to the abolition of identification cards, and rightly so.

Criminals today—and, I am sure, historically as well—do not apply for identification cards if they are voluntary. The previous Labour Government said they wanted a voluntary scheme of identification cards, but the reality is that a voluntary scheme would simply mean that the criminals and those disinclined to follow the law would not apply for them, yet those inclined to follow the law would feel increasingly obliged to carry them. It is what is referred to in the military as mission creep, and elsewhere as function creep. I understand that one of the methods by which the previous Labour Government were going to introduce those identification cards was via airports and airlines. They were going to have airside workers carrying these cards first. Trade unions and airlines expressed concern that this voluntary scheme would become impractical and that it would eventually be required to be compulsory.

As we have seen, that has happened in many historical cases, such as with the discontinuance of the use of cheques. They have not been banned, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to use a cheque, and there is pressure to discontinue them entirely. On Sunday trading, too, it has been said that, although Parliament as then assembled was careful not to make the new law compulsory, the safeguards have been eroded, so that those employees who would otherwise have chosen not to work on a Sunday have felt increasingly obliged to do so, whether or not that is a legal requirement. There is every indication that if identification cards had come into existence there would have been exactly that kind of mission creep, or function creep. Some people might have found it increasingly difficult to go into work, especially in certain lines of work, if they did not have a card.

Nick de Bois (Enfield North) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in essence, he is explaining that the last Government were working on the shameful premise of, "If you've got nothing to hide, there's no reason why you shouldn't have one"? That alone is a reason why their measure must be killed off tonight.

Michael Ellis: Yes, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. We heard from another of my hon. Friends about how a constituent of his working in the port at Dover was already feeling under pressure to acquire one of these identification cards. There is every reason to believe that that attitude would have become extremely damaging in the longer term. Criminals, however, would have ignored all of this.

The card's security measures are not impregnable either. In recent years, I have prosecuted a number of criminal cases in the Crown courts in England involving the fraudulent misuse of identification documents, usually passports. Passports are now quite sophisticated documents, but even all the sophisticated apparatus designed to protect their integrity can be circumvented without particularly highly specialist care. That is because it is often the naked eye that is used to determine the veracity or otherwise of a document. Many court cases have resulted from such situations.

There is no substance to the Labour argument. We have now a kind of Big Brother watch in this country, and Labour's attitude that one is guilty until proven innocent has paid into the lack of security and lack of integrity in our system. I pointed out to the shadow Home Secretary, when he was in his place, that in a press release on 27 May, the head of the TUC backed the coalition Government's proposals. Brendan Barber said that

> "identity cards were a costly folly...and would have been an unwelcome intrusion into people's personal liberty...Scrapping identity cards is an important sign that the new Government is committed to safeguarding civil liberties."

When the shadow Home Secretary first became Home Secretary, he announced that ID cards would no longer be compulsory, which gave the distinct impression that he had not been much in favour of them in the first place.

I am delighted to support this Bill as the first measure that Her Majesty's Government are bringing before the House. The compulsion by stealth was a feature that would have been completely deleterious to the interests of the people of this country. The cost was another factor altogether. Some £800 million will be saved over the next 10 years by abandoning this absurd and costly scheme. It is interesting to note that Labour Members are not taking a stance against the Bill. Perhaps that is because they understand that the cost-benefit analysis has not worked out. There is no substance to the Labour argument, and there never was. I am delighted to support this measure.

6.2 pm

Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con): I echo the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton North (Michael Ellis) in congratulating all those hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today. Like him, I remember making mine about a week ago. At the time, I was unsure whether I was more nervous about making the speech or about having to wait so many hours to make it. So I offer my congratulations—and, in some ways, my commiserations—to all those who have had to sit here today waiting for their time to come.

[Brandon Lewis]

I also want to echo the comment made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Mr Buckland) when he congratulated the team who put together the NO2ID campaign. They did superb, ground-breaking work at an early stage in making use of some of the social media sites. As a user of Twitter and Facebook myself, I think that they did a super job in bringing people together and creating a cohesive campaign. It is ironic that some of those same social networking groups have had questions raised about data protection and the data that they hold on people. My core problem with identity cards has always related to data protection.

When the legislation was first introduced in March 2006, I had an instinctive feeling that it was the wrong thing to do, as I am a believer in small government. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton North mentioned function creep. That and the Big Brother state added to the feeling that this was yet another system that the previous Government were using to gain more knowledge and control over all of us. It is interesting that it moved to being a voluntary scheme, following the initial proposal to make it compulsory. I congratulate the Home Secretary and the entire ministerial team on using one of our first Bills to get rid of this vile piece of legislation.

I look at the matter quite simply. My decision to speak today is based on my conversations over the past few years with residents in my constituency of Great Yarmouth. I have spoken to tens of thousands of people, and I was wracking my brains today as I worked through the pros and cons of the argument. I wanted to play devil's advocate and produce a strong and positive case for identity cards, yet I cannot remember any Great Yarmouth residents asking me when they could get theirs. Not one person has told me that we should make it compulsory, or that we should hurry up its introduction.

Residents of Great Yarmouth said many things during the election, but I struggle to remember anyone asking, "Will you please make sure that, if your party is successful and forms a Government, you keep the identity card legislation? I am very much looking forward to getting my card." That is not a conversation that I recall, although I wait to be corrected by any resident who does recall it.

A very long-serving Member of this House who is no longer here gave me some advice earlier this year. I was told that, if I was fortunate enough to be elected, I should ensure that I know why I am speaking on an issue in the Chamber, and why I am voting on it. I was told to be aware of the positive impact that any proposal would have on the lives of my constituents and the country. I cannot think of a single thing about the Identity Cards Act 2006 that is beneficial, and so can see no reason to support it. For that reason, I support its abolition.

Given that my residents in Great Yarmouth do not want identity cards, what is the economic case for them? The figures that I have seen show a set-up cost of around £450 million to bring the scheme in, and that operating it over the next 10 years would cost something like £4.1 billion. We heard at Prime Minister's Question Time earlier today that the interest charge alone on our national debt will cost us around £70 billion a year or more, so it seems to me that we simply cannot afford such a hugely expensive scheme. I have not met anyone among my residents of Great Yarmouth who wants the scheme, although I appreciate that some Opposition Members might have a different view. It is an expensive folly, and I cannot see why we should get involved in something that we simply cannot afford.

From the perspective of what is good for my residents and what they want, it is clear that they do not want identity cards. Given also that we cannot afford them, why would we consider them? Is it a question of civil liberties? Earlier, one hon. Member mentioned that other countries have identity cards, but is their use forced on those countries' populations? What would be the benefit for us?

I do not know about other Members of this House, but I have a passport. I also have utility bills and a photocard driving licence. I have credit cards—unfortunately!—and lots of other proofs of identity. I know so many people who also have lots of different proofs that I started to wonder why I would want an identity card as well. What benefit would I get from having one? Again, I cannot think of any.

Would having identity cards make us safer and protect us against crime and terrorism? Even the now shadow Home Secretary and his predecessors—Charles Clarke among them, I think—have admitted that the identity card scheme would not do much to prevent terrorism. Indeed, the shadow Home Secretary himself said a while ago that he regretted the emphasis that had been put on the card's usefulness in that regard.

The reason for that, as was noted earlier this debate, is that the card was supposed to be voluntary. Why would a person considering committing any sort of crime, such as fraud or an act of terrorism, go and get an identity card voluntarily? That is beyond me but, as a new Member, I am sure that Opposition Members will enlighten me in the hours to come, but I cannot see the benefit.

Certainly, I cannot see that having an identity card would be the first thing on the mind of a person looking to commit a major fraud or act of terrorism. I do not believe that such a person would think, "I can't commit this crime because I have an identity card and the authorities might find out who I am." At the same time, we have also heard that modern electronics such as those involved in computers, printing and so on are so advanced that it would not be difficult for anyone who is criminally minded to find a way around the system, falsify the documents and create a false identity card. That would give us another problem and a real issue to deal with, because a black market would thus be created whereby people make fraudulent documents to sell to people who want to commit other crimes.

Some of my local residents in Great Yarmouth have concerns about antisocial behaviour. Our local police are working hard to improve the situation and some of their thinking outside the box has done a phenomenal job. They have also cracked down on under-age drinking. We all want that to happen, and we have heard much talk of that across the House and in the press over the past few months. A substantial black market in creating false identity cards would receive a hugely beneficial financial boost from under-age drinkers who want to obtain such cards in order to buy alcohol. That shows that we could be walking a hugely dangerous tightrope in future, and I have not yet got too far into dealing

with worries about a Government who have a database that contains 50 pieces of information about everyone in the country.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Given that the hon. Gentleman said that he has a passport—I presume that he also has a driving licence—what information that would be kept on his ID card is he so worried about the state holding?

Brandon Lewis: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's question, because it gives me the opportunity to deal with that matter. As I said, I do have a driving licence—a photocard version—and a passport. That is one reason why I do not need another piece of identification to prove who I am. I say that despite the favourite independent organisation of all of us explaining to me recently over the phone that it could not answer a question until it had confirmed who I was—it does that by a return call. That happened two weeks ago, but I have not yet heard from that organisation—perhaps it will pick me up on the cameras tonight and realise who I am.

My concern relates to the holding of that database. Hon. Members should be frank about the fact that over the past few years a number of Government bodies and other organisations have lost data and had data corrupted. The idea of that kind of data being held does worry people. My core point is that my residents have never asked or begged me for any of this and I do not think that they particularly want to waste such an amount of money on ID cards, leaving aside the fact that they would then have to pay for the pleasure of having a card at a time when they are under economic pressure.

There are other ways of helping people, particularly youths, who might want to have an identity card to make things easier for them. The police force in Great Yarmouth has come up with a fantastic scheme, which I shall be inviting my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary or one of her Ministers to come to see some time this year—I hope that one of them will visit. The police are working on a voluntary scheme, which is sponsored by a commercial organisation, to allow young people to have a local identity card that they can use in various outlets and gain points, as happens with supermarket reward cards. Those young people are, thus, encouraged to go to school and to improve their behaviour because they can gain points that give them access to do other things. That carrot is being used, as well as the stick.

That local scheme is not about holding identity details; it simply allows those young people to have a reward card. Such an approach could play a large part in moving things forward. It is a small-scale local scheme, worked out by local people and our local police force, to deliver a positive local end product. It is not a great big national scheme of huge expense that creates more bureaucracy and involves another set of forms that those who decide voluntarily to take it up have to fill in, get back and go through, and all so that we all have another card in our pocket.

I simply do not see the benefit of the identity card. I can see huge risks ahead of it in terms of the data, the black economy and encouraging crime, rather than discouraging it. I cannot see how the card would be a good investment of getting on for £4.5 billion-worth of our money. Therefore, I am delighted that this Bill is being introduced to abolish it and I will give the Bill my full support.

6.14 pm

Matthew Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con): As this is the second time I have had the honour to speak in the Chamber this week, I am very grateful to you for calling me, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am particularly grateful to be able to speak in this debate to take part in rejecting the Identity Cards Act 2006 and the proposal for identity cards introduced by the previous Administration. Many Government Members have spoken on this issue and it is telling that the Opposition Benches are entirely empty of people prepared to defend what the previous Government had planned to introduce. *[Interruption.]* I look forward to seeing which way the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) votes in the Lobby.

There are three solid reasons to support this Bill to abolish the prospect of identity cards. Those reasons tell us a lot about the Government formed in the past month and have given me great hope regarding their strength and underlying motives for the years to come. The first reason, which has been touched on, is the cost of the ID card scheme. The official estimate of £800 million was bad enough, but independent experts came up with another estimate of £20 billion for the total cost of the scheme. Given the current state of extremely tight national finances, the idea of spending £800 million on such an unnecessary scheme is something that we should reject.

What is more, I clearly remember the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) trying to argue, when we proposed abolishing ID cards to save money, that that would not save money because the cost would be borne entirely by those forced to take up the cards. That says an awful lot about the attitude of anyone who could say that, because whether the cost would have been £800 million to the Exchequer or £30 to everyone in the country, it would eventually have been borne by the same people—the taxpayers. It was greatly to disregard the taxpayer to put forward a scheme that clearly was not going to work, as several of my hon. Friends pointed out, with so little regard to its cost.

The second reason why it is such good news that the scheme is being abolished is the risk involved. I clearly remember the then Chancellor of the Exchequer standing at the Dispatch Box about three and a half years ago and admitting to the whole country, with his hands shaking and his papers quivering, that two data discs containing information and bank account details for every single child in the country had been lost. I also remember the national outrage that followed. That demonstrated—I hope that we do not have to demonstrate it again—the danger of keeping sensitive and private information all on one huge database in this age when it is so easy to transfer information electronically. That danger, and the contingent liability that comes with holding that information is a great risk not only in an extremely practical sense in that it can be lost—we all know that data discs can be lost and get into the hands of national newspapers—but because holding it in one place can be extremely risky.

The final and most exciting reason why this is the first Bill that the new coalition Government have introduced is that it reveals the faith in human nature of the Government who have put it forward. The fact that some think that the way to solve crime and to regulate our society better is to have an enormous state database and to force everybody to hold a card in their pocket is

[Matthew Hancock]

extremely revealing of the view of human behaviour held by those wanting to make such laws. We must understand that people are all individuals and are all different, and that society is best organised by the people in it coming together rather than by the people at the top telling them what to do. That is an extremely strong principle that we on the Government side hold dear. That is demonstrated in the fact that the rejection of the Identity Cards Act is the very first Bill being debated under this Government. On those bases alone, I should be in favour of a Bill to reject identity cards. The situation is best summed up by the now shadow Chancellor, who obviously understands the costs. I rest my case on a statement he made before—for some reason—he changed his mind. He said:

"I don't want my whole life to be reduced to a magnetic strip on a plastic card."

I could not put it better myself. I commend the Bill to the House.

6.20 pm

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Madam Deputy Speaker. Many congratulations on your elevation to that position.

Unlike me, Madam Deputy Speaker, you have not had the privilege of sitting through the entire debate. We have had the opportunity to hear from a number of colleagues who made their maiden speeches. First, the hon. Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinenage) told us that it was not Gosport but God's Port. She told us that Portsmouth is close to Gosport, but as someone who grew up in Portsmouth and went back and forth on the Gosport ferry on Saturday afternoons, when my mother made sure she got us out of the house for recreation, I have fond memories of Gosport from a slightly different perspective.

The hon. Lady spoke in glowing terms of her constituency and spoke up strongly for the future of HMS Sultan, urging her Government to think carefully about the impact of their decision on her constituents. Like many speakers, she mentioned identity cards and I shall turn to that issue when I have congratulated other speakers on their comments.

The hon. Lady was followed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Mr Blunkett), who was not making his maiden speech. He was Home Secretary when the Identity Cards Bill was first published and he eloquently explained some of the original thinking behind identity cards. He highlighted the fact that the issues the identity card system was set up to deal with will not go away. He particularly bemoaned the passing of the second generation of biometric passports, which I shall touch on later in my comments.

We then heard from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (John Hemming). I would say that his criticisms applied equally to driving licences. On the basis of his comments, perhaps the Government's next policy will be to abolish them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) made his maiden speech, but with his background and experience we can look forward to many good and knowledgeable speeches from him. He gave a spirited history of his constituency and of municipal investment in Birmingham. He spoke of the benefits of Labour investment, particularly in the decent homes programme. He also highlighted the many problems that remain to be tackled in his constituency, especially unemployment and the lack of affordable family housing. There is no doubt that in him we have a strong champion for Erdington in the Chamber.

The hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) spoke movingly about manufacturing in his constituency and his desire to see it improve. Unbeknown to me, Gloucester is famous for making health and aerospace products, but particularly for making ice cream. We look forward to hearing more from him. He has a strong commitment to his constituency—even the shirt on his back was made by his constituents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) is a fellow Co-operative Member of Parliament. She warmly acknowledged the work of Martyn Jones, particularly his success in ensuring that money from dormant bank accounts went to good causes. Her thoughtful and moving description of life in Clwyd now and in the past will remain with me. We look forward to many eloquent speeches from her.

The hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) rightly paid tribute to Rudi Vis. On the Labour Benches, we join the hon. Gentleman in acknowledging Rudi's contribution to the Chamber. We pass our condolences to his family.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of another predecessor in the seat—Baroness Thatcher—about whom we may not share the same level of agreement. He then spoke about identity cards. It was heartening that, despite the fact that Members were making maiden speeches, several of them commented on identity cards.

We then heard an amusing speech from the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart). If I were being mean, I could talk about cheap oratory, but he talked about identity cards as being anti-civil liberties. Were he in his seat, I would ask him if he has a passport and I will touch on that. He talked about Emu and Rod Hull. I was not sure whether we were hearing from Emu or Rod Hull, but we had a good time listening nevertheless.

We heard from the hon. Member for Keighley (Kris Hopkins), who was generous in his tribute to Ann Cryer, his immediate predecessor in the seat, and he rightly highlighted her work on tackling the abuse of young women by men and on forced marriages. He also talked about the many illustrious sons of Oakworth, his home village.

We then heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), who we thought at a number of points was about to burst into song, as he quoted from "Blaydon Races" and gave a tour of the international venues in his constituency. I have no doubt that as we go to many conferences over the years, we will remember that speech.

The hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) is the first Conservative to represent the town of Rothwell, a constituency that apparently has had 10 boundary changes. Whether there is more to come from the Government and whether the seat will stay in anything like the same form are matters for a future debate.

We then heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), who rightly highlighted the muddle and inconsistency of Government policy on the issue. I will touch on some of the other points that he raised.

The hon. Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams) spoke in glowing terms about his constituency and paid warm tribute to his predecessor, John Grogan. He wondered whether his grandfather, a miner, would have been proud of his grandson becoming a Conservative MP. I am sure he would, Madam Deputy Speaker, and we look forward to hearing more from the hon. Gentleman.

We then heard a very powerful speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero). She spoke warmly about her predecessor Geoff Hoon, a former Defence Secretary and Chief Whip. She spoke about literacy and the sporting tradition in her constituency and she was proud—quite rightly—to be the first woman to represent Ashfield. She spoke movingly of a real sense of community in her constituency and about the legacy of the mining traditions.

We then heard from the hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert), although this was not a maiden speech. It is heartening that a number of new Members are already contributing fully to debate in this House. He spoke quite a bit about the 1950s. It is worth saying that, in terms of identity cards, the 1950s were quite a long time ago. We are talking today about a very different programme that was proposed by the last Government and is being opposed by this Government. We had a number of history lessons on that but the identity card system was rather different from now, as is—I would say to the hon. Gentleman—this place is from academia. Academic debate is all very well but government, in which he now plays a part, has to deal with practical realities. We wait to see how the Government will cope with those realities on this issue and others.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) helpfully reminded us of previous parliamentary scrutiny of identity cards, a number of points from which were taken on board by the last Government as they developed the policy over time.

We then heard from the hon. Member for South Swindon (Mr Buckland), which took me back to one of my first public meetings on the issue. He opposes ID cards on the basis that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I suggest that the Government would do very little if it took that to its ultimate extreme. I went to South Swindon in my early days as Minister responsible for identity cards and met NO2ID. After we entered the room and found that, seemingly, there was nobody there to oppose ID cards, we looked out and realised that the three or four people outside were the demo. As a result of that meeting, the local newspaper—the redoubtable *Swindon Advertiser*—stopped carrying quite so many letters from that organisation. Members have praised NO2ID today; it was relatively small in number, but it was effective, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough acknowledged.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) spoke movingly about the sort of freedoms that her constituents expect, including the freedom to live peacefully in their community. She felt that ID fraud was an important issue to be tackled, and that it was something that her constituents wanted to see tackled. That was one of the reasons why she has been such a strong supporter of and advocate for ID cards over the years. She is right that there is a demand still, and there will be greater demand in the future for the improved personal security that ID cards represent.

Let me make it clear to the House that we have not abandoned the policy of using fingerprints or having a proper database to back that up. The policy of our Government was clear and remains so. However, we have to recognise the reality that we did not win the general election—nor did the Conservatives, but with their friends the Liberal Democrats, they form the Government. We recognise that and the will of the people. In opposition, although we will attack, we also need to recognise when the Government have put forward a view and want to get that through. Sometimes we will not oppose just for the sake of it. I will return to some of the issues later.

We heard from the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) largely what we would expect to hear from him. He is giving lessons to many new Members. The hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab) spoke about the state being accountable to the citizen. We all agree with that, though perhaps not about the ways in which we would achieve it. The hon. Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke) spoke about trafficking, where I would counter that fingerprints make a difference. In that regard, we may be throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr Shepherd) gave an eloquent history lesson about civil liberties, as he sees them, and ID cards over the years. We then heard from the hon. Members for Northampton North (Michael Ellis), for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis) and for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock).

It has been interesting to listen to a debate dominated by newer Members who spoke eloquently and with enthusiasm. However, it is easy to make a speech from the Back Benches with energy and enthusiasm, but as those on the Government Front Bench, the Home Secretary and her colleagues will learn—or, in many cases, do not need to learn—the challenges of being in government are quite different. They have to examine the facts in detail and consider the problems of national security that they must deal with.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): When the ID card was first launched last year, does the hon. Lady recall that at the launch in the north-west, the Minister forgot her own ID card? If she could forget, what chance would the rest of us lesser mortals have had in the brave new world of ID cards?

Meg Hillier: That rather proves my point. The law as it stood and still stands is that no one is required to carry their national identity card. [Hon. Members: "What is the point?"] The chorus of approval for that comment from a sedentary position suggests, perhaps, that the Government may be proposing a compulsory scheme. It is important to remember that as the law still stands, there was never a requirement to carry the card. It is easy to make cheap debating points, but that was an important part of the scheme. Like previous Home Secretaries and the most recent Home Secretary, I did not want to see a card demanded of people. That was never in the Act and would never be a requirement.

[Meg Hillier]

Section 14 explicitly ruled out the possibility that anyone would have to show a card to access any public service. It was important that we won the trust of the public and let them buy into the scheme if they wished, so that they could see for themselves the benefit. The British passport is not a compulsory document, yet eight out of 10 British citizens choose to have one, and it has an important resonance and role.

There were three main reasons or broad themes for introducing identity cards. It is understandable that many Members will think that there were mixed messages. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough said, that is a fair point. It seemed at different times that there were different reasons. In fact, if one goes back and reads the speeches made on two attempts to give the Bill a Second Reading—a general election interrupted—by the former Member for Norwich, South, Charles Clarke, who was then Home Secretary, terrorism was not mooted as the main reason for identity cards, but because of the events of 11 September, that question was often posed in the media. The debate was often hyped in that way.

Protecting the public was one of the reasons for introducing identity cards. It allowed people the option of locking their identity firmly to their fingerprint and thereby helped to reduce the risk of ID fraud for those who chose to take up the option, as I did and as my colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench did.

Mr Blunkett: As I said earlier, my hon. Friend deserves great credit for her work on this matter. Congratulations, by the way, Madam Deputy Speaker.

From the end of 2001, we were constantly asked about terrorism and whether an identity card of some description would help, and we constantly indicated that that was not the prime concern. However, MI5 made it explicit and put on the record that more than one third of those people who were known to be associated with international terrorism used false and multiple identities. MI5 would have been helped in its struggle to protect us by having a system that was verifiable and authenticable in a way that the existing system is not.

Meg Hillier: I thank my right hon. Friend who, from his own, special perspective, proves my point exactly.

There was a second point, convenience, which was a key contributor. Eight out of 10 people already have a passport, but we were keen to improve its security, and the little plastic card was an additional convenience factor and something that those who were keen to have one very much took up. They wanted an easy, convenient thing that one could slip in one's wallet and, yes, forget. Perhaps some hon. Members have more organised lives than mine, but one would not normally carry around one's passport. People indicated that they were keen on the convenience of the plastic card. It was one thing that made the card popular with those who chose to take it on.

The third main issue is that the card was a travel document within Europe. Indeed, for £30, it was not only a travel document, but a passport-plus, because it allowed travel, plus that more secure form of ID to which I have referred. For the four out of five British citizens who have passports, that is fine, but there was also an issue about those who do not.

I do not have time to deal with all the nonsense, to be frank, that came out in today's debate, but there was some discussion about a huge Government Big Brother database being built like no other. I am tempted to ask how many hon. Members present have a British passport, and what on earth they think happens to the data that they hand over when they receive one, because that information is held on a database. It has been held on a database ever since passports were introduced, and I recommend hon. Members visit the database records in Peterborough, where they will see paper records from 1916, microfiche records and more up-to-date records. Of course, if one has a safe and secure passport, and one wants it to become a proper document that makes British citizens first-class citizens in the world, one needs a back-up database; and we proposed putting fingerprints on passports, so it was important to ensure that the database was more secure.

That is why we proposed three databases that could not be downloaded or looked up. In time, with a reader machine, as many new hon. Members may not be aware, one could have taken the card and—by checking against the register and the database, with no information going to the person to whom one was proving one's identity—just proved one's identity. There would have been no need for bits of paper going to a back room to be photocopied and possibly stolen, and no need for bills in different names, which is a challenge for many people. There would have been just one card, involving just the individual and their fingerprint. That would have put the citizen in control of their data. That was our vision, and it is still the vision of this Opposition.

So, the database already exists. My question to the Minister, who is now responsible for passports, because they have been thrown into the mix with immigration even though they used to have their own Minister, is what will happen to the passport database and to the passport? If we do not introduce fingerprints on to passports, we risk British citizens becoming second-class citizens in the world. They will have to pay for visas as countries demand more security, and we also risk having a much less secure document. The Government use the curious phrase,

"halting second generation biometric passports",

which are those with fingerprints, so will the Minister clarify that?

There is Tory muddle on this issue, and I have some further questions. Is the hon. Gentleman in favour of fingerprints in general? *[Interruption.]* Clearly, many hon. Members want to give me their fingerprints. Very nice. We have foreign national identity cards, and people who come to this country provide their fingerprint for inclusion on that database, which was going to be part of the same database. People applying for visas abroad have their fingerprints taken before they arrive in the UK—an important security measure that I hope that the Minister, with his immigration hat on, agrees with. If the Government are in favour of fingerprints in those cases, then why not for British citizens too? Why are British citizens being denied this right?

The Government are also in a muddle on costs and savings. Cards would have been funded by fees. If someone paid £30, they got a card; if they did not pay £30, they did not. That seems a fair-minded transaction that did not involve lots of money from the general taxpayer. Yes, there were set-up costs, which would have been

recouped, but the £4.75 billion total cost was paid for not out of taxation but out of fees over a 10-year period. No cards, no fees—and no money to spend on other things.

Perhaps the Prime Minister should be told this, because in September 2007, in an online question and answer session with *The Daily Telegraph*, he said:

"A future Conservative Government will...Scrap the ID card scheme, saving £255.4 million in the first three years."

Where is that number now? It seems to have shrunk to £84 million. Worryingly for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Prime Minister went on to say that they would use those savings to provide extra prison places, so that is another Government policy gone.

Let me quickly explain who will lose out through this. Current cardholders will lose out, and it is mean-spirited of this Government not to compensate them. Sending out two letters to cardholders will cost at least as much as it would to give them a credit for a passport. Moreover, the convenience factor has gone.

This Bill is a symbolic gesture, as the Home Secretary said. The Government have not had time to look at the detail and the consequences. It is ill thought out and mean-spirited, and it has a worrying disregard for the security of the passport. I really do hope that the Minister has some proper answers as he risks the safety of the British public.

6.41 pm

The Minister for Immigration (Damian Green): It is a delight, Madam Deputy Speaker, to see you in the Chair, which I am sure you will adorn for years to come.

For some of us, this debate is an exciting occasion. Those of us who have campaigned against the ID card scheme since the day it was introduced by the previous Government regard it as not just a duty but a pleasure to be able to lay it to rest. On a personal note, in the 13 years that my party spent in opposition, I rebelled only once against a three-line Whip, and that was to vote against ID cards, so it is a particular joy to be at the Government Dispatch Box to get rid of them. I advise Labour Members, particular new ones, that for Opposition Members occasionally to rebel against their Front Benchers can be very rewarding. Let me also say to my own hon. Friends that for Government Back Benchers to do the same thing is completely reprehensible.

Scrapping the ID card scheme shows the clear intent of the coalition Government to roll back the intrusion of the state and to return personal freedom and control to the individual citizen. This Bill is a major step on that road. Bringing the Bill before the House at such an early stage of the new Government signifies the importance that we place on creating a free society and on cutting unnecessary expenditure. The Bill is also about trust. It is about the people having trust in the Government to know when it is necessary and appropriate for the state to hold and use personal data, and it is about the Government placing their trust in the common-sense and responsible attitude of the people. The previous Government's ID cards scheme and the national identity register, which lay at its heart and which was its most reprehensible part, failed on both counts.

The indiscriminate collection, use and storage of vast amounts of biographical and biometric data belonging to innocent people is not a role for the state. People do not want the state keeping information on the basis that in some far-off and speculative circumstance it may be of benefit. The lack of public trust in the scheme was reflected in the very low numbers coming forward to buy the cards. I suspect that that also reflects—the shadow Home Secretary may reflect on this—the knowledge that a new Government would drop the scheme.

Meg Hillier *rose—*

Damian Green: I am afraid that the hon. Lady did not leave me enough time to give way to her, as she overran her time.

Let me start with what the shadow Home Secretary said. He gave a completely bravura performance. It was entertaining and funny, and it was particularly good from someone whose heart, I felt, was not really in it. I do not believe that he is a fully paid-up member of the authoritarian tendency on the Labour Benches. The fact that his speech was so good disguised the central incoherence in it. He said that he wanted ID cards to be voluntary, and his speech also contained a long, passionate passage about how they would be effective in the fight against terrorism. He can either hold the view that we need compulsory ID cards to fight terrorism, or he can hold the view that we need voluntary ID cards, but he cannot hold both at once. He knows as well as I do that a voluntary card system would have no effect on terrorists, criminals or benefit fraudsters, who would not sign up to a voluntary scheme. That was the central incoherence in his speech.

May I correct one example that the right hon. Gentleman gave? He said that France had a national identity database. It does indeed have a national identity card scheme, but the cards are issued, and the accompanying register held, at local level. There is no single French identity database, so he was wrong about that.

Like others, I pay tribute to the many good speeches that we have heard. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr Shepherd) that it was a privilege to hear his magnificent speech in favour of freedom and Parliament's essential role in defending it. I now move on to the many hon. Members on both sides of the House who made their maiden speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinenage) gave a stirring defence of naval tradition of which I believe Lord Palmerston, one of her distinguished predecessors, would have been proud. It was a delight to hear the maiden speeches of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), who will clearly be a strong champion for Birmingham, and of my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), who gave us a fascinating and educational tour ranging from Piers Gaveston to Harry Potter by way of Beatrix Potter.

I sympathise with the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones), who said that the size of her constituency was 240 square miles. Until a recent boundary review mine covered 220 square miles, so I know that she has a lot of travelling to do over the next few years. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) and the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) in using this occasion to pay tribute to Rudi Vis, who died last week and was a friend to many of us on both sides of the House.

[Damian Green]

I was delighted to learn from my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Kris Hopkins) that the village of Oakworth is the Notting Hill of the north in providing a tightly knit group of massive political talent. I was also educated by hearing from the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) that the most famous running of the Blaydon races was on today's date, 9 June; I will store that fact away. Similarly, I learned from my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) that Elmet was the last Celtic kingdom in this country—another fascinating fact for everyone. My hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams) told us that he is the grandson of a miner. He might not know that the Government Chief Whip was a miner himself, so if I were him I would concentrate on emphasising that fact. It could be career-enhancing.

To stay with mining, it was a delight to see the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) make her maiden speech. I was delighted to hear that the big society is clearly alive and well in Ashfield. Many of us will have woken up with her on many occasions when she was on GMTV, and it is a great privilege to have her here in the House in person.

There were also speeches from those who were recently elected but were not making their maiden speeches. It was a particular delight to hear from my hon. Friends the Members for South Swindon (Mr Buckland) and for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab), both of whom are clearly great new fighters in the House for liberty and freedom. My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke) gave a fascinating speech, and I can assure him that the current Home Office Ministers will not try to strong-arm their staff into buying identity cards.

I wish to address some of the specific points that the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch and other hon. Members made. I was slightly shocked to hear the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Mr Blunkett) say that the British passport was easy to forge. As a former Home Secretary, he knows that it is actually a secure, high-integrity document and very difficult to counterfeit or forge. I do not believe that when he was Home Secretary he told the House or anyone else that it was easy to forge.

In response to an intervention, the shadow Home Secretary made a point about the biometric residence permit and minority communities. It is clearly nonsense to suggest that the permit, which has to be held by people who are living in this country because they want to work here, could in some way be used to revive the sus laws. He knows as well as I do that no one is required to carry it with them at any time. Frankly, it is an insult to the police to suggest that they would behave like that.

Many interesting points were made by the former Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz). In particular, he speculated on how we might destroy the national identity register when the time comes. I suspect that the Home Secretary, other ministerial colleagues and I might bend our minds to find the best and most dramatic way of striking that blow for freedom.

The right hon. Gentleman asked a number of detailed questions, including one about the number of cards that had been issued. As of 27 May 2010, the number of ID cards issued was 14,670. He also asked what is happening now and whether people can still apply for a card, and therefore waste £30. We have adopted a common-sense approach to that, so staff at the Identity and Passport Service inform any potential applicants that it is the Government's stated intention to scrap ID cards, and then ask them whether, in that light, they want to reconsider going ahead with the application. The Government have taken a common-sense attitude, but I have heard some anecdotal evidence that some journalists are desperate to be the last person to buy an identity card so that they can write an article about it. I am not sure whether any normal citizens, as it were, are continuing to apply.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about biometric residence permits. Since 25 November 2008 the UK Border Agency has issued 188,000 residency permits. The attempt by the previous Government to rebadge those as ID cards for foreign nationals, in an attempt to make more acceptable a scheme that was clearly unacceptable to the British people, was pretty disingenuous, and it clearly failed.

The right hon. Gentleman asked what happens when people have applied but not yet received a card. When a person has made an application but payment has not been made, they are informed of the coalition Government's policy and the introduction of the Bill, because we want to save their time and money, and we request that they hold off their application pending the outcome of parliamentary consideration of the Bill.

The decision to scrap the scheme is mainly about stopping the state snooping into the lives of innocent people. We would have introduced the measure even if we were not saving significant sums of money by doing so, but a lot has been said in the debate about the expense. Even though this measure is a matter of principle, it is a happy coincidence that in putting our principle of freedom into practice, we are saving the British people hundreds of millions of pounds. The previous Government planned to spend £835 million on ID cards over the next 10 years, even after they had stripped out the costs that they were loading on to the IPS.

The previous Government claimed, as shadow Ministers have today, that the whole scheme would cost nothing, because the money would be recovered from charges. I have got news for those former Ministers: it is the British people who would have paid those charges. Whether the Government take money from people as a charge or a tax, that is still taking away people's money. By that measure, this Government are leaving in the pockets of the British people £835 million that the previous Government would have extracted for their terrible scheme.

Mr Blunkett: I would accept the Minister's point if he were announcing this evening that there will be a substantial cut in both the projected and the existing charge for the passport. Is he proposing that?

Damian Green: No, because I am talking about the ID card scheme, which is a separate scheme. The former Home Secretary—like all the other former Home Secretaries and former Home Office Ministers—seems not to get the point that if we charge someone for something they have to give us some money, and their money is taken away. What makes it worse is that the previous Home

Secretary, at a press conference, memorably called this level of saving "diddly squat". The British people will disagree that it is not worth saving £835 million of their money. *[Interruption.]* Labour Front-Bench Members are chuntering from a sedentary position, "You're not saving it." No we are not: British citizens, the British people, are saving it. I find it extraordinary that they cannot understand that if somebody has to write a cheque to the Government, they lose that money and the Government get it. They do not regard that as a saving, but other people do.

I shall deal with some of the other caveats that have been raised. Liberty, a pressure group for which I have a very high regard, talks about the biometric residence permit, and is worried that we will continue with it as an ID card for foreign nationals. I hope that I have laid that fear to rest: it is a completely different scheme under a completely different law. It is not mentioned in this Bill because it is covered under EU, not British, law.

May I say what a pleasure it is to be a Home Office Minister standing at the Dispatch Box and reading a Liberty brief on a Government proposal that it describes as "hugely welcome"? This is a first, certainly in recent years. The hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) made the good point that all the major parties in the House have a spectrum, with some at the authoritarian end and others at the civil liberties end. I can assure him that the civil libertarian end is now in the ascendance in the Conservative party, and given his long, honourable and principled opposition to ID cards, I wish him success in driving out the authoritarian tendency that took over the Labour party under the previous Government.

It is also clear that there are some civil libertarians new to the House in other parties as well. I welcome the hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert), who made the point that he is not happy with the wording of clause 10—a point that I dare say we can, and should, take up in Committee. I know that he is very knowledgeable about such matters. I am delighted to have Liberty's support on this Bill, but I am also pleased to join others, on both sides of the House, who have paid tribute to NO2ID—a campaign whose meetings I have addressed and supported over the past few years—and I am delighted to hear that he was a leading member of it in Cambridge. I will discuss with him the details of the other parts of the Bill reintroducing previous parts of the ID cards Bill that are necessary. I know that others on the Conservative Benches have worries about that too.

Beneath all the arguments about cost, second generation biometrics and biometric residence permits, we have before the House a matter of principle. A functioning national identity register would be the biggest intrusion into the privacy of the British people that the British Government have ever devised. Just because technology has transformed how the Government can use our personal information, it does not mean that a sensible Government will go down that route. In all eras of technology, the principle that the state should serve the citizen, and not vice versa, is a good one, to which Governments should stick.

The bigger the capacity to collect and share information, the greater the danger to privacy and therefore freedom. That is why the Government are acting quickly and decisively. We want to avoid further spending by the taxpayer and to dismantle the scheme at the minimum cost to the public. We want early destruction of the personal data held on the national identity register and of the register itself, and we want to bring an end to the practice of the state gathering data on its people simply because it has the power to do so. Instead, the Government should be held accountable to the people they represent, and should justify their actions in the key areas of personal freedom and liberty. The Bill is a statement of the coalition Government's new approach. It is just the first step in our commitment to rolling back the database state created by Labour and restoring the civil liberties of the British people. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

IDENTITY DOCUMENTS BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Identity Documents Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

2. Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 8 July 2010.

3. The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

4. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

6. Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

7. Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—*(Bill Wiggin.)*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Equitable Life (Portsmouth North)

7 pm

Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con): I offer my good wishes and congratulations to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, in your new role.

In presenting this petition, I pay tribute to Mr. Brian Aitchison, a Portsmouth resident who has done so much to support the victims of Equitable Life's maladministration in his home town and elsewhere.

The petition states:

"The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to uphold the constitutional standing of the Parliamentary Ombudsman by complying in full with the findings and recommendations of her Report upon Equitable Life.

[Penny Mordaunt]

I am very pleased to present the petition, which I hope will ensure a speedy resolution to this grave injustice.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The Petition of residents of the constituency of Portsmouth North in the Hampshire region of the U.K. regarding the Government's response to the Parliamentary Ombudsman's reports on Equitable Life,

Declares that the Petitioners either are or they represent or support members, former members or personal representatives of deceased members of the Equitable Life Assurance Society who have suffered maladministration leading to injustice, as found by the Parliamentary Ombudsman in her report upon Equitable Life, ordered by the House of Commons to be printed on 16 July 2008 and bearing reference number HC 815; and further declares that the Petitioners or those whom they represent or support have suffered regulatory failure on the part of the public bodies responsible from the year 1992 onwards, but have not received compensation for the resulting losses and outrage.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to uphold the constitutional standing of the Parliamentary Ombudsman by complying in full with the findings and recommendations of her Report upon Equitable Life.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.]

[P000833]

Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (Fraud)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Stephen Crabb.)*

7.1 pm

Mr Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): May I, through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, thank Mr Speaker for allowing me this evening's debate. It is pleasure to see you in the Chair on what I think is your first day. I believe that this is the first time that I have addressed the Minister from the Opposition Benches, and I am very pleased to do so. I assure him that it will not be the last time that we will be engaged in these conversations.

From this Adjournment debate on alleged fraud in the Wirral hospital trust, I am looking for three things. First, I am sure that I am not exceptional in the number of constituent cases about alleged fraud that I refer to the relevant authority. In every case I have passed on, whether it be to the Department for Work and Pensions or to the Department of Health, I have never had a satisfactory reply that I could then refer to my constituent. I would not disclose the information, but if I had such a reply, I could say that I had been able to read the papers and assure constituents that they were mistaken in alleging fraud. I could say that a proper investigation had been carried out and we could leave the case there. As I say, however, that has never occurred. One thing I am looking for this evening, then, is for the Government to consider the particular role in which elected representatives sometimes find themselves in handing to the Government alleged cases of fraud, yet never being able satisfactorily to report back to their constituents.

Secondly, I have tried to use the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in order to gain the information that Wirral hospital trust denied me. I was refused on the basis that disclosure of the information would provide me with sensitive personal information such as the name of the person against whom the allegations of fraud were made. However, given that everybody involved in the case knows the name of the doctor, although I have never used it in public, it seems somewhat farcical to use the Freedom of Information Act in this way to prevent my gaining access to reports that have been commissioned.

Thirdly, this saga has been going on for a long time, and I have no intention of letting go of it, so I hope that the Minister might be able to advise me on the next best steps to take to resolve the issue. Through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to remind the House of what happened.

All too long ago, one of my constituents was sitting in the surgery at their doctor's. The doctor was engaged in a telephone conversation with one of his patients, who turned out to be a private patient. During the conversation, for reasons that I cannot possibly explain, the doctor assured the person that they had been treated as an NHS patient although they were being charged as a private patient.

I started to look into the case. I asked both the primary care trust and the hospital trust—Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust—to investigate. I had a meeting with the hospital trust at which the chairman and the senior directors were present, as well as the locally based official who was in charge of

countering fraud in the health service. At that stage the doctor admitted that, as a result of an error, he had put through as NHS patients about 180 patients whom he was charging as private patients, but who were being given tests as NHS patients.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr Field: I will give way in a moment to my good and hon. Friend from a neighbouring constituency.

The doctor admitted that that had been an error in all cases, and repaid money. I asked, through its chairman, whether the trust—on the basis of the core of cases of private patients being fed through the NHS—would examine other procedures in the hospital to establish whether any of those 180-odd patients had had scans or X-rays, and whether the doctor had again forgotten to declare that they were private patients when ticking the forms assuring the NHS that they were, in fact, NHS patients.

Ms Eagle: My right hon. Friend has raised an issue that affects all of us who represent constituents in the Wirral, which is served by the hospital concerned. Does he think that this individual case of fraud involving an individual doctor raises issues about conflicts of interest that may well resonate in other areas of the NHS, and does he agree, on the basis of his experience of this case, that there are general rules that all Members should consider applying more generally throughout the NHS to avoid such financial conflicts of interest?

Mr Field: I strongly agree, and I hope that at some stage the medical profession will give serious consideration to how the interface between the public and private sectors might be policed in the context of health.

As the fraud officer present said that it was quite reasonable to undertake the next stage of the inquiries, I left the meeting, only to find that later the chairman of the hospital trust and her senior executives had said that no such investigation would take place, and that I would not have access to their reports on this case of alleged fraud unless I was prepared to sign a document saying that after reading the information I would never use any of it in public debate. I was not prepared to sign such a gagging clause.

I appealed for access to the documents concerned under the Freedom of Information Act. Because the hospital trust is not known for its efficiency, it applied to block my appeal under the wrong section of the Act. When I appealed to the commissioner, he had to point out to the trust that if it wanted to block my original appeal it would have to use another part of the Act, which of course it then did.

I then appealed to the tribunal, which ruled that I should not have access to the document, or documents, because if I had such access I would gain sensitive personal information to which I was not entitled, such as the name of the person against whom the allegations were being made. As at every stage everyone who was in that room has known the name of the doctor concerned but none of us has made it public, it seems bizarre that it was on those grounds that I was denied access to the counter-fraud report which is alleged to have been undertaken.

Since the attempts to grapple with that individual case of fraud, the same hospital trust has had to repay more than £1 million to what was the primary care trust but is now Wirral Health, because it was found to be fiddling its accident and emergency figures. Quite how that came about and how it was decided that the fraud amounted to £1 million-plus I do not know, but that money has been repaid. I allege that there is a culture of fraud in that hospital trust, which is not being taken seriously by the chairman and the directors of the trust. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

One last point concerns the Freedom of Information Act. I am well aware that the Government have their own legislative programme, but I would be grateful if the Minister would take back the fact that there may be problems in two respects where MPs refer fraud cases to the administration for investigation. One is the one that I touched on at the beginning of my remarks. As elected representatives, we are never put in a position to report back fully to our constituents. Obviously, we deny them any sensitive personal information, but we cannot say that we have read the relevant papers and we would like to be able to assure them that their concerns about fraud are unfounded.

Secondly, I took up the case only because a constituent referred me to a case of alleged fraud. The doctor admits that somehow in 180-odd cases he happened to tick the wrong boxes, claiming the people concerned were NHS patients, rather than private patients. It seems wrong that I am denied access, as the elected representative of an area, to the counter-fraud allegations that have taken place.

There are two issues, and I would be grateful if the Minister reflected on them with his colleagues, although he may wish to comment on them in the debate. The case has dragged on for some time, but as I have said— I know the Minister is convinced of this—I am not going to let it go yet. I would be interested to hear how the Government think that we might take the case forward to a successful conclusion. I wait to hear what the Minister says.

7.12 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Simon Burns): I add my congratulations on your elevation, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is warmly welcomed by me and I imagine by many right hon. and hon. Members.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) on securing the debate on detecting and dealing with fraud in Wirral NHS foundation trust. I know from the research that I have done that he has had a long-standing interest in the case. In certain areas I can appreciate his frustration as a constituency MP seeking to represent the interests of his constituents and to get to the bottom of a problem. Fraud in the NHS is totally unacceptable, but before I move to the specifics of the case that he has raised, I would like to explain the processes and institutions involved in the detection, investigation and prosecution of fraud in the NHS, although I promise to keep it brief.

Fraud and corruption in the NHS is dealt with by the NHS counter-fraud service. Since the NHS anti-fraud initiative began in 1998, counter-fraud service investigations have led to 551 successful prosecutions, with a 96% conviction rate, 773 civil and disciplinary sanctions

[Mr Simon Burns]

and the recovery of more than £59 million in cash. Under "Secretary of State Directions", all NHS bodies nominate a local counter-fraud specialist, who reports to their director of finance and works with counter-fraud service staff.

Because of their independent status, foundation trusts are not, however, bound by Secretary of State directions. Clause 43 and schedule 13 of the standard NHS commissioning contract, under which foundation trusts operate, regulate anti-fraud requirements and mirror those in Secretary of State directions. Local counter-fraud specialist staff investigate allegations or suspicion of fraud. Where fraud is suspected, all appropriate disciplinary, civil and criminal sanctions are sought.

Through a quality assurance programme, the counter-fraud service works to ensure that all NHS organisations apply the highest standards to their anti-fraud work. A self-assessment process, managed by the counter-fraud service, helps NHS organisations identify and improve any areas of weakness. The assessment rated trusts on a scale of 1 to 4, with level 1 indicating that adequate performance had not been met and level 4 demonstrating that the organisation was performing strongly. In 2009, Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust achieved a level 2 rating, indicating that its performance was "adequate". The counter-fraud service is continuing to work with the trust to improve its performance and to ensure that it meets the highest possible standards.

I understand that the right hon. Gentleman has been concerned about this particular case of alleged fraud since 2007, when a constituent anonymously alleged that fraud was being committed by a general practitioner. The allegation was that the GP was using NHS blood service facilities at Arrowe Park hospital for his private patients but not declaring them as such. The case was first referred to the primary care trust by the pathology laboratory manager in January 2005. Following some initial inquiries, the PCT referred it to the trust local counter-fraud specialist in January 2006. The trust began its investigation in March 2006.

I understand that the right hon. Gentleman wrote to the trust's chief executive in March 2007, asking what actions had been taken to investigate such a serious allegation of fraud. The trust explained that an investigation had taken place. The trust's local counter-fraud service was provided via a contract with Deloitte. This is common practice among NHS trusts.

In the report into the case, published in October 2007, the investigation found that while there had been inaccuracies in the documentation, there was insufficient evidence that the GP had intended to defraud the hospital. The GP accepted that he had made mistakes, but refuted any suggestion that he had intended to deceive or mislead the trust. The investigation report concluded that there was insufficient evidence on which to charge and prosecute the GP concerned. The investigation reached this decision partly because of a lack of clear instructions to GPs on how to complete referral forms, and partly because of the potential ambiguities on the forms themselves, such as a lack of a declaration on the form.

I understand that the GP repaid the money to the trust for the work done and that the trust chief executive wrote to the right hon. Gentleman to explain the outcome of the investigation. Separately, between December 2007 and February 2008, the Mersey internal audit agency investigated concerns over the use of NHS services on behalf of private patients. The review found no evidence of fraud.

I know that the right hon. Gentleman has met representatives of the trust and the counter-fraud service to discuss his concern that the investigation was not sufficiently robust. It is vital that hon. Members and the public have full confidence in the ability of the NHS to identify and root out any examples of fraud. So that I may satisfy myself and the right hon. Gentleman—I hope—that the original investigation was indeed sufficiently robust, I will ask the departmental sponsor at the Department of Health in Whitehall for the NHS counter-fraud service to work with the managing director of that service to review this case and report to me directly on their findings. I will then write to the right hon. Gentleman on the matter.

The second issue concerns the right hon. Gentleman's requests for information on the investigation. I understand that on 30 November 2007 the trust offered him a copy of the investigation report subject to a confidentiality agreement, which he rejected. While accepting the good intentions of the trust, this offer was, to my mind, a mistake. While the trust's intention was to be as helpful as possible, it was required to protect the GP under the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

I have noted the right hon. Gentleman's observations about the workings of that legislation vis-à-vis the work of Members of this House in pursuing their constituency duties, and I will certainly give him a commitment that I will pass on his concerns to my relevant ministerial colleague, so that this can be looked at. I make no other promise or commitment on that, but I do give an assurance that it will be passed on to be considered, without any ties as to what the ultimate decision might be.

In January 2008, the right hon. Gentleman submitted a freedom of information request to the trust, asking for information on the investigation. Legal advice was sought by the trust. It was advised that it was legally required not to comply with the right hon. Gentleman's request, as the release of the information in question would have been considered personal and in breach of the legislation that I have just mentioned. However, it was felt appropriate to disclose limited information from the investigation report that dealt with improving trust practices, such as the weaknesses in procedures that had been identified.

I understand that the right hon. Gentleman then sought the assistance of the Information Commissioner's Office on this matter. The commissioner upheld the trust's decision not to provide the GP's sensitive personal data, and advised the trust that it should not take any further steps in relation to the request. Finally, the right hon. Gentleman appealed to the Information Tribunal, which also found that the trust had acted properly on the matter.

I understand that, at that point, the right hon. Gentleman agreed to the trust's original proposal to sign a confidentiality agreement, so that he could see the original report. However, following the decision of the Information Commissioner's Office, the trust was legally

unable to disclose that information. As I said, I feel that it had been a mistake to make that offer to the right hon. Gentleman.

I wholeheartedly share the right hon. Gentleman's concern about any possibility of fraud in the NHS. If there is ever any suspicion of fraud, it must not only be investigated thoroughly, but be seen to be investigated thoroughly. That is why I have asked the responsible Department of Health official, in conjunction with the NHS counter-fraud service, to review this case and the investigations that took place. I hope that that will clearly demonstrate to the right hon. Gentleman that the Government and I take issues of fraud in the NHS very seriously indeed. When it is committed, it must be rooted out. Equally, when an innocent party is accused, they must have every opportunity to clear their name. When the review is complete, I will write to the right hon. Gentleman with its findings. I hope that he will be satisfied with that approach to what has been a long, complex and sometimes perplexing problem.

Question put and agreed to.

7.24 pm

House adjourned.

House of Commons

Thursday 10 June 2010

The House met at half-past Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Garden Development

1. **Zac Goldsmith** (Richmond Park) (Con): If he will bring forward proposals to increase the powers of local authorities to prevent infill and garden development. [1535]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles): Further to the coalition agreement—

Mr Speaker: Order. I think the right hon. Gentleman should have requested a grouping with questions 9 and 15.

Mr Pickles: You are absolutely right, Mr Speaker. I was just so happy to be here. I hope that I do not go on too long—[HON. MEMBERS: "So do we."] Well, I was not thinking of putting it to a vote.

9. **Mr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): If he will bring forward proposals to increase the powers of local authorities to prevent infill and garden development. [1543]

15. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): If he will bring forward proposals to increase the powers of local authorities to prevent infill and garden development. [1550]

Mr Pickles: Further to the coalition agreement, the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), who has responsibilities for decentralisation and planning, gave notice to the House that we are changing planning guidance and that we have taken back gardens out of the definition of brownfield land. In addition, we have removed density requirements. The matter is now for local people to decide.

Zac Goldsmith: I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his welcome return to the Communities and Local Government brief. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister, not only for his recent work in developing the Government's ambitious low-carbon economy programme, but for his long-term battle to give communities the power they need to stand up for themselves against inappropriate development.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for his answer, but will he reassure the House and my constituents that he intends to repeal perverse rules that prevent local councillors from standing up for their constituents—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but I must now cut off the hon. Gentleman. From now on, questions and answers must be briefer.

Mr Pickles: I think I got the gist; I think my hon. Friend was referring to predetermination and I am delighted to inform the House that it is our intention to repeal those regulations. That means we can give local councils the thing that Members of Parliament so desire—that councillors with opinions can actually vote on those opinions.

Mr Speaker: Matthew Offord is not here, so I call Bob Blackman.

Bob Blackman: In Harrow East, the decision to safeguard gardens will be warmly welcomed, but another problem remains: unscrupulous developers whose planning application is turned down by councillors at local level, but who then appeal. What proposals are there to prevent the overturning of local planning decisions on appeal?

Mr Pickles: I understand what my hon. Friend is saying. We are determined to ensure that planning remains local, but of course an applicant's right to appeal against a decision will remain.

Mr Nick Raynsford (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to his new post. What estimate has his Department made of the impact of the potential changes to planning policy implicit in this question and the other changes his Government have announced, given that Savills, the respected commentators on housing, project that on current trends and patterns there will be a cumulative shortfall of more than 1 million homes within five years?

Mr Pickles: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his welcome. It is entirely typical of his courtesy that his was the first letter of congratulation that I received. However, I have to tell him that it seems perverse for the Labour party to be concerned about housing numbers. After all, last year the lowest number of houses was built since 1946. Under Labour, it would appear that more damage was done to the housing industry than the Luftwaffe did.

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State recognise that, stretching back to the time of Herbert Morrison, the green belt is a great Labour achievement? Does he also recognise that the urban densification policy of the past 13 years has protected the green belt and regenerated our cities? Does the policy review announced today put in jeopardy all that good work?

Mr Pickles: I recall hearing our former colleague John Prescott say from this Dispatch Box that the green belt was a great achievement of the Labour party and that it intended to build on it. That indeed seems to have been the case.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I understand fully the concerns about garden grabbing, but I urge the Secretary of State to adopt a careful approach to how he intends to tackle the issue, because some infill is absolutely necessary in urban areas. Can he assure me that planning policy will be flexible enough to assist and not to detract from urban renewal in constituencies such as mine?

Mr Pickles: I very much welcome the hon. Gentleman's support of the coalition's policy, and I thank him for being part of that consensus. He should understand that these matters will now be decided locally, and the Government think that the most sensible people to decide matters of density and particular applications are the local communities that must bear the consequences of those developments.

Financial Propriety Requirements

2. **Lorraine Fullbrook** (South Ribble) (Con): What ministerial directions in respect of an action likely to breach the requirements of financial propriety or regularity were issued to the accounting officer of his Department in the past 12 months. [1536]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill): Although there were no directions in the past 12 months due to propriety and regularity issues, two directions were issued to my Department's accounting officer due to concerns that he had about the value for money of actions proposed by the then Secretary of State: one related to implementing unitary city councils in Exeter and Norwich; the other covered the purchase of Blackpool Leisure Assets. In the interests of transparency, I am today placing copies of both directions in the Library.

Lorraine Fullbrook: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. I am sure that he is aware that the First Division Association—the civil servants' union—has reported that Ministers in the previous Government systematically ignored civil service value-for-money considerations. Can he give us an assurance that this Government will not do the same thing?

Robert Neill: We are fortunate in having able and experienced civil servants at our Department, and we certainly want to listen to their advice. It is worth remembering that that direction not only ignored value-for-money considerations, but contradicted stances taken by the previous Government. We will seek value for money, and we will also seek to be consistent.

Mr John Denham (Southampton, Itchen) (Lab): I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his post. Can we debate Exeter and Norwich when the Local Government Bill comes to this House, although as these somewhat arrogant, high-handed and incompetent new Ministers have already lost a vote on it in the Lords before it even reached its Second Reading, we may never see it?

Does the Minister not understand that public investment through regional development agencies in towns such as Blackpool has been vital for business and jobs and should be in the future? Securing Blackpool tower and the Winter gardens for Blackpool and its millions of visitors was the right thing to do. What the House, the people of Blackpool and its Conservative council want to hear today is a promise from the Minister that he will not allow his colleagues in the coalition to undo the crucial deal that has been done. Will he give that assurance?

Robert Neill: The fact is that the deal is done; the money has been spent. We are not seeking to undo it.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Can the Secretary of State confirm that the new regulations to stop having to build on gardens will also apply to local authority-owned gardens, not just to privately owned gardens—

Mr Speaker: Order. I must very gently tell the hon. Gentleman that that was the subject of Question 1, but we have moved on to Question 2, and we will now move on to Question 3.

Private Rented Housing

3. **Julie Elliott** (Sunderland Central) (Lab): What plans he has for the future regulation of the private rented housing sector. [1537]

The Minister for Housing (Grant Shapps): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. It is important that we strike the right balance between tenants and landlords. The current legislative framework, which I have been looking at closely, does exactly that. We therefore have no plans to take forward the previous Government's ideas about further regulatory measures on this subject.

Julie Elliott: I thank the Minister for that answer. In light of the massive budget cuts announced in the Department, can he assure me that there will be no threat to the measures that the then Government introduced and, indeed, confirm that the Government have no plans to reverse the further powers that Labour has given to councils to introduce local licensing schemes, because in my experience, in my constituency, people want more regulation, not less?

Grant Shapps: In my experience, in my constituency and across the country, people also want a good supply of private rented sector property. Of course, getting that balance right is important. I share the hon. Lady's concern about the extent to which homes in multiple occupation sometimes become a blight on an area. I confirm that we do not plan to overturn the rules that the previous Government introduced, but we will look at them in more detail.

Mr Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): We already face new planning applications for large-scale and inappropriate housing development in and immediately around my constituency. The Secretary of State's letter to local authorities has been helpful, but what further steps should local authorities such as mine take to revise their housing growth figures, which now seem utterly outdated?

Grant Shapps: I thank my hon. Friend for pointing out that many communities feel put upon due to the regional spatial strategies and many other centrally imposed items. We will ensure—

Mr Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is seeking to respond to the question, but it is outwith the terms of that on the Order Paper.

David Wright (Telford) (Lab): What discussions has the Minister held with landlord organisations about possible changes to the capital gains tax regime as it relates to private landlords?

Grant Shapps: That is a matter for the Treasury, but the hon. Gentleman will not have to wait long because the emergency Budget, which has been made necessary by the previous Government's profligacy, will be on 22 June.

Regional Spatial Strategies

4. **Chris Kelly** (Dudley South) (Con): What steps he plans to take to end regional spatial strategies. [1538]

10. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What steps he plans to take to end regional spatial strategies. [1544]

The Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): We committed in the Queen's Speech to abolishing regional strategies. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to all council leaders saying that he expects them to have regard to that as a material planning consideration in any decisions they are currently taking.

Chris Kelly: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and welcome him to his new position. Will he outline how the Government's abolition of regional strategies will impact on the provision of Traveller sites of the kind that we already have in Dudley South?

Greg Clark: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's welcome, and I welcome him to the House. I know that he has always been a vigorous local campaigner.

The point behind abolishing the regional spatial strategies is that we believe that local communities should make decisions locally and should have the ability to put them into effect. It is, of course, important to make provision for Travellers, but such decisions should be taken locally.

John Howell: I welcome the Minister to his post. Will he confirm that, as I set out in our radical planning paper "Open Source Planning", the expectation is that abolishing regional spatial strategies will reinvigorate our planning system and move us away from the historically low level of house building that we have seen, which has so badly failed us?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I half expected to find a note on my desk from the previous Housing Minister apologising for the fact that there were no houses, but he did not get round to writing it.

I am glad that my hon. Friend draws attention to his role in what I think will be an important paper. He wrote in that paper that the present system

"imposes too many one-size-fits-all rules...Tragically, the very idea that development can benefit a community has...become a casualty."

That is the reality of the system that we have been labouring under—literally "Labouring" under. The system does not work in practice or in theory; what kind of bankrupt system is that?

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): May I welcome the abolition of the regional spatial strategies? I referred in the previous Parliament to the system being akin to Soviet-style planning, and it certainly put constraints on the development of housing in my North Durham constituency. However, what will the Minister be doing on guidance and, more importantly, funding to ensure that the housing that is desperately needed in former mining villages in County Durham will be forthcoming?

Greg Clark: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome for our policy, which enjoys a degree of consensus throughout the country, if not among some of his colleagues. It is important to recognise that when things are imposed from the centre, people tend to react against it. We need to provide incentives, including funding, so that the communities that host more housing get some of the funding that they need to provide infrastructure and other things associated with it.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): With regional spatial strategies, did not local authorities at least have the chance to have some say about coming together on big strategic issues? Now, however, we presume that the hefty hand of the central controller at his expansive desk in Whitehall will be making all the decisions centrally.

Greg Clark: I will forgive the hon. Gentleman for that remark, because he has been absent from the House for the past five years, but if a central controller had been operating, they had been doing so from Whitehall under the previous Government. The fact is that we want to allow local communities to co-operate. Co-operation is something that people should do co-operatively, rather than by imposition. Although we will encourage co-operation, we will not tell communities what to do from the centre.

Local Authority Funding

5. **Mr Dominic Raab** (Esher and Walton) (Con): If he will review the extent to which the local authority funding formula accurately measures the funding requirements of local communities. [1539]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill): As my hon. Friend is aware, this is the last year of a three-year settlement. We will consult on our proposals for 2011-12 in due course. We are of course prepared to keep an open mind about options for change in the distribution of formula grant to local authorities.

Mr Raab: I thank the Minister for his response. One ward in Elmbridge has double the national average of child poverty, yet we get back just one third of the national average of funding for local services. Will he

consider the local funding formula as part of the local government finance review to ensure that it is based on a truly objective assessment of local needs?

Robert Neill: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the question. I know that, very swiftly after his election to this House, he was in contact on behalf of his constituents regarding a number of related issues. I assure him that, yes, the Government are committed to a review of the local government finance formula and that, within its scope, we will of course consider the points that he and others have made.

Mr John Denham (Southampton, Itchen) (Lab): The Conservative party was elected on a promise to slash public services this year—the Liberal Democrats must answer for themselves—and huge cuts affecting local government have been announced today. May I ask the Minister why what he has proposed today is so unfair? Why is it that the impoverished northern mill towns, the ex-coalfields and the struggling seaside towns will take the largest share of the cuts? Why is it that the big cities—Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Birmingham—will take the largest cuts? Why is impoverished Newham to have a cut of £4.6 million and wealthy Richmond one of just £900,000?

Robert Neill: I have no intention of taking lectures from a member of a Cabinet that left this country record levels of debt. Unless there are cuts, by 2014 we will be paying more in interest on the debt than we will in council tax, business rates, inheritance tax and stamp duty combined.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr John Denham.

Mr Denham *indicated dissent.*

Mr Speaker: Not on this one. I therefore call Mr Clive Betts.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Regarding today's written statement, does the Minister not accept that local authorities have been at the forefront of making efficiency savings—2% year on year—so to ask for a further 1% part way through the year, on top of the 2% to which they are already committed, will effectively mean cuts in local authority spending part way through the year of about 4% to 5%? Rather than being about efficiency savings, this is surely the first round of the savage cuts for local authorities that Ministers promised us.

Robert Neill: The hon. Gentleman, who is experienced in these matters, well knows the dire financial straits the country is in and the need for all sectors to save money. However, he ought to put that in the context of what we have had to do because of the legacy of his party's Government. We have taken steps to protect formula grant, to un-ring-fence a good deal of grant to give local authorities more financial flexibility and to remove burdens such as the expensive comprehensive area assessment inspection regime.

Mr David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): If the Government cut external funding based specifically on local authorities' levels of deprivation—external funding available to Witney in Oxfordshire at 1.7% but to the city of Sheffield at 18.5%, for example—is it not inevitable that those in greatest need will take the biggest cuts?

Robert Neill: Those in greatest need ultimately bear the burden of paying off the debt which this country has been left—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I know that these are high-octane exchanges, but the House must calm down, because people lower down the Order Paper deserve a chance to get in.

Robert Neill: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman recognises that, if we are to have sustainable, quality local government services, the first thing we have to do is get this country's economic mess sorted out.

Standards Board for England

6. **Dr John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): What steps he plans to take to abolish the Standards Board for England. [1540]

14. **Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): What steps he plans to take to abolish the Standards Board for England. [1548]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Stunell): We shall be abolishing the Standards Board for England. The necessary legislation will be in our localism Bill, announced in the Queen's Speech.

Dr Pugh: I thank the Minister for that answer and welcome him to his position. He brings enormous experience of local government to the post.

We all agree that £10 million could be better spent to better effect, but what rights of appeal will there be if the local process goes wrong or goes amiss, as it sometimes does?

Andrew Stunell: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome. He is right that a safety net is needed, and we are in discussion with our local government colleagues about the most appropriate way of moving forward.

Mr Bone: Is the Minister aware that he is going to become the pin-up boy for every councillor in the country, and receive an enormous amount of fan mail? Will he ensure that the abolition takes place as soon as possible?

Andrew Stunell: I would like to claim that, for my Liberal Democrat colleagues, I already was, but I am happy to be so for others as well.

Around the country, there are councillors of every political persuasion deeply frustrated by the fact that the Standards Board remains a burden and a threat to them. It costs £7.8 million, but it dealt with only 1,000 real complaints last year, which is £7,800 per complaint. The sooner we get rid of it, the better. That will be done on a statutory basis through the decentralisation and localism Bill.

Shorthold Tenancies

7. **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): What his policy is on the provision of shorthold tenancies by local authorities and housing associations. [1541]

The Minister for Housing (Grant Shapps): As our draft manifesto makes clear, we will respect the tenures of social tenants. The vast majority of social tenants have a very secure degree of tenancy.

Lilian Greenwood: Why did the Conservative manifesto commit only to "respect" the rights of social tenants, not to protect them, as the Minister has previously stated?

Grant Shapps: I made it pretty clear that we intend to protect the rights of social tenants. *[Interruption.]* They are already protected, as Members well know. It is important to say that there are a record 1.8 million families languishing on the waiting list—a number that nearly doubled during the 13 years in which Labour was in power. It is important that we respect those rights to tenure as well.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Interviewed in *Roof* magazine last year, the Minister made it clear that he was open to change in security of tenure for new tenants. Will he confirm that new tenants—people in housing need coming off the housing waiting list, as he described—will enjoy the security enjoyed by existing tenants?

Grant Shapps: As I have said, security of tenure is incredibly important, particularly for people in social housing, and we are keen to protect that. There are 1.8 million families languishing on that social housing waiting list, and it is right and proper that we look at the way in which we can reduce that list. It may include looking at tenure for the future.

Homelessness

8. **Paul Maynard** (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve the co-ordination of Government policy on homelessness. [1542]

Mr Speaker: We need a Minister at the Dispatch Box.

The Minister for Housing (Grant Shapps): That will be me then.

The most important thing is that there is an honest street count, but there has not been such a count up to now. We will introduce measures to take street counts into account. The last street count said that there were just 468 people sleeping rough in the entire country: it is nonsense, and we are going to get it sorted.

Paul Maynard: May I welcome my right hon. Friend eventually to the Dispatch Box? We have a fine record in Blackpool of inter-agency working to tackle systemic structural homelessness involving both the council and NHS Blackpool. Will he tell me, as part of his collaborative efforts in government, which Departments he will target and which thematic issues are important in tackling the rough sleeping that he has just described?

Grant Shapps: I will make sure that I am quick in reaching the Dispatch Box, to announce that Ministers across Government will be involved in helping with homelessness: there will be a named Minister in each of the key Departments to ensure that, at long last, there is some form of joined-up government to help to reduce the number of rough sleepers.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to one of the best jobs in government. All of us who are passionate about housing are disappointed that the new Government have downgraded housing and that the Housing Minister no longer attends Cabinet. On homelessness, does he accept that co-ordination is fine, but we need to build more new affordable housing to tackle the problem? Some £230 million of cuts this year is a bad start. When the £6 billion of cuts were first announced, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws), the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, told the House that the Government were

"putting more money than the previous Government did into social housing."—[*Official Report*, 26 May 2010; Vol. 510, c. 160.]

Is that true or false?

Grant Shapps: I welcome my opposite number to my former position. I feel a little bit bad: I have taken both his offices and his car, and I have even got his red tie on today. But I can reassure him that we will do all that we can to undo the mess of the lowest level of house building since 1946, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned. Indeed, if one takes out the war years, it is the lowest since 1924. That is the heart of the problem with house building in this country. Leaving us with a bill—it is highly dubious whether £780 million of it is available to the Government—was not the smartest thing to do, and it means that we are in the position of trying to rescue house building in this country, and, in particular, affordable house building.

Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con): As a significant proportion of those who are long-term homeless are ex-servicemen and women, will the ministerial team also liaise with the Ministry of Defence to ensure that these people are properly supported as they make the transition from service to civilian life?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about that. It is incredibly important, right across Government, from the MOD to the Department of Health and the Department for Education and many other Departments, that there is proper co-ordination between Ministers. It has never been done before at ministerial level; it has always been left to the officials. We will have Ministers in charge of homelessness across the Government, including in the MOD.

Housing Revenue Account

11. **Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): What plans he has for the future of the housing revenue account. [1545]

The Minister for Housing (Grant Shapps): The Government are committed to reviewing the unfair housing revenue account in England, and want a funding system that gives local communities more power and

responsibility. I can therefore announce that I intend to continue with the review that was undertaken by my predecessor, which reports back to me on 6 July.

Jonathan Edwards: Is the Minister aware that Welsh local authorities returned more than £80 million to the Treasury as a consequence of the scheme last year, and that my home local authority, Carmarthenshire county council, which has retained its stock, returned £5.5 million in 2008-09? Does he agree therefore that the scheme does not provide a level playing field between local authorities and housing associations, and that it would be far fairer for moneys to be retained locally to increase investment in public housing, help Welsh local authorities to achieve the Welsh housing quality standards and help to create jobs in the local economy?

Grant Shapps: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that there are numerous problems with how the housing revenue account operates at the moment, in England as well as in Wales. The simplest answer that I can give him is that I agree, and we will continue the review.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Kettering council, on which I serve, collects £12 million a year from its council tenants, £3 million of which is handed straight over to Her Majesty's Treasury. How is that fair, and will the Minister receive a representation from the council on this issue?

Grant Shapps: I would be happy to receive a delegation from the council on the issue. It is absolutely the case that it is not fair. I think that there is cross-party agreement that the housing revenue account has become increasingly unfair over the years. That must be fixed, in the interests not only of transparency and of the tenants within those authorities that are paying in, but of efficiency. I would be very happy to meet my hon. Friend and his colleagues.

Social Housing

12. **John Robertson** (Glasgow North West) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to improve the standard of social housing; and if he will make a statement. [1546]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Stunell): It is an astonishing but sad fact that after 13 years of a Labour Government there is a backlog of £3.2 billion to bring decent homes to all social housing, and that is in the context of the previous Chief Secretary to the Treasury leaving a note saying that he was afraid that there was no money—or, as my brief says, future funding for the decent homes programme will be decided in the context of the Government's spending review.

John Robertson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his inept answer. Could he possibly tell me how he intends to find the money to help social housing? His party stood on a manifesto to try to help people who needed help, unlike the party that he joined in coalition, which did not give a toss about the poor people.

Andrew Stunell: The coalition Government and the agreement make it clear that we have a firm commitment to dealing with social and affordable housing to bring housing up to standard. We have the job of making sure that we can do that in an affordable way while getting Britain back on its feet. The hon. Gentleman's Government caused the problem; we are giving the solutions.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): It is a question not just of the standards of housing but of the legacy. After the last couple of decades of development in social housing, there is a desperate shortage of three and four-bedroomed family houses. There are a lot of families in my constituency and throughout the country who are crammed into one and two-bedroomed houses. It is simply unacceptable. It has an enormous impact on their lives and children's life chances. Will the Government be addressing that as well?

Andrew Stunell: The question is about social housing, and of course my hon. Friend is right that we must have the right mix of accommodation in each local area. One thing that we are making clear is that local areas should take the decision, and that local bids should be made.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): May I start by congratulating the new Minister on being appointed to work in my old office? He has a great team of civil servants, and it was a privilege to work with them. I congratulate also the new Housing Minister on his promotion, but it is a real shame that he, along with the Prime Minister and, this week, the Chancellor, should choose to use their first appearances at the Dispatch Box to give such inaccurate information about the housing pledge that the previous Government announced two years ago. The Housing Minister knows full well that the costs were agreed with the Treasury and would have been met with £340 million from capital under-spends in other Departments and £540 million in greater departmental flexibilities. If that had not been the case, the Government's accounting officer would have prevented us from making the announcement. If that pledge— *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should resume his seat. I think that we have got the thrust of it. We are pretty clear.

Andrew Stunell: Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman is wrong, and, as it will become clear when statements are made in the emergency Budget and elsewhere, we are putting the financial package back together again.

Affordable Housing

13. **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to increase the supply of affordable housing in areas of high demand. [1547]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Stunell): We recognise that there is a continued need for affordable housing, and we remain committed to its provision. When we announced on 24 May the £6.2 billion of savings to tackle the deficit, we made available £170 million to safeguard the delivery of about 4,000 otherwise unfunded social rented homes, starting on site this year and prioritising provision for the most vulnerable. Decisions on future levels of funding for affordable housing will be made in the spending review.

Kerry McCarthy: I thank the Minister for that reply. Given his professed support for social housing, will he explain why the Homes and Communities Agency has put a moratorium on all spending on new council housing, including the site in central Bristol on which work was planned to go ahead?

Andrew Stunell: As the hon. Lady will know, the moratorium is in existence until the emergency Budget is announced, and I cannot go much further than that at this point. However, the reason why there will be an emergency Budget, and the reason why there is a moratorium, is that there is not enough money to complete the programme that was put in train by the Opposition's Front Benchers when they were in government.

Angie Bray (Ealing Central and Acton) (Con): Does the Minister agree that, although the previous Government made lots of pledges, the problem is that they never lived up to them?

Andrew Stunell: Yes.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): Why did Ministers not make an announcement about the first £230 million of cuts to the affordable housing investment programme instead of sneaking them out on the Homes and Communities Agency website? Do they not accept that the hardest-hit areas are the poorest, and that the poorest families will be hit first? Given that the Prime Minister said this week that the Government's cuts will be open, responsible and fair, can the Minister not see that that fails each one of those three tests?

Hon. Members: Just say yes.

Andrew Stunell: I shall not be quite so quick to do so this time. The fact is that we have tried to do our work in a measured and careful way to protect the vulnerable, as the coalition agreement set out. That is what we are about. That is what we are doing.

Regional Spatial Strategies

17. **Tony Baldry** (Banbury) (Con): What timetable he has set for the ending of regional spatial strategies. [1552]

The Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): As I said in my answer a few moments ago, we and, I think, many people in the country regard regional spatial strategies as undemocratic, bypassing local authorities. They are based on artificial regional boundaries and, by imposing on local people, have increased antagonism towards development. In other words, they have not worked.

Tony Baldry: Regional spatial strategies were a stick that was used to beat local authorities, but what will my right hon. and hon. Friends do on incentives? Do Ministers on the Treasury Bench still intend to allow those local authorities that encourage housing applications and grant planning applications for housing to retain the council tax receipts in respect of that new housing for a period, thus giving local councillors and authorities an incentive to bring forward housing schemes and new housing?

Greg Clark: I could not put it any better myself. That is exactly our intention. This shows that if one works with the grain of human nature by, instead of bullying people and telling them what to do, allowing them to share in the success, then—miracle of miracles—we might have people who support development of all kinds in this country.

Affordable Housing

19. **Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): What estimate he has made of the effect on the number of affordable homes of planned reductions in spending under the Kickstart and national affordable housing programmes. [1554]

The Minister for Housing (Grant Shapps): The national fiscal position is severe, and we have had to make some very difficult decisions on savings. That is why on 24 May we announced that the Government would be making £6.2 billion of savings this year. We have estimated that planned savings in the housing programme will reduce the number of affordable houses. That is why we brought forward another £170 million to ensure that 4,000 could be completed.

Mr Speaker: I call Mary Creagh.

Mary Creagh: Thank you, Mr Speaker; it is an honour finally to be called by you. [Hon. Members: "Oh!"]

Mr Speaker: Order. People should not be so unkind. I know that the hon. Lady was not criticising the Chair—she would not do that.

Mary Creagh: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would never dare to criticise you, as you well know.

I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his new role. The residents of the Lupset estate in Wakefield are anxiously scanning the horizon for the sounds of his private plane jetting in to tell them which of their homes are going to survive the cuts to the decent homes standard. We are also very concerned about what calculation is made as regards the impact on the construction sector of the net cut of £60 million in the affordable housing programme. How will that cut affect the 1.8 million families he is so concerned about who are languishing nationally on the council lists?

Mr Speaker: That was three questions, but we will have one answer from the Minister.

Grant Shapps: Those of us on the Government Benches who care about things such as homelessness and affordable housing provision do not need to take lectures from a Government who, during their 13 years in office, produced less affordable housing than the Thatcher and Major Governments. The simple fact is that we want this stuff to go ahead, and that is why the £170 million has been brought forward. The reality is that if one runs the country like the money is never going to run out, one ends up in exactly this position. Rather than blaming us for it, it would be good to look closer to home.

Sunderland Point

20. **David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): What recent discussions his Department has had with Lancashire county council on levels of funding for community services in Sunderland Point, Morecambe. [1555]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill): My Department has had no representations from Lancashire county council in relation to the matter that my hon. Friend raises.

David Morris: Thank you for that answer. *[Interruption.]* Behave yourselves across the Floor there.

Sunderland Point is a community that must be protected at all costs. It is a very historic area of this country, and Lancashire county council should help in any way it possibly can. I hope that the Minister's Department can help accordingly.

Robert Neill: I am conscious of the sensitivities involved in Sunderland Point and the areas to which my hon. Friend refers. Predominantly, the works there are dealt with by the Environment Agency, but Lancashire county council would stand ready to assist as far as it can.

Local Authority Funding

21. **Claire Perry** (Devizes) (Con): What his policy is on changes to the funding formula for local authorities. [1556]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill): As my hon. Friend will know, and as I said in relation to an earlier question, this is the third and final year of a settlement. Yes, we will be consulting in relation to future funding arrangements, and that certainly includes a willingness to consider any options that may be put forward.

Claire Perry: Will the Minister confirm that the plans we set out in our manifesto to make the funding formula more transparent—*[Interruption.]* Excuse me—I would like Opposition Members to listen. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is entitled to be heard, and I want to hear her.

Claire Perry: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will start again.

Will the Minister confirm that the plans to make the funding formula more transparent and independently audited are still intact? That is a matter of great concern in my constituency of Devizes and all the Wiltshire constituencies, because we receive the lowest amount of funding from central Government of any unitary authority.

Robert Neill: I can confirm that the Government remain committed to a review, and we are more than happy to examine the points that are raised.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): The Minister seemed to suggest earlier that the poorest communities would bear the brunt of the cuts. What is he doing to protect the poorest communities, such as those in Halton, from the cuts?

Robert Neill: The important thing that we have done is to protect formula grant, which is the largest single grant paid to local authorities. As I said, we have given local authorities considerably more leeway in how they use those moneys by ring-fencing a significant number of grants and removing significant burdens such as the inspection regime, which is estimated to cost local authorities something in the order of £2 billion a year.

Topical Questions

T1. [1561] **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles): I and my ministerial colleagues have already announced new powers for councils to resist unwanted garden grabbing; the abolition of Labour's cumbersome comprehensive area assessments; the vetoing of a proposed salary package of nearly £250,000 for the chief executive of the Audit Commission; a new era of town hall transparency for councils to be able to show the people of this country the money; the burying of John Prescott's regional spatial strategies and the unwanted regional assemblies; the abolition of the red tape of Labour's home information packs; and the end of Labour's hated bin taxes.

Fiona Mactaggart: I am shocked that in that list, the Secretary of State did not refer to the cuts announcement that he has just made in his written statement. I have just calculated that in his plans, 90% of cuts in the diverse and deprived town of Slough, which I represent, will land on education and children's services and community safety initiatives. If someone is not protected or dies as a result, whose fault will it be, Slough council's or his?

Mr Pickles: If the hon. Lady is complaining about a 0.91% cut, goodness knows what she must have said about Labour, which allocated cuts of £50 billion, and the effect that that would have had on communities. If the hon. Lady wants to make complaints about anybody, she should look to herself.

T3. [1563] **Simon Hughes** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): Will the Secretary of State tell us whether the Government intend soon to go ahead with their policy of giving the power of general competence to local councils, which my colleagues and many councils will warmly welcome?

Mr Pickles: I am very pleased to confirm to my hon. Friend that that is exactly what the Government intend to do, and the matter will be included in the new localism Bill.

Mr John Denham (Southampton, Itchen) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to his post. He and I have known each other since we worked together at the British Youth Council, which will give the House some

idea of how long ago it was. I wish him well in his new role and hope that he does a great deal better in the months ahead than he has in his first month, because has he not failed to defend his Department, meaning that local communities and local services will bear the biggest share of the cuts, and introduced a package of cuts to services and housing that will fall unfairly on the communities with the greatest need? He needs to do better than that. He has failed in his job so far, and he will have to be a great deal more careful in what he does in the future.

Mr Pickles: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his words of welcome. We have indeed known each other for a very long time, but at least he is still recognisable from his photographs from those days, unlike myself. I wish him well in the forthcoming elections to the shadow Cabinet.

The right hon. Gentleman operated an extremely effective burnt earth policy within the Department. He left a legacy in which the cupboard was bare. All that was missing was a note of apology. The cuts that we have had to make have been imposed on us by him. We have managed to ensure that formula grant has not been touched and that no authority will face a revenue cut greater than 2%. That is much better than the £50 billion of unallocated cuts that was the legacy left to our Department.

T4. [1564] **Mr Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): I understand that, notwithstanding the announcement that the Standards Board will be abolished, the big cheeses of that organisation have written to chief executives of local authorities asking them to supply more business in the form of complaints against accountable and elected representatives. Has the Treasury Bench considered making an example of this quango for its impertinence?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Stunell): I have already told the House that the cost of dealing with every successful complaint is approaching £8,000. The hon. Gentleman is right that something needs to be done about that quickly. We have indeed, in the proposals that the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham) was criticising a few moments ago, drawn back on spending by that quango. As soon as legislation permits, we will get rid of it completely.

T2. [1562] **Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State explain to people in Chesterfield, who suffered so badly from unemployment under the last Conservative Government, why one of the first measures that he has taken is to move £160,000 out of the working neighbourhoods fund? That money was being well spent by our council helping unemployed people back into work. Was not the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), right when he said that the poorest people will bear the cost of the cuts under this Conservative Government?

Mr Pickles: The hon. Gentleman's council faces cuts of 1.36%. If his council cannot cope with that, it should ask him why the Labour party spent the country's money without making adequate allocations and why the then Government planned cuts of £50 billion, of which local government's share would have been about £13 billion.

T5. [1565] **Mr Dominic Raab** (Esher and Walton) (Con): The coalition programme for government pledges to incentivise local business growth. Will that involve giving local authorities back a greater share of the tax revenue raised locally from business rates?

The Minister for Housing (Grant Shapps): It is our intention that areas that promote business within their communities should benefit in some way from doing so. The manifesto and coalition agreement make it clear that that is our intention.

T6. [1567] **Tony Lloyd** (Manchester Central) (Lab): Because this Government have deliberately chosen to cut the budget for housing, and that will have an inevitable effect on jobs and training in construction, does the Housing Minister now regret his words in opposition that it would be ridiculous and counter-productive to insist on apprenticeship training in publicly funded housing schemes?

Grant Shapps: The hon. Gentleman knows about the huge deficit—£780 million was promised from other budgets but never existed—and building homes with imaginary money is not possible, so compromises need to be made. We have said that £170 million will go to support 4,000 homes—as the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Andrew Stunell) said—and 3,500 jobs.

T7. [1568] **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): I very much welcome the ending of the regional spatial strategy. My constituents, who are fighting inappropriate proposed developments in Micklethwaite and Menston, would like to know more detail about how the Government's new planning policy may enable them to fight off those developments. Will the Minister visit Shipley and meet local residents to discuss with them how the Government's new planning policy may help them in those particular cases?

The Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): My hon. Friend extends an enticing invitation that I will be delighted to take up, so that I can meet his local community and tell them that they are now free to set community plans in accordance with their interests without any fear that those plans will be revoked by national, unelected officials.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The mantra that it is all down to the last horrible Labour Government that there is no money will not wash if this Government make the poorest people in our country pay. When the Secretary of State took office, he inherited one of the biggest council housing building programmes for 20 years. Will he guarantee that council housing will form part of his future affordable housing strategy?

Grant Shapps: First, after one month, frankly it will still wash; and, secondly, over 13 years, while in government, the Opposition built on average half the level of affordable

housing per year of the previous two Conservative Governments, so we will be proud to put the situation right again.

T8. [1569] **Mr Robert Buckland** (South Swindon) (Con): I apologise for asking this question earlier. On regional spatial strategies, what advice can the Secretary of State give to local authorities such as mine in Swindon about revising housing growth figures that now seem utterly outdated?

Greg Clark: My understanding is that, in the hon. Gentleman's part of the world, the plan has not yet been submitted to the inspectors, so he should be able to go back and tell his councillors that they now have the opportunity to put forward plans that are in keeping with the needs of his area.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Can the Minister give Bolsover council an assurance that the plans concerning the 108 prefabricated Tarran bungalows occupied mainly by elderly people will receive the go-ahead? We already have the plans. There were plans to get rid of 20 in the first tranche, and to get rid of the lot in the future. We received a nice letter from the then Housing Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey). Surely, in a deprived area, this Government will not cut those plans to replace the prefabricated bungalows for elderly people in Bolsover.

Mr Pickles: I am sorry that, after 13 years of a Labour Government, people in the hon. Gentleman's constituency are still living in prefabs—I can recall them from my youth. I do not know about the particular scheme, but I will ensure that he is written to.

Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): I welcome the answers given to questions 1 and 4 earlier. What advice and guidance will be given to local authorities, and particularly the Planning Inspectorate, when dealing with applications prior to the new legislation going through?

Greg Clark: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to the Planning Inspectorate to inform it that the Government's stated policy on such matters is now a material consideration when it reviews applications that have been made and gone to appeal.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): This morning, the Minister for Housing stated that he did not wish to overturn the use classes order changes concerning houses in multiple occupation, but that he would look at them in detail. During the election, he stated that Southampton city council should have all the powers it needed to deal with homes in multiple occupation. It has all the powers it needs as a result of those changes. Is it therefore his intention to water down those changes as a result of looking at them in detail?

Grant Shapps: As I said, I recognise the scale of the problem, and we will ensure that councils in areas such as Southampton maintain those powers. My only concern is to ensure that we do not have a system in place for homes in multiple occupation that is so overarching that it applies to areas where HMO students are not a problem.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): Has the Secretary of State had a chance to estimate the change in the number of unauthorised Traveller sites since Labour came to power in 1997?

Mr Pickles: By a weird coincidence, I happen to have with me the figures for unauthorised sites—because my hon. Friend's question was on the Order Paper. The number of caravans on unauthorised developments has increased from 887 in 1997 to 2,395 in 2010, which is an increase of 170%.

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): How can the Secretary of State reconcile his pre-election commitment to localism with his subsequent ministerial diktats, and why did he snub the Conservative-dominated Local Government Association over his Government's cuts programme?

Mr Pickles: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The first person who came to see me was Dame Margaret Eaton from the LGA. It has been informed throughout the process, and we have a very constructive relationship, not surprisingly because the Government intend to pass substantial powers down to local authorities. That represents a new constitutional settlement in which local people have power.

Matthew Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con): Is the Minister aware of how many messages of support I have received today for the plans to allow council buildings to fly the England flag during England games, and will he tell us more about what he intends to do to allow that to happen?

Grant Shapps: In line with the localism that we have just discussed, this is, of course, a local matter. However, I hope that local authorities throughout England will take the logical and sensible approach, and be proud of the nation's being able to come together to celebrate England's—we hope—great success, and we encourage them to do so.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): The recently announced cuts of £230 million to the Homes and Communities Agency include £50 million of cuts to housing market renewal, of which Liverpool has to take the burden of £4 million. Will the Secretary of State give his assurance that there will be no further cuts to vital housing market renewal projects, including those in Liverpool, Wavertree?

Grant Shapps: I have visited many of the housing market renewal areas, and we are passionate about ensuring that they can go ahead. In all the cuts that have been made, those in areas such as housing market renewal are the most concerning of all. Again, we have to get the budget deficit under control, but we will consult the areas involved to try to ensure that the impact is minimised. I look forward to a time when the economy is back on its feet again and we can really help the most needy communities in this country.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the great failures of the previous Government was to wrap local

authorities up in a bureaucratic top-down performance-management regime from which local government needs to be liberated?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill): My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is why we have indicated our intention to get rid of the CAA regime, which has been estimated to cost the sector in the region of £2 billion. That is why we are committed to abolishing the Standards Board and why we want to give genuine power back to local authorities.

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): There is a need for a more strategic view of how we can have Gypsy and Traveller encampments around the country, as well as in specific regions, but how can we do that when the Government have just cut the budget for the Gypsies and Travellers programme by £30 million?

Mr Pickles: It is certainly our intention to encourage local authorities to have Gypsy and Traveller sites, and we will be announcing an incentive scheme. This is an important issue, and I want to ensure that we treat Gypsies and Travellers with respect. However, the hon. Gentleman must understand that we are in this position only because of the inheritance that we received. We had to take that money out, and if we had not done so, the prospect of our being able to provide sensible accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers would have been diminished, because of the profligacy of the Labour party.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but all good things come to an end. We must now move on.

Speaker's Statement

11.32 am

Mr Speaker: Nominations for Chairs of the 24 Select Committees set out in Standing Order No. 122B, as amended by the Order of the House of Monday 7 June, closed on Tuesday 8 June, and elections were held by secret ballot on Wednesday 9 June. No ballot was necessary for eight Committees for which a single nomination had been received as follows:

Committee	*Elected*
Culture, Media & Sport	Mr John Whittingdale
International Development	Malcolm Bruce
Justice	Sir Alan Beith
Northern Ireland Affairs	Mr Laurence Robertson
Procedure	Mr Greg Knight
Scottish Affairs	Mr Ian Davidson
Transport	Mrs Louise Ellman
Welsh Affairs	David T. C. Davies

In the contested elections, the following candidates were elected:

Committee	*Elected*
Business, Innovation & Skills	Mr Adrian Bailey
Children, Schools & Families	Mr Graham Stuart
Communities & Local Government	Mr Clive Betts
Defence	Mr James Arbuthnot
Energy & Climate Change	Mr Tim Yeo
Environment, Food & Rural Affairs	Miss Anne McIntosh
Environmental Audit	Joan Walley
Foreign Affairs	Richard Ottaway
Health	Mr Stephen Dorrell
Home Affairs	Keith Vaz
Political and Constitutional Reform	Mr Graham Allen
Public Accounts	Margaret Hodge
Public Administration	Mr Bernard Jenkin
Science & Technology	Andrew Miller
Treasury	Mr Andrew Tyrie
Work & Pensions	Miss Anne Begg

The full breakdown of voting in each contest, indicating the votes attributable to each candidate after each redistribution of the votes of eliminated candidates, is set out in a paper available from the Vote Office. The Members so elected take up their positions formally when their Committee has been nominated by the House. I congratulate all the right hon. and hon. Members concerned.

Business of the House

11.35 am

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster Central) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir George Young): The business for the week commencing 14 June will include:

MONDAY 14 JUNE—General debate on UK policy on the middle east, followed by general debate on emerging economies.

TUESDAY 15 JUNE—The House will be asked to approve motions relating to the establishment of a Back-Bench business committee, September sittings, private Members' Bills, deferred Divisions, Select Committee sizes and sittings of the House.

WEDNESDAY 16 JUNE—Opposition day [1st Allotted day]. There will be a full-day's debate on Government support for industry. This debate will arise on an Opposition motion.

THURSDAY 17 JUNE—General debate on building a high-skilled economy.

The provisional business for the week commencing 21 June will include:

MONDAY 21 JUNE—General debate on strategic defence and security review.

TUESDAY 22 JUNE—My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will open his Budget statement.

WEDNESDAY 23 JUNE—Continuation of the Budget debate.

THURSDAY 24 JUNE—Continuation of the Budget debate.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall will be:

THURSDAY 24 JUNE—A debate on the future of local media.

May I offer my congratulations to the new Deputy Speakers who were successful in the ballot this week: the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr Hoyle), my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) and the right hon. Member for Bristol South (Dawn Primarolo)? May I wish them every success in carrying out their important duties and pass on the thanks of the House to those they replaced for the undoubted service they offered over many years? May I also pass on my congratulations to those Members who you, Mr. Speaker, have just announced as having been successfully elected as Chairs of Select Committees? This is undoubtedly a landmark in the history of the House. I warmly congratulate those who have secured the approval of their colleagues to undertake the vital task of scrutinising Government Departments. This is an important reform—part of a process of transferring power from the Executive to the House, which I intend to progress in my role as Leader of the House.

Ms Winterton: I thank the Leader of the House for setting out the forthcoming business and I add my congratulations to the new Deputy Speakers and the new Chairs of Select Committees.

With regard to Tuesday's business, the Government have today tabled proposed new Standing Orders on the new Back-Bench business committee. Frankly, however,

no proper consultation took place with the Opposition on the detail of those before they were tabled. Would it not be right for the new Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, whose Chair has just been announced, to look at those before they are debated by the House? I hope the Leader of the House will give a detailed response to that.

Business questions always provide a good opportunity for the right hon. Gentleman to bring us up to speed on how his leak-prevention strategy is going. Last week, he said it was *going splendidly, but I am afraid that I* must draw his attention to what he might regard as a slight seepage rather than a leak, although it is nevertheless alarming. The BBC seems to have been told by "sources" that the Liberal Democrats are doing a deal with the Government so that they continue to receive Short money, which was designed specifically for Opposition parties. On top of that, the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes) has been elected deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats. Many congratulations to him; he was here a minute ago. In his manifesto, he said

"For those departments where there is no Liberal Democrat minister, we should have a shadow secretary of state in the Commons... For those departments where there is a Liberal Democrat minister and a Conservative Secretary of State, then there should be a Liberal Democrat lead spokesperson in the Commons... For those departments where there is a Liberal Democrat Secretary of State, there should be a Liberal Democrat MP outside of government with particular responsibility for that department's business."

There was a time, I believe, when the Tory and Labour parties agreed that the Liberal Democrats tended to say one thing but do another. This has taken that to a whole new level. The Liberal Democrats say that they are in opposition, but actually do government. The new deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats cannot have it both ways, and I hope that the Leader of the House can assure us that there are no such shenanigans going on with the Short money.

Will the Leader of the House ask the Justice Secretary, when he comes to the House for Question Time on Tuesday, to put right the comments made by the Home Secretary during the Queen's Speech debate on Monday? As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the British crime survey, which is widely recognised as the most effective way of measuring long-term crime trends, shows that under the Labour Government crime fell by a third. Violent crime fell by 41%, burglary by 54%, and car crime by 57%. Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Home Secretary to explain why she is still trying to avoid using the survey? Of course, the Tory party has form in this regard: the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) was rebuked by the chairman of the UK Statistics Authority for damaging public trust by manipulating crime figures. Not only is the Home Secretary in danger of misleading the House, but she is being very unfair to all those who worked so hard to reduce crime under the Labour Government.

I do not think the Leader of the House was in the Chamber to hear the Adjournment debate initiated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), who spoke eloquently and effectively about the Conservative-Liberal Democrat proposals for defendant anonymity in rape cases. The response of the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr Blunt), was frankly disappointing, and showed very little understanding of the message that he was sending to rape victims. He did say, however, that the Government wanted informed contributions, and would consider all the options before formulating the proposals.

Given that legislation is not ready in a number of cases, and that we are having a number of general debates, may I urge the Leader of the House to allocate one of the future general debates to discussion of this important issue? If the Government are serious about listening before the proposals are presented, I really cannot see why Government time cannot be allocated to it.

Sir George Young: I was disappointed by the right hon. Lady's first request. She asked for the establishment of a business committee to be delayed yet further. The reason that the matter is on the Order Paper for next Tuesday is that the previous Government failed to make progress. We are honouring a commitment made in the last Parliament by me and by my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House, to set up a Back-Bench business committee as soon as possible. Referring the matter to the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee would simply redo the work of the Wright Committee, and would further delay the establishment of a committee on which I want to make progress. What we are doing is relinquishing the grip of the Executive on the agenda of the House, and giving Back Benchers the power and the time to schedule debates on the matters that they believe are important. When we reach the debate next Tuesday, I hope the House will seize the opportunity with both hands and make real progress with parliamentary reform.

On the right hon. Lady's second point, there has been no leak. I make it absolutely clear that Short money is available to Opposition parties. The Liberal Democrats are a party of government and therefore Short money is not available to them. I have no ministerial responsibility for what the newly elected deputy leader of the Liberal party wants to do in rearranging the internal machinery of that party.

So far as the Home Secretary is concerned, I was present when she made a fantastic speech to wind up Monday's debate, in which she dealt with all the issues regarding crime and crime statistics and set out some robust policies from the Government to deal with crime.

Finally, on the Adjournment debate, I was not present but I have read it. The issue is serious and we want to get things right. We agree entirely with the Stern review that serious consideration of the issue is needed, but there is ample time to debate it because no legislation on it is proposed for this Session. One of the objectives of setting up a Back-Bench business committee is to enable it to respond to requests for debates on important issues such as rape, so that they can be debated without the House continuing to be wholly dependent on the Government to find time to debate them.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): May I draw the Leader of the House's attention to early-day motion 188 in my name?

[That this House looks forward to the 2010 Trooping the Colour ceremony on Saturday 12 June 2010 to mark the Official Birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II; notes with pride that the flags of all the nations of the

[Andrew Rosindell]

Commonwealth are always displayed in and around Horse Guards Parade for this great occasion; calls on the Government to ensure that the flags of all Her Majesty's Territories are also flown in time for the ceremony, including Her Majesty's Crown Dependencies of the Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney and Sark, together with Her Majesty's Overseas Territories of Anguilla, Bermuda, British Antarctic Territory, British Indian Ocean Territory, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands, St. Helena, Ascension Island, Tristan da Cuhna, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands.]

My right hon. Friend will recall that on numerous occasions under the previous Government, I raised the issue of the failure to fly the flags of the British overseas territories and Crown dependencies on the occasion of Her Majesty's birthday parade Trooping the Colour. Will the Government change that policy and ensure that the flags will fly this Saturday, and will he ask the relevant Minister to make an urgent statement on this before Saturday?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend makes a good point, but he presents me with a challenging time scale if he wants me to do something by Saturday. He will have heard what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said from the Dispatch Box yesterday, and I hope that he draws heart from that. I will raise with the appropriate authorities my hon. Friend's robust request, which is backed up by others who have signed his early-day motion, and I will make sure that he gets a response.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House tell us when we can expect a debate on the revised police grant? As he will know, a £125 million in-year reduction has been made to the grant I agreed as the relevant Minister in only February of this year. I am anxious to explore how the Liberal Democrat promise of putting 3,000 extra police officers on the street is matched by the Conservative Government's cut of £125 million.

Sir George Young: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will have seen today's written ministerial statement on the subject. He will find that it says that the matter is subject to the approval of the House.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): The coalition agreement says:

"We will bring forward the proposals of the Wright Committee for reform to the House of Commons in full".

Does the Leader of the House understand the concern of many MPs that the motion he has put forward does not represent the Wright reforms in full, particularly in the loss of days in the Chamber for Back-Bench business? Will he be open to representations on the issue with a view to improving the motion on the Order Paper?

Sir George Young: The hon. Lady makes a good point. If she reads the Wright Committee report, she will see that it says right at the beginning that the proposals need to be implemented "in stages". There is a real issue with moving straight to having 35 days in the Chamber: there would be implications regarding the amount of time for which the House sits and, more seriously, it would run the real risk of squeezing out time for the Report stage of Bills—an issue that concerns hon. Members on both sides of the House. I hope that we can debate the matter more extensively on Tuesday, but I can say that at least 27 of those 35 days will be on the Floor of the House. That is an improvement on the 12 days for set-piece debates that we have at the moment.

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): I have recently received a letter from my local Age Concern expressing its deep concern about the axing of the future jobs fund. When can an early debate on the issue be timetabled?

Sir George Young: The hon. Lady might have seen today's written statement from the Minister with responsibility for employment, which sets out our strategy to move away from the current raft of different schemes, many of which do not provide good value for money, to a single work programme this time next year. We have set out our strategy. There is a debate on poverty that she might be able to use ingeniously to raise the issue. There are 5 million people on out-of-work benefits. We inherited a situation with rising long-term unemployment and we genuinely believe that the single work programme that we are introducing, with a tailor-made package for individuals, is a better way forward than the raft of regimes that we inherited.

Mr David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): Given that Labour left university funding in a mess and problems persist with the Student Loans Company, but record numbers are applying for university places, may we have a general debate on higher education in the near future?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend makes a forceful case. He will have seen the thoughtful speech that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Universities and Science made today. It would be good if we could find time for a debate on those issues. Of course, we will need to hold a debate in any case when we have the report from Lord Browne, who is considering future funding for higher education.

Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I listened carefully to the right hon. Gentleman's comments about the Liberals applying for Short money. Every parliamentarian knows—including hon. Gentlemen sitting behind the Leader of the House; we all believe the same thing—that the Liberal Democrats are all things to all men. The right hon. Gentleman rightly said that no money is available for them. May I press him to say that no money will be available for them? In due course, if there is to be a change, will the Conservative Government also apply for that money?

Sir George Young: Short money is available only to Opposition parties; we have no plans to change that.

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement that we will get the Back-Bench business committee, but I am concerned that the proposals of the Wright Committee, on which I sat, will not be implemented in full and we will not get the full 35 days. Will he reassure me that, if the business

committee recommends that the remaining eight days in Westminster Hall should be transferred to this Chamber, the Government will accede to that request?

Sir George Young: I take the opportunity of congratulating my hon. Friend on his election to the Chair of the Treasury Committee. There is a resolution on the Order Paper, asking for a review of the scheme at the end of the Session. I am happy to have that debate. It is important to have it with the business committee because the more days we have in the Chamber, the greater the pressure on Report stages or on the House to sit for longer into August. We need a sensible debate between the business committee and the House about how exactly we re-engineer the House's time to get the best possible outcome. I do not rule out having more than the initial 27 days, moving up to 35, but I want the House to be aware that there are real problems with putting a quart into a pint pot.

Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): Some £5 billion has been wiped off BP's share price this morning as a result of the US Administration's seeking to restrict dividend payments. May we have an emergency statement from the Foreign Secretary or the Prime Minister about the crisis that engulfs BP? With the company paying £1 in every £6, a serious crisis faces millions of pensioners in the UK. We need to say to our US allies that, yes, a British company made the mistake, but if it had been subject to a regulatory regime in the UK, it would not have been able to do that, and that the world's insatiable appetite for oil is responsible, not British pensioners.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman makes a forceful point. My understanding is that there are more American than UK shareholders in BP. Although the company is called British Petroleum, the dividend policy has as much impact in the United States as it does here. What happened in the gulf of Mexico is a human and environmental tragedy. The Government will do everything possible, in consultation with BP and the American Government, to help in whatever way we can. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's question will have been heard by the Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor—all those who may be having a dialogue with the American Administration.

Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): Right hon. Members and hon. Members have entered into contracts of employment with their staff. We are legally obliged to ensure that their terms are obeyed, but they were imposed on Members by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. Does the Leader of the House agree that that is unjust, unfair and potentially a legal minefield?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend raises an issue that, I know, is of concern to all hon. Members. Earlier this week, the shadow leader of the House, my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House and I held a meeting with the acting chief executive of IPSA. It was a constructive discussion and we outlined several possible solutions to the problems that confront hon. Members. There is a debate in Westminster Hall for an hour and a half next Wednesday, when my hon. Friend may want to raise the matter again.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Will the right hon. Gentleman agree to a debate on the consequences of the moratorium on and eventual cuts in social housing, which were discussed earlier, on urban regeneration, and the practice that that encourages in registered social landlords to engage in property speculation by sitting on land that they are not developing, thus leaving it empty?

Will the Leader of the House also ensure that his ministerial colleagues agree, as a matter of urgency, to a meeting with me and the Save our Stow campaign to ascertain what can be done to prevent the iconic Walthamstow dog track from being left derelict, given the persistent commercial interest in restoring it and the 500 local jobs that represents?

Sir George Young: I will pass on to my right hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for housing the request for a meeting. The hon. Lady may have just attended Communities and Local Government questions, when social housing was raised.

Perhaps a half-hour Adjournment debate on the future of the Walthamstow greyhound track is a suitable opportunity to share with Ministers the hon. Lady's concern about its future.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May we have a reaffirmation by Health Ministers of the statement made in opposition that fluoridation would not be imposed on Southampton and Totton without the approval of the majority of the people concerned, given that South Central strategic health authority has put aside £400,000 to fight a court case, despite opposition to fluoridation from 72% of the community?

Sir George Young: The coalition Government have no plans at this stage to change the legislation under which the health authority is proceeding with its plans to add fluoride to the water in Southampton and the surrounding district. My constituency verges on that district, and I am aware of the strong local feelings and the unhappiness among some people about the consultation exercise that was undertaken before the decision was made to go ahead. However, I would mislead my hon. Friend if I said that we were planning to do anything in the short term to change the legislative framework in which the decisions are made.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): May we have an urgent debate to clear up the mess that is Government policy on further powers for the Welsh Assembly? Yesterday, the Prime Minister was unable to tell us whether he was in favour. The Deputy Prime Minister told my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) that he was in favour, but that was a slip of the tongue, and it turns out that, he, too, did not know. In the main, Liberal Democrat Members are in favour and Tory Members are not. Is all that any surprise when we have the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan), who does not even know who the First Minister in Wales is, as Secretary of State for Wales?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman will have heard what the Prime Minister said yesterday. The referendum cannot be held in October because the

[Sir George Young]

outgoing Administration made no preparations for it, so it will be held next year. How people vote in that referendum is a matter for the people of Wales.

Nick Boles (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): Many of my constituents were outraged when my predecessor, who was elected as a Conservative, defected to the Labour party and did not stand down to cause a by-election. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on whether hon. Members should be required to cause a by-election if they defect to a different party from the one on whose manifesto they were elected?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend says that many of us were outraged. I think that many people in the Labour party were rather surprised when that transition happened. He proposes a major constitutional reform of the role of Members of Parliament and their independence, and I do not think we should embark on that without thoroughly considering the implications. At the moment, we have no plans to do that.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Does the Leader of the House agree that, in this week of world oceans day, it has been strange not to have a debate on the state of the world's oceans, particularly given the current state of the gulf of Mexico? Will he make time for such a debate so that we can consider the marine recovery strategy that international legislators agreed at the global forum in the House of Commons earlier this week?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman, who has a long-standing interest in the matter, makes a forceful case for a debate. Without giving any commitments, I agree that it is the sort of issue we ought to look at, and against a background of other demands I shall see what I can do.

Mark Lancaster (Milton Keynes North) (Con): May we have a debate on overseas territories? Perhaps then we could discuss the ongoing financial crisis on Ascension island, whose only school is facing closure. The cause is an internal dispute between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, and although it is very much a legacy of the last Government, will the Leader of the House join me in pressing Ministers to make an early resolution of the problem?

Sir George Young: It sounds to me as though the matter might be a suitable candidate for a debate in Westminster Hall, where my hon. Friend will be able to raise his concerns at greater length.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): In response to a question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on affording anonymity to those accused of rape, the Prime Minister said that proposals would be brought forward, enabling debate. That led me to think that the Prime Minister believes that the debate should take place in Government time, in the House. Given the grave anxiety that the proposals are causing not only in the House, but in the wider community, the sooner that debate can take place, the better. Will the Leader of the House commit to holding such a debate, and very soon?

Sir George Young: I heard what the Prime Minister said:

"we are promising...to bring proposals forward so that they can be debated."—[*Official Report*, 9 June 2010; Vol. 511, c. 329.]

When we introduce the proposed legislation, that will be the opportunity for debate that my right hon. Friend referred to. However, I recognise the serious concern of Members on both sides of the House and it may be possible before we set up the Back-Bench business committee to find time for a further debate.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): May I supplement the question put last week by the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds)? I would like a debate in the House to reconsider the question whether a Member who was elected to the House should be able to use its facilities, and possibly take allowances from the public purse, without him or her taking the Oath of Allegiance.

Mr Speaker: Order. I think a statement, not a debate on the matter is sought by the hon. Gentleman.

Sir George Young: Indeed. This reply may not make my hon. Friend's pulse race. Nevertheless, issues about allowances are no longer a matter for the House. Issues about allowances, including to Members who may not have taken their seats, are now a matter for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): Given that the Department for Communities and Local Government has just announced the end of ring-fencing for stroke strategy money, can the Leader of the House arrange for any Department of Health advice on the increase in disability and the number of hospital admissions that that is likely to cause to be placed in the Library? Will he allow time for a debate on the stroke strategy in Government time, given that stroke is a major cause of death and disability?

Sir George Young: I am in favour of giving local government the maximum freedom to use its resources intelligently, without constraining its decisions by directions from central Government. I have no doubt that the hon. Lady and her colleagues who share her views will be able forcefully to make the case to the local authority in her area about the importance of providing resources for those who suffer from stroke.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): The new chairman of the Sentencing Guidelines Council has called for hefty cuts in sentences to people who plead guilty to the police, which does not bode well for his term in office. May we have a debate about the Government's approach to sentencing? Given that people already get a considerable discount for pleading guilty and prisoners are automatically released halfway through their sentence, many of my constituents would like the Government to move towards ensuring that prisoners are serving their sentence in full, rather than softer sentences or letting people out of prison even earlier.

Sir George Young: That is a typically robust proposition from my hon. Friend. On 15 June there are oral questions to Justice Ministers, which may be an opportunity for him to raise the matter again.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): May we have an urgent debate on the importance of diversity in news broadcasting in the UK? There is real concern in Wales, Scotland and the regions of England about the Government's decision not to proceed with pilots for regional news programmes. What is the Government's position and how will they ensure the diversity in news broadcasting that is so important?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious issue and I think it best that he comes along on 21 June and puts the question to Ministers from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): The September G8 in Canada will pay particular attention to how the international community takes forward the millennium development goals. Between now and the rise of the House for the summer recess, will my right hon. Friend try to make time for a general debate on international development so that both sides of the House can reinforce the need for the international community to take forward the MDGs, as set out in early-day motion 179?

[That this House recognises the important contribution and commitment the UK has made to the progress of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); welcomes the Government's commitment to spend 0.7 per cent. of gross national income on overseas aid and to enshrine this commitment in law; further recognises that development benefits often remain out of reach of those who are poorest, most marginalised and affected by conflict; acknowledges that many of the MDGs are off track, especially those relating to maternal, infant and child health; further acknowledges the importance of the G8, G20 and MDG Review in mobilising the international community to achieve the MDGs; and trusts that the Government will show strong international leadership in encouraging others in the international community to work towards an MDGs' rescue plan with clear political and financial commitments, and with every G8 country providing solid national commitments and timetables.]

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend makes a forceful case. I will see whether between now and the summer recess we can arrange a debate along the lines he has proposed.

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House and his deputy for bringing forward with great expedition the proposals for a Back-Bench business committee. Sadly, that stands in contrast to the delay we experienced over the last year or so. Before we have too much of a love-in, however, I must tell the Leader of the House that there are a number of omissions in the decision of the whole House last year about how the committee should be constituted. To maintain consensus next Tuesday, and to keep all Back Benchers behind his proposals, will he meet me and a number of interested colleagues from all parties to discuss serious amendments, which we can table tomorrow?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I congratulate him on his election to the chairmanship of the Select Committee on Political and Constitutional Reform.

The debate on Tuesday is House business, and it will be for the House to decide whether it wants to proceed with the motions I have tabled or agree to amendments. Amendments to some of the motions have already been tabled. I should be more than happy to see the hon. Gentleman after business questions if he is available, to explain why we have constructed the motions as we have, why this is not the last word on implementing Wright, and why I believe that on Tuesday we should take an important step forward and build on it.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): Last week, the Leader of the House told us that the Mayor of London had applied to the High Court for an injunction in respect of the demonstration in Parliament square. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on the situation?

Sir George Young: The Mayor did indeed apply for an injunction. The case has been adjourned. My understanding is that more people appeared wishing to make their case than was originally anticipated, so it is taking longer for the High Court to hear many of the people now on Parliament square before it reaches a decision, but I shall try to keep the House informed.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): Members on both sides of the House who attended the annual meeting held by the all-party group on learning disability and Mencap will know that research was published showing that it costs £7,000 per place to support people with learning disabilities to go into employment. This morning, it was announced that there would be a £30 million cut in the supporting people element of the local government area-based grant. That will obviously fall on some of the most vulnerable people with learning disabilities, including those in my area, and will undermine their efforts to find employment. If we contrast that with the £17,000 cost per place for day care, we see that it makes no sense in economic terms, so may we have a debate on fairness and supporting people, and how to make the big society more inclusive?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful case. He will know the background to the decision to reduce the resources available. Before the last election, the outgoing Chancellor said that the cuts that would be necessary would be deeper than those imposed by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, but I am afraid we have heard no details at all from Opposition Members as to how those economies might be made. Turning to the point the hon. Gentleman made, he says that the cuts will inevitably fall on the most vulnerable. I hope that the local authority will protect the most vulnerable from the impact of that decision and not seek economies from the client group he has just referred to.

Matthew Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con): The Leader of the House will know that my constituents and those of Members throughout the House have welcomed the proposal to abolish the regional spatial strategies set up by the previous Government. May we have a statement and a debate about when regional spatial strategies will be abolished in legislation?

Sir George Young: If my hon. Friend had asked that question an hour earlier, he would have received a definitive response from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. Later in the Session, there will be a planning Bill, which may

[Sir George Young]

be a forum for changing the planning regime. There has been a statement about regional spatial strategies. Speaking from memory, I think the guidance is being altered, but I shall arrange for a definitive reply to be forwarded to my hon. Friend.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): It is my desire to help the Leader of the House to save money wherever possible. To that end, has he seen my suggestion that we hold the September sittings in Birmingham, rather than in the building site that the House will be in September? May we have an early debate on the obvious benefits and cost-effectiveness of moving Parliament to Birmingham?

Sir George Young: Whether it would save money to sit in Birmingham, rather than in London, given some of the costs involved for some Members, is a moot point. So I am afraid that the motion on September sittings, which I have tabled, presumes that the House will continue to sit here. But may I commend the hon. Gentleman? He is the first Opposition Member who has made a proposal to save money.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The Leader of the House will be aware of the significant concerns among hon. Members about the business practices of banks, in which, of course, we now hold a substantial stake. The Royal Bank of Scotland in Partington—one of the most deprived areas of my constituency—has just announced closure plans. Will he ensure that there is time to debate the future of the banking sector and to discuss economic and social responsibilities, and emphasise to his colleagues in the Treasury team that the House will want that to be covered?

Sir George Young: I was sorry to hear about the proposed closure of the bank in the hon. Lady's constituency. She will have heard me announce that the Budget statement will be made on Tuesday week, after which there are a number of days to debate Budget resolutions. That will provide an opportunity for her to raise this concern with Treasury Ministers.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It might surprise the House to know that, among the letters that I receive, there are many asking me what I am doing to uphold the hunting ban in inner-city Hackney. They at least equal the number of letters that I receive about urban foxes. In the past week, nine-month-old twins in my constituency were the very unfortunate victims of a nasty attack by one of those urban foxes. Given that we have some idea of the Government's plans about how to deal with fox hunting, have they any plan to consider either guidance or, if necessary, legislation on urban foxes?

Sir George Young: The hon. Lady raises a serious issue, and the whole House has sympathy for the family of the twins who were mauled by a fox a few days ago. I will raise with the Home Secretary the issue of whether further guidance or, indeed, a change in the legislation is necessary, but I hope that there may be ways to deal with those risks other than primary legislation.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Surely the Leader of the House is washing his hands, Pilate-like, of the responsibilities that the House ought to have when it comes to the payment of Members' allowances to a party and to Members who deliberately abstain and fail to do the work that they ought to do on behalf of their constituents. Surely, there should be not only a debate in the House but a statement by the Government and, indeed, an admonishment of those Members who fail to turn up to the House and to do the job as elected Members, but who are paid full allowances for coming here and for failing to do that job.

Sir George Young: I understand the concern, but it was a unanimous decision of the last Parliament that decisions on the salaries and allowances of Members of Parliament should be taken no longer by the House, but by an independent organisation. That is where the responsibility rests. As I said a moment ago, there is a debate on Government policy on IPSA on Wednesday, and that may provide the hon. Gentleman with an opportunity to raise the issue again.

Angie Bray (Ealing Central and Acton) (Con): I wonder whether the Leader of the House is aware that, in Ealing, the Post Office is engaging in yet another consultation on a major proposal to close down a post office in one place and move it to another. Even while the consultation is going on, it appears that some of the preparatory building work is taking place at the proposed site. I wonder whether we can have a further look at how the Post Office conducts some of these so-called consultations.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Ealing is an area with which I am not unfamiliar. I am looking forward to sharing with her the party in my former constituency later today to celebrate her election to the House. I will raise with Business, Innovation and Skills Ministers the issue that she raises about whether the Post Office has gone through the appropriate procedures in apparently pre-empting a decision on closing one office and moving it to another location.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Returning to the economy, in view of today's forecast that unemployment will rise substantially and stay there for the duration of the Conservative-dominated Government, will we have regular statements by the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary on the misery that will be undoubtedly inflicted on so many of our constituents?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman can raise that matter in the Budget debate. We inherited the largest fiscal deficit in the EU. Everyone agrees that we must take some measures to get it under control. The sooner that we get it under control, the better for securing a long-term, sustainable recovery and the better the prospect for interest rates. Unless we take those decisions to rebalance the economy and promote growth in the private sector, the situation will not improve.

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): Although I welcome the Government's proposals to introduce individual voter registration, I wonder whether the Leader of the House could grant us an early debate on restricting

postal and proxy votes, which have brought the electoral system in this country under so much criticism in the past.

Sir George Young: The Electoral Commission is, I believe, doing a review of the recent election that will be published. It would be sensible to await the outcome of that review before we consider any decision on restricting postal or proxy votes. I recognise the concern that my hon. Friend expresses, but we need a debate set against the background of the work that is now under way.

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): I am sure that, as a very distinguished former Housing Minister, the Leader of the House will be disappointed in the appalling complacency of some of the answers and, frankly, the frightening delay in getting to the Dispatch Box of some Housing Ministers during Communities and Local Government questions today. May we have a debate in Government time on housing and planning policies, so that we can ensure that they are based on the needs and aspirations of those who live on council estates, not those who live on country estates?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman was also a good Housing Minister. Housing completions in the year that has just ended were the fewest since 1946. The last Labour Government built 26,000 fewer houses per year than the previous Conservative Government. That is not a record to be proud of, and as the hon. Gentleman will have heard from the Housing Minister who was at the Dispatch Box, he found that promises had been made to spend money that did not exist. That is why we had to take some tough decisions. None the less, when the Chancellor considered savings to be made in year, £170 million was found to make progress with social rented housing. We hope to do a lot better than the outgoing Administration in meeting housing need.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): There is great concern in Cleethorpes, particularly among those who are employed in the tourism trade, about the spread of the salt marsh on Cleethorpes pleasure beach, and there is anger at the attitude of the Government agency, Natural England—an unaccountable and unelected body—in respect of overruling the local authority, which is, of course, democratically accountable and elected, in its desire to manage the beach. Will the Leader of the House find time for an early debate on the role of agencies, such as Natural England, and their ability to overrule democratically accountable bodies?

Sir George Young: My extensive briefing does not cover salt marshes in Cleethorpes, but my hon. Friend raises an important issue about the role of elected local authorities and that of the unelected quangos that sit above them. There may be an opportunity on 24 June, during Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions, for him to press Ministers in more detail, and I will give them advance notice of his concern.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): We will all have been horrified by the brutal murder on 28 May of nearly 100 Ahmadiyya worshippers in two separate attacks in Lahore. Britain's Ahmadiyya Muslims work hard and contribute greatly to this country, and their belief in peace and religious tolerance is an example to us all. Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore find time for Parliament to debate how we can help to stop the persecution of the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan and what we can do to reassure them that they are safe to practise their faith in the UK?

Sir George Young: Freedom of religious worship is an important principle, which I hope that this country will always defend. May I suggest that the hon. Lady find time for a debate in Westminster Hall, where this serious issue can be debated at more length and an appropriate Foreign Office Minister can respond?

Mr Dave Watts (St Helens North) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 so that a Minister can give us the Government's views on the review set up by the previous Administration and hon. Members can set out in the Chamber what they believe are the benefits and disadvantages of the existing legislation?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his question and I am aware of a serious case in his constituency. I will, of course, contact the Home Secretary to ask where the review to which the hon. Gentleman refers has got to and to ensure that its findings are available to the House.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): May I welcome the Leader of the House's indication that he has some sympathy with the idea of an early debate in Government time about their proposal to extend anonymity to defendants in rape cases? When he decides how early a debate we may have, will he take account of the fact that the policy was in neither the Conservative nor the Liberal Democrat manifestos, but appeared in a mere nine words in the coalition agreement?

Sir George Young: That is an ingenious approach on the case for a debate. I just say to the hon. Lady that a Labour Government adopted such a policy in 1976 when they introduced anonymity for rape defendants, so this is not wholly without precedent. However, regardless of whether the proposal was in the manifestos, this serious issue should be debated on its merits.

Jim Sheridan (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): May we have a debate on industrial relations in the aviation industry? Most reasonable and rational people recognise that the British Airways cabin crew dispute has run its course and that serious discussions should be taking place. Earlier this week, several hon. Members met a cabin crew member who told us about the bullying, harassment and vindictiveness that is going on in British Airways, and an early debate would allow us to expose the corporate thuggery that is taking place in the company.

Sir George Young: I hope that the dispute can be brought to a conclusion. It is a matter for British Airways, the trade unions and the staff to resolve, perhaps with the assistance of ACAS, but I note the hon. Gentleman's request for a debate.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): In Swansea, where I am meeting the chief of police tomorrow, there is growing concern about the relationship between increased job cuts and crime, and between education cuts and

[Geraint Davies]

drug abuse. Given the plans to cut the police grant by £125 million, when will the Leader of the House find time to debate those issues, especially given that the previous Government reduced crime by a third, whereas the former Conservative Government doubled it?

May I thank those people who supported my Select Committee candidacy, even though I was unsuccessful?

Sir George Young: There will be more resources available to police authorities this year than last year, despite the reductions that have been referred to. As I said earlier, the written ministerial statement indicates that the grant reduction requires the approval of the House, so that might give the opportunity to debate it.

Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab): I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) on her election as Chair of the Public Accounts Committee.

May we have a debate soon, in Government time, about Network Rail's contracts for rail track renewal? The Leader of the House will be aware that the rail track renewal firm Jarvis went into administration in April with the loss of 1,100 jobs, including 350 in my constituency. Network Rail has signed a contract with Babcock that will allow 25 of those 350 who were made redundant to be re-employed, but that is not good enough. Rail track needs to be renewed for reasons of public safety, and those skilled workers need jobs, especially if the Government are to fulfil their obligation to build new railways.

Sir George Young: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about the loss of jobs in his constituency. A week today—on 17 June—we will have Transport questions, and I believe that he still has time to table a relevant question on the matter.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Did the Leader of the House knock any sense into IPSA when he met its representatives? Did they give an apology for the breach of security by sending these e-mails to the wrong Members of Parliament, because there was none in the letter that I received? Next time he sees them, will he tell them that a strange paradox is occurring in the House of Commons, as the Back Benchers are taking power to themselves—he referred to that today, right?—yet an oligarchy called IPSA is moving in the opposite direction? Tell it to get in tune!

Mr Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman is seeking either a statement—preferably now—or indeed a debate.

Sir George Young: I raised the issue that the hon. Gentleman mentions, which should not have happened, with the interim chief executive of IPSA, who is apologetic about it. I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman gets a letter from the interim chief executive to confirm what he said to the shadow Leader of the House, my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House and myself.

We are doing what the hon. Gentleman's Government failed to do by taking power away from the Executive and giving it to the House of Commons and the Back-Bench business committee. On the question of setting up IPSA, if he looks at the voting record, he will see that he either supported it or abstained—he did not object to it.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): Yes, the Labour Government made a terrible mistake more than 35 years ago with what they tried to do on anonymity for rape defendants. I do not think that this is about party political point scoring because more than 50 hon. Members, including 18 Government Members, attended a late-night Adjournment debate on the matter, which is pretty rare. It is becoming clearer day by day that there is confusion about the Government's policy, where the priority came from and the basis for their approach, so may I entreat the Leader of the House to think about providing Government time to discuss something that is a Government plan?

Sir George Young: The position of the Government is that we have put forward a proposal in the coalition agreement. That proposal will require the assent of both Houses before it comes into effect. We have made it clear that we would like a debate before we proceed with the proposal. I take seriously the right hon. Lady's point, which has also been made by her colleagues, that we ought to find time as soon as possible to debate the matter at greater length.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Further to that, there is a lot of confusion about the Government's position. The agreement says not, as the Leader of the House suggested earlier, that the Government will give "serious consideration" to introducing the proposal, but:

"We will extend anonymity in rape cases".

Would he care to propose an amendment to the coalition document to reflect what he said, and perhaps to publish a White Paper or Green Paper on the proposal? Given what the Prime Minister said recently, is he suggesting that there will be consideration of a free vote on the issue when the Government introduce legislation? The coalition's programme for government states that it "will extend anonymity", so he cannot get away with saying that he is just running this idea up the flagpole—that is fag packet politics.

Sir George Young: That, if I may say so, is a distortion of what I said. I said that the coalition Government have made a proposal, which is in the coalition agreement. That proposal cannot reach the statute book unless it goes through both Houses. Before it can do that, it is clear that there needs to be a serious debate about the pros and cons. I have taken on board requests for a debate before we make progress, and I will try to respond to them.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I listened with interest to the Leader of the House when he responded to my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster Central (Ms Winterton) about Short money and the proposals made by the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes), the new deputy leader of the Liberal party. However, may we have a debate about the seating arrangements in the Chamber, as some of us remain concerned that although the Liberal party is a signatory to the coalition document, its Members want

the right to set out statements against certain policies, for example on nuclear power, and to make a principled abstention? As a precursor to that debate, may I suggest that we build a fence down the middle of the Chamber so that when the Liberals are sitting on it, we can at least see that they are doing so?

Sir George Young: I am delighted with the new seating arrangements and so are my hon. Friends. May I amplify what I said earlier about Short money? It is for the Clerk of the House, as accounting officer, to ensure that Short money payments are made in accordance with resolutions of the House. As for the voting record, the hon. Gentleman will find that Members of the last Parliament who sat on the Government side of the House very occasionally voted against the Government.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Patients and NHS staff would have been as concerned as I was to learn yesterday that decisions on capital projects in the NHS that had already been announced, such as the vital rebuild of the Royal Liverpool hospital, will not be forthcoming until the autumn. Will the Leader of the House ensure that the Chancellor of the Exchequer or one of his Ministers comes to the House to make an urgent statement about the delay?

Sir George Young: That is probably better raised with the Secretary of State for Health, but I say to the hon. Lady that we were the only party at the last election to pledge an increase in real terms in spending on the NHS, so whatever the prospects are for her hospital, they are better than they would have been.

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): The Leader of the House said last week and again today that he has had meetings with IPSA, and I thank him for the overtures to IPSA that he has made on behalf of the House. Is there any point where he can make a statement to the House on the results of those discussions, before the byzantine bureaucracy of IPSA stops and prevents Members of this House from serving their constituents?

Sir George Young: I understand the concern and repeat that, as Leader of the House, I would be concerned if the allowance regime stood in the way of Members discharging their responsibilities as constituency MPs. In addition to the meeting with the interim chief executive, the right hon. Member for Doncaster Central (Ms Winterton), my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House and I held a meeting with the chairman of the 1922 committee, the chairman of the parliamentary Labour party and the leader of the parliamentary Liberal group. Discussions are ongoing about how we improve the dialogue with IPSA. I add as a footnote that, if the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) looks at the list of ministerial responsibilities, he will see that Government responsibility for policy towards IPSA rests with my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, and the debate in Westminster Hall will be answered by the Parliamentary Secretary from the relevant Department.

Points of Order

12.31 pm

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I ask your advice? Today, two contradictory statements have been made on the Floor of the House—and just repeated by the Leader of the House. It was stated that the decision by the last Government to build 20,000 new homes was not properly funded and there was a black hole, but we also heard the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), say that no ministerial direction was given in the Department for Communities and Local Government in the past 12 months. Both statements cannot be true, because if the policy was not properly funded, the permanent secretary would have asked for a letter of direction. Will you advise on whether it would be possible to have a Treasury spokesman come here to explain the true picture?

Mr Speaker: I do not think I can offer any advice on that point. What I say to the hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg), who is a very experienced Member, is that what he has just put to me is not a point of order, but a point of debate. He has put his views and concerns very clearly on the record and that may be an object lesson to new Members in debating points, although probably not in points of order.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Perhaps you can advise me, even if you could not advise my hon. Friend. In the course of business questions, the Leader of the House made a statement that absolutely no preparation at all had been undertaken by the last Government for a referendum on extending powers to the Welsh Assembly—something that is strenuously denied by those concerned. Is there any way Members can require Ministers to provide evidence for statements made when they are trying to rewrite history?

Mr Speaker: Such a strict requirement would create an entirely new precedent in the way in which debate is conducted in the House. As I understand it, the hon. Gentleman is asking me to insist that, in future, any statement by a Minister or another Member should require evidence before it can be made. That, I think, would be an extremely dangerous and risky precedent to set. However, he has put his views on the record and I am sure the House is grateful to him.

Tackling Poverty in the UK

12.33 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Chris Grayling): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of tackling poverty in the UK.

Helping people in the UK to escape poverty is one of the key challenges for the new Government and something that we are passionate about achieving. Although this Administration face one of the biggest financial challenges in our peacetime history, we are determined that we will not act in a way that leaves behind some of the poorest and most vulnerable in our society. Before Labour Members contribute to this afternoon's debate, I hope that they will think back to their 13 years in power in times when they felt able to spend money freely, and remind themselves just how little progress was made with so much money.

Within days of taking office we saw the release of official poverty statistics, and what a bleak picture of progress they painted: 18% of people in the UK today live below the official poverty line, defined as a typical family, comprising a couple with two children under 14, having an income before housing costs of less than £342 a week. Official research has shown the number of children who live in families where even the most basic needs cannot be met. Of children in households with incomes in the bottom 20%, more than half live in families who cannot afford to replace worn-out furniture or broken electrical goods, and about two thirds cannot afford to make a saving of £10 a month. Of course, families under pressure to meet their daily needs are likely to see making provision for their retirement as a relatively low priority, which adds further to poverty down the line.

We believe that the last Government went wrong because they simply did not understand the nature of the poverty problem in this country. With one or two notable exceptions—I shall return to the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) later in my speech—they seemed to believe that Whitehall knew best: they always talked about poverty simply in terms of money and seldom demonstrated a clear understanding of the far deeper problems that can leave so many people struggling. Behind the facts and figures—beyond the statistics and the measures of material deprivation—lie incredibly complex and challenging issues.

Poverty is not just about income. Family breakdown, a lack of experience of work and education in the home, a lack of experience of parenting in the home—all contribute to a climate of poverty. Some children are brought up without even a single stable family home or in households that are ridden with the challenges of addiction. All of that shapes someone's chances of getting on or not getting on in life.

Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): A debate on child poverty, which I introduced, was held yesterday in Westminster Hall. Will the Minister confirm that, according to Barnardo's, at the conclusion of 13 years of Labour Government the number of children living in poverty totalled 3.9 million?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman makes his point very well and I commend him for the work that he has done to highlight the subject. One of the most disappointing things about the last Administration is that, despite talking as much as they did about child poverty, they missed their 2010 target. In their later years in office, child poverty was rising, and not simply as a result of the recession.

The reality is that being in poverty shapes those children's lives and too often ends the lives of too many people. On average, people living in the poorest neighbourhoods in England will die seven years earlier than those living in wealthier neighbourhoods. Health inequalities today are worse than they were in the 1970s and the gap in educational attainment between children from rich and poor backgrounds remains persistently great.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that one form of poverty that is little mentioned is poverty of aspiration for young people who come from very deprived backgrounds? They do not see further or higher education as something that is for them. That is why it is important that we continue to put money into education: if we do not, that gap will worsen.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman is right. What he says about higher education is one reason why I am proud that the present Administration will provide more university places this year than were planned by the previous Administration. He makes a valid point. I remember the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) saying in the House some years ago that in his constituency, a person was seen to be weird if he or she stayed on in education past the age of 16. That underlines the challenge in communities where there is too little experience of educational achievement. I absolutely agree with the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami): there is a need to break down the barriers and to raise aspirations.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that evidence also shows that children from the poorest families are unable to make the most of their education? At as early as 22 months, children from poorer backgrounds are doing less well than children from better-off backgrounds and that gap continues to widen as they go through the school system. Does he agree that efforts to address both educational attainment and aspiration and family incomes need to go hand in hand if children are to make the most of their schooling?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady has extremely extensive experience of these matters and she is absolutely right. We remain firmly of the view that early intervention is important. I mentioned parenting skills earlier; when talking about these matters, I always pay tribute to the charity Home-Start. Enabling people who have good parenting experience to mentor those who do not makes a valuable contribution to helping young people who grow up in more challenging environments to do better than they might otherwise have done. That is hugely important because we have massive divides within communities, between people living side by side.

Here in Westminster, for example, we have the largest difference in life expectancy of any London local authority. In areas such as Knightsbridge and Belgravia, people can expect to live into their mid-80s, but just up the road in Queens Park life expectancy is just over 70—a gap of nearly 15 years. For every two minutes on the tube between Knightsbridge and Queens Park, the life expectancy of the communities through which one travels drops by a year.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): As a resident of Queens Park, this is an opportune moment to seek to intervene.

On the issue of health inequalities, poverty has to be understood as a relative as well as an absolute issue. Before the right hon. Gentleman goes too far in dismissing everything that the Labour Government were doing, does he agree with the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which said:

> "Tax and benefit measures implemented by Labour since 1997 have increased the incomes of poorer households and reduced those of richer ones, largely halting the rapid rise in income inequality that we saw under the Conservatives"?

What measures that the Conservatives took—or failed to take—in those years will he now say will not be reintroduced if we are to make further progress?

Chris Grayling: Of course, we have not been in office since 1997. One of the tragedies of the past 13 years is seeing the amount of money spent leading to so little in the way of results. The point made by the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside about poverty of aspiration is a crucial one. I shall come on to discuss worklessness, but a lack of experience of work or educational achievement in a household, and other factors, can make such a difference. The divides are enormous. If one goes to a city such as Liverpool, one only has to walk for 20 minutes from one of the smartest, newest shopping centres in the country to streets where almost no one is working. Worklessness is central to the challenges faced by many of our communities.

Mark Tami: What are the right hon. Gentleman's views on the comments made earlier by the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), who said that local authority cuts will fall hardest on the poorest areas?

Chris Grayling: We have to look at this in a far more three-dimensional way. It is about changing educational achievement, which is why we have said that it is important to focus on a pupil premium for the most deprived areas. It is also why we have said that it is important to ensure, as the economy recovers and as the employment market picks up, that we do not make the mistakes of the past 10 years. Too many of the jobs that were created went to people coming into the country from overseas, as the right hon. Member for Birkenhead has identified on more than one occasion. We have to make sure that we break down the culture of worklessness and educational failure, which is as essential to dealing with poverty as any other factor.

Ms Buck: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way again. To approach the question that I asked earlier from a different angle, the IFS confirmed that Labour's measures had largely halted the rise in income inequality, which increased dramatically under the Conservative Government. Does he accept that the measures that he has to put in place must not repeat the errors and mistakes, with deep roots in unemployment and social breakdown, that characterised the Conservative years and led to rising income inequality and poverty?

Chris Grayling: We should always seek to learn from the past. We will seek not to make the mistakes of the past 10 years, when billions of pounds were spend on employment programmes that failed to break down the culture of worklessness in many of our communities.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend is speaking very well about the inequalities between rich and poor, mainly in an urban context. Does he agree that nowhere is that difference more stark than in rural locations? Despite their rhetoric on rural-proofing over 13 years, the Opposition did absolutely nothing to narrow that divide. Will he provide an assurance sought by my constituents, and confirm that the plight of the poor in rural locations—they tend to be among the poorest in our society—will be addressed during our coalition Government?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. As we prepare the Work programme, I shall seek to ensure that it includes scope for the voluntary sector organisations that specialise in local communities and individual groups in our society that can make a difference. Groups that best understand rural areas can make the biggest difference to ensure that we help people in rural communities into prosperous and successful working lives, and not leave them stranded on benefits. I certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance.

We have a moral duty, even in difficult times, to do what we can to break down the cycle of deprivation that affects many of those communities. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and his team have committed years to identifying the challenges that face those deprived communities and how to solve them. We have demonstrated a willingness to look at ideas across the political spectrum. I am delighted that we can take advantage of the expertise of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead in his review. He is highly regarded in all parts of the House for the knowledge and insights that he has built up, and we look forward to seeing his conclusions, particularly on how we measure poverty and capture a more accurate understanding of it in all its forms. That work enables us to understand more clearly how to develop solutions for the problems that we face.

I hope that we can maintain dialogue with Members such as the hon. Member for Nottingham North, who is a leading thinker on how to use early intervention to tackle deprivation. He has worked closely with my right hon. Friend who is now the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, and we believe that this is an issue that should capture expertise wherever it lies. In addition, we have established for the first time a cross-departmental Cabinet Committee under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend to ensure that we join up all the thinking and work that we do on social justice across government.

[Chris Grayling]

All of that will require radical reforms. It is about stimulating economic growth by moving more people into work; providing more effective routes into truly sustainable jobs; establishing clearer links between work and reward; and helping people to make responsible choices and save for their retirement. And ultimately, in these straitened times, we must ensure that we are using the money available to the best possible effect, both for those individuals and the taxpayer.

Kate Green: I agree strongly with the Secretary of State that leading people to, and enabling them to sustain, well-paid jobs is an important route out of poverty, but with only about 0.5 million vacancies—and, as his Government have said, about 5 million on inactive and unemployment benefits—can he confirm that an adequate safety net for people who cannot be in paid work will be sustained, and in particular, that there will be no freezing or cutting of benefits on which families who are out of work rely?

Chris Grayling: I am not going to announce the Budget today, but it will remain a Government commitment to provide a security or safety net for people who find themselves in difficulties. That safety net must not be a place in which people simply live their lives. No one benefits from sitting at home on benefits doing nothing, whether it is people with incapacities, people with disabilities or lone parents. There is general agreement—between ourselves, and between representative groups outside—that if we can help people into work it gives them a more fulfilling life, and it provides a job for their families. We regard breaking down the culture of worklessness as a huge priority.

The hon. Lady is right about the economic situation, but we must not make the mistake that has been made over the past 10 years. The previous Government presided over a situation in which jobs that were created tended to go not to people who were stranded on benefits in this country but to people moving here from overseas. That must not happen in the coming decade.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Further to the Secretary of State's comments on the balance between work and benefits, will he take into consideration a letter from a constituent that I received this morning? She is a single mother trying to support her children, but she pointed out she was not eligible for a grant for a uniform for one of them because she works.

"Why",

she writes,

"should I be penalised for not claiming benefits, for going out to work to try and better myself when I am in fact worse off. I am in two minds to give up my job so that I can get more perks."

I urge the Secretary of State, in reshaping policy, to take into consideration people such as my constituent who are trying to do the right thing but who find that people on benefits are better off.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is right. We have to make sure that people benefit financially from going back to work. We will do everything that we can as an Administration to ensure that people who do the right thing genuinely benefit from doing so, and that no one is incentivised to say, "There's no point in getting a job. I'll stay at home." That does not do them, or any of us, any good whatsoever.

We are talking not just about individuals but about whole families: two or three generations of the same family who not only do not work but have never worked. That is not simply the result of a lack of opportunity. In many of our most deprived and challenged communities, the culture of dependency and the sense of exclusion from mainstream society has resulted in a sense of hopelessness and poverty of ambition, as the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside said, which we have to break down. We will do everything that we can to meet that challenge.

I want to set out five key areas that are central to helping people to escape from that poverty trap. First, all the evidence shows that early-years experiences are crucial in determining life chances. A stable home life can make a huge difference to the health and well-being of our children. Family breakdown has been linked to mental health problems, addiction and educational failure, and there is no doubt that the impact of families on life chances seems to be more pronounced in the UK than in neighbouring areas. The earning potential of a child in the UK is more closely related to that of their parents than it is in countries such as the United States, Germany or France. The rate of family breakdown is much higher in the UK than in other major countries, and we have one of the highest proportions of single-parent families in the OECD and the highest rate of teen pregnancies in the EU.

The reality of the links to poverty is clear: 34% of children in families with just one parent in their home were in poverty in 2008-09—a much higher proportion than the national average, which is 22%—and we know that a family with just one parent is twice as likely to have an income in the bottom 20% as families where there are two parents. We want to create a system that supports families, creates a stable environment for children and improves social mobility. That is why we will work to strengthen families by investing in effective early-years provision, including expanding the availability and accessibility of health visitors, so that all parents have access to expert support and advice in the crucial early days of a child's life. We will recognise marriage in the tax system, and, as soon as we can we will tackle the couple penalty in tax credits. We will encourage shared parenting from the earliest stages of pregnancy, including the promotion of a system of flexible parental leave. We want to restore aspiration, allowing parents to hope for their children and children to dream for themselves. Education plays a central role in that, and it is the second key area that we wish to address.

Education is vital. We know that people with five or more GCSEs at grades A to C earn more than those without, and they are around 3% more likely to be in work. But we also know that of the 75,000 children who receive free school meals every year, almost half do not get a single grade C at GCSE—more than a thousand classrooms of children each year let down by the system. We have some of the most disadvantaged children in the UK. Of the 6,000 children leaving care every year, only 400 are in higher education by the age of 19. Children in care should be a particular priority for us. Every child should have access to good quality education. Too many of the poorest children are stuck in chaotic classrooms

in bad schools, so we will give teachers more power over discipline, bring in a pupil premium and provide extra funding for the poorest children so that they go to the best schools, not the worst.

But we are concerned not only about preventing the next generation falling into a cycle of poverty and worklessness. We also have to deal with the challenges that are there right now. So the third area that we will address is the problem of worklessness and welfare dependency. Each week, if one includes tax credits and child benefits, 12 million working-age households receive benefits at a cost of around £85 billion a year. About 5 million people claim out-of-work benefits, and around half of those have spent at least half of the last 10 years on some form of benefit. We know that many of those on out-of-work benefits cannot work for reasons of health, but many with the right help could get back into work.

At its worst, the current system divides people and assigns support based on the type of benefit claimed rather than need. It fails to recognise people who need extra help and it refuses up-front support, allowing people to become so entrenched in the benefit system that they cannot see a way out. Many Members who represent some of the most challenged communities and talk to those people know that we must help them to break out of the environment in which they live, raising their aspirations and showing them that there is a better way forward.

During the last 10 years, an array of programmes was set up by the last Government. They believed that the answer was to create top-down, closely designed programmes, which they imposed on the system. That did not work, so we will do something different. When we introduce our single work programme next year, it will create an environment in which the support that we offer will be tailored to the needs of individuals, not designed in Whitehall by Ministers and officials. Everyone who can work should get the help and advice that they need to get a job and move into sustainable work. That will be our focus and those who deliver that support will be paid on the basis of the success that they have in delivering that support and getting people into work.

Britain is a nation of opportunity. It must be a nation of opportunity. As we tackle the deficit and get the economy back on its feet—I keep returning to this point—we must ensure that the jobs that are created in the next few years go to those who are in the most need, who can get off benefits and make more of their lives. We cannot make the same mistakes all over again. That is what our welfare reforms are all about.

I want to talk briefly about another group—those on incapacity benefits. More than 2 million people claim incapacity benefits, nearly half of whom have been out of work for the last 12 years. They, in particular, need fresh opportunities. Not all will be able to work, but very many can work, and very many would be much better off in work. All of those who work with people with incapacities and disabilities say that if we can get them into mainstream employment, return them to a normal working life, it will do them a power of good, improving their quality of life and making a real difference to them. That can and will be a big priority for us.

As we design the work programme, we will ensure that we have a system and a structure in place that encourages the people who deliver that programme to provide the specialised, tailored support that we need to steer those people who have been on incapacity benefit for so long down a better path and get them into employment. In particular, we recognise that the most disabled, those who have the biggest challenge in their life, will need additional help and support to get into work. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Maria Miller), will no doubt be talking later about some of the ways in which we hope to deliver the best possible support to those people.

Kate Green: Many disabled people would welcome the opportunity to be in paid employment. What efforts are being made not just to concentrate on supporting them to find suitable work, but to work with employers to ensure that they respond to the particular needs of disabled people in the workplace?

Chris Grayling: That is an important point. We must encourage and work with employers, and we should start at home. Whitehall and Government Departments and agencies should be at the forefront of finding the best ways to provide opportunities for people with disabilities, and that will be a priority for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. If we do not lead from the front, no one else will, and that is something that we certainly want to see happen.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen South) (Lab): How will the Minister encourage employers to employ people with mental health problems when the stigma is so great? We have had recent examples of discrimination against people who have disclosed mental health problems.

Chris Grayling: First, I congratulate the hon. Lady on her election to the Chair of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions. My colleagues and I look forward to being grilled by her in the months ahead, but I hope that we will have a constructive relationship. I hope that we can listen openly to the ideas that come from her Committee and that we can work together to make a difference on some of these issues.

I very much agree with the hon. Lady on mental health issues. One thing that I hope will come through the Work programme, where we have established providers with specialist skills working with employers and people who have had mental health challenges in their lives, is that we will have the kind of partnership that will break some of these barriers down. Once a provider starts to work with a group of employers, starts to bring good people to them, and that works well, more doors will be opened. The hon. Lady makes an important point; more than 2 million people are on incapacity benefit and many have supplemental health problems, and they must be looked after in the Work programme and we must ensure that it delivers opportunities for them.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Can the Minister explain what the future holds for Remploy?

Chris Grayling: Remploy does some very good work. We have been in office only three weeks, so there is still a lot of work to be done, but we recognise the importance of Remploy. In particular, I pay tribute to Remploy for doing some of the work that the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Miss Begg) would like to see, such as

[Chris Grayling]

getting people who have various forms of disability routinely into workplaces alongside members of society as a whole. That is particularly important. I want to see as many people as possible with either mental health problems or physical disabilities in workplaces as a matter of routine, and Remploy's work in getting more people into work has been extremely valuable.

May I also welcome you to your Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker? This may or may not be your first session, but it is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair today. If you will forgive me, I shall move on quickly and make way, because many Members want to make their maiden speeches.

On pensioner poverty, we are concerned to see that older people enjoy dignity and security in their old age, and that means ensuring that those in work are able to put money aside for their future. We have far too many pensioners living in poverty today, about 1.8 million people, so we need a system that works for our pensioners. We need a fair, decent and simple system that is supported by a vibrant private pensions landscape, too.

As a first step in doing the right thing for our pensioners, we will from April next year restore the earnings link with the basic state pension, and there will be a triple guarantee that pensions will be raised by the higher of earnings, prices or 2.5%. That is a big step forward for state pension provision, and I am very proud to be part of an Administration who intend to deliver that change.

We will also do everything that we can to ease the burden on pension funds, to encourage companies to offer high-quality pensions to their employees and to stop drowning pension funds in the red tape that has been symptomatic of the past 13 years of government. We also need to put people back in control of achieving their retirement aspirations, instead of being reliant purely on the state, and that involves creating the savings culture that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has talked about.

We need to address another area—debt, the single biggest challenge facing the UK. This week we have talked extensively about the national challenge that we face, but we should not forget the challenges that individual families face with debt. People in lower-income families are the most vulnerable; they have nothing to fall back on in an emergency; and the debt that they have to take on is twice as expensive as that for most other people because of the risk that they are perceived to represent. Debt creates tensions in families, it can be a disincentive to work and it leads to worry and stress-related illnesses. We will consider ways of alleviating some of the credit and debt challenges that our poorest communities face. That is essential if we are to deal with some of the issues in those communities, and we hope to bring forward thoughts and ideas in due course.

Drug and alcohol misuse and addiction is closely linked to some of the biggest challenges that we face, whether they are social challenges, educational failure, family breakdown, or even crime. Problematic drug and alcohol users are frequently unable to hold down a job or form relationships that do not revolve around their habit, and such addiction can ruin lives and destroy families, often leaving little room for anything else. Poverty and deprivation are a cause and effect of addiction, born out of the fact that 80% of problem drug users are in receipt of benefits, often for many years, with little realistic prospect of finding employment. Addiction in the home can do huge damage to children too, so as we design the work programme's detail, we will also be mindful of how we address the deep-rooted problems of addiction in our welfare state and our most deprived communities.

The past decade has been a wasted opportunity for this country. Promise after promise was not kept; hopes and expectations were dashed; and the jobs that were created went to people entering the country from overseas, not those on benefits. The reality is that billions and billions of pounds were spent to relatively little effect. We are determined to ensure that our most deprived communities are not left behind as they were over that decade. We will strive to get people back into work as the economy recovers; we will strive to improve the chances of those people getting a good education; we will work to strengthen families; we will work to break down the barriers between our richest and poorest communities; and we will work to raise the aspirations in those communities.

This is a Government who believe in opportunity, and we will work tirelessly to deliver it for all our citizens.

1.4 pm

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Thank you very much indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker. May I say what a pleasure it is to see you in the Chair this afternoon?

I welcome the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), to his new post. I know that on 5 May he thought he would become the Home Secretary, but the Department for Work and Pensions is a great Department, with excellent officials and a fantastic network of dedicated public servants throughout the whole country, and I hope he enjoys his time there as much as I enjoyed mine.

I have been trying to picture how the new ministerial team meetings are going, and I guess that the right hon. Gentleman has a pivotal role in mediating between the Secretary of State, who believes that family breakdown is a key issue that must be addressed, and their new colleague, the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Thornbury and Yate (Steve Webb), who said:

> "To hear Conservative Front Benchers suggest that they even care about this subject...is...unbelievable."—*[Official Report,* 20 July 2009; Vol. 496, c. 625.]

I was wondering why the right hon. Gentleman had been given that job, and whether it was because of his famed diplomatic skills, but then I remembered that it was in fact because he used to be a member of the Social and Democratic party—until he was swallowed up by the Conservatives. So he really is the prototype for the new coalition politics.

We have said that we want to be a constructive Opposition, supporting when we agree and criticising when we do not, and I must say that the Minister has not given a fair or accurate account of the Labour Government's achievements in tackling poverty. Over the 13 years in which we were in power, we reversed the trend of rising poverty and lifted 900,000 pensioners

out of poverty and 500,000 children out of relative poverty. On the statistics published only last month, we see that 2 million children were also lifted out of absolute poverty.

Bob Russell: Is the hon. Lady aware of early-day motions 61 and 62? The first is on the Joseph Rowntree Foundation audit of poverty, which shows that poverty is at the same level as it was in 2000. The second is on a study by the Fabian Society and the Webb Memorial Trust, which shows that 20% of the population lives in poverty. Is that really a triumph of new Labour's 13 years?

Helen Goodman: The latest year for which we have figures is 2008-09, and the hon. Gentleman must take account of the fact that since then two things have been going on: first, we have had to face the global recession; and secondly, the Labour Government have put in train all the measures from the 2007 Budget. Our calculations were that they would lift a further 500,000 children out of poverty, so the hon. Gentleman slightly overstates his case.

Bob Russell: The hon. Lady suggests that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Fabian Society and the Webb Memorial Trust, all of which are nominal supporters of new Labour, have got it wrong.

Helen Goodman: No, I do not suggest that at all. I suggest that those statistics are selective and that, if we take the decade as a whole, we see an extremely positive record on poverty across the board.

Mark Tami: Will my hon. Friend express a view on the comments of the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill)? I asked about them earlier and did not receive an answer, but the Under-Secretary said that the poorest would bear the brunt of the cuts.

Helen Goodman: That is the big worry, and if even Government Back Benchers can see it, I hope that Government Front Benchers will take that concern very seriously. As my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) said earlier, the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies also stated that Labour's tax and benefit reforms have reduced income inequality. If we had maintained the policies that we inherited in 1997, there would have been a much greater degree of income inequality.

The Minister before us this afternoon also overstated his case on worklessness. In fact, the number of people on inactive benefits is now 350,000 lower than the number that we inherited, and the number of lone parents in work has increased substantially from 46 to 58%, because of the positive measures that we took. I hope he does not mind my saying that he will find the problems rather more intractable than he implied in his speech.

We welcome the commitment to restoring the earnings link to pensions, and we are extremely pleased that the Government have decided to maintain the winter fuel allowance and free bus passes, which we introduced. As the Minister said, encouraging a savings culture is obviously important, but Labour Members cannot quite marry that with the halt that seems to have been put on the auto-enrolment programme.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): May I, for the record, ensure that the hon. Lady understands that there is no such halt? We are committed to auto-enrolment, but we are reviewing how it is done within the whole NES—new entrepreneur scholarships—programme.

Helen Goodman: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention.

The Minister talked about the importance of the problem of debt facing the very poorest people, and the Secretary of State mentioned credit unions in his speech on Tuesday night. The Labour Government introduced a growth fund for credit unions, and we put £86 million into credit unions across the country. I very much hope that the new Government will maintain that level of support in the public spending round that they are going to undertake.

Mark Tami: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is very important that we keep that support for credit unions, because if they are not there, such people will, yet again, have to turn to loan sharks and others who demand very high interest rates, often with menaces?

Helen Goodman: That is absolutely right. It is vital that we prevent the poorest people from being exploited in the way they have been. There is a lot of work to be done on this subject.

Mr Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): Has my hon. Friend had the same experience as I have in my constituency, where the Financial Services Authority is regulating credit unions in the way we wish it had regulated the big banks, thereby putting their future at stake? As my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) said, credit unions play a vital role in giving poorer people an alternative way of getting cheap credit.

Helen Goodman: I do not know whether my experience in my constituency has been exactly the same as that of my right hon. Friend, but he reinforces the significant role that credit unions can play, and we urge the Government to maintain support for them.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): In my constituency and around the county of Gloucestershire, the three credit unions that still exist—in Stroud, Forest of Dean and Gloucester—are all very small and only scratch the surface in trying to reach those on housing estates who are most vulnerable to loan sharks. Under this Government, we will try, with the help of a community foundation and social enterprises, to consolidate those three credit unions into a county-wide credit union that will be bigger and more solid and sustainable, and will reach more of the most poverty-stricken people.

Helen Goodman: I am of course interested to hear about what is going on in Gloucestershire. I do not know whether DWP Ministers have yet had time to engage with their colleagues at the Department for

[Helen Goodman]

Business, Innovation and Skills, but the regulatory issues mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) clearly need to be addressed in conjunction with that Department.

I should like to turn to the issue of free school meals, on which I hope to be able to offer the new ministerial team some constructive advice. I do not know if they have seen the letter that the Secretary of State for Education sent to my right hon. Friend the shadow Education Secretary on 7 June, in which he says that he plans to discuss the whole issue of free school meals with DWP colleagues. Labour Members are disappointed that the Secretary of State has decided not to go ahead with extending the eligibility of free school meals to the 500,000 children in primary schools whose parents are on working tax credits. He says in his letter:

"I am sympathetic to the arguments for extending eligibility—though surprised that a decision to do so was taken before any evidence on the impact on attainment could be collected from pilots."

That argument is not wholly unfamiliar to us. However, I would like the Minister to understand that we decided to go ahead with extending eligibility to those 500,000 children not only because we expected it to have a beneficial impact on their performance in school but because it is estimated that it would lift 50,000 children out of poverty and would be a serious improvement to the quality of work incentives. I strongly urge him to ask his officials if he could look at the analysis of the most cost-effective measures for addressing child poverty, because I believe he will see, as we did, that this is one of the most effective things that could be done. As the Education Department team are not here, I point out that another advantage of the measure is that it does not come off the DWP budget. This delay will be seriously disappointing for large numbers of families across the country. I urge the Government not to begin their tenure by repeating Mrs Thatcher's snatching of the milk.

Bob Russell: I have considerable sympathy with the hon. Lady's point, but I have to tell her—I researched this for an Adjournment debate that I had in the last Parliament—that it was the legislation of the last Labour Government that paved the way for the withdrawal of school meals services. Certainly, the Tories in Essex used that legislation to go down the route of removing the school meals service. Perhaps she should look at the Education Act 1944, and then she will see what a proper Labour Government used to do.

Helen Goodman: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman look at the Child Poverty Act 2010, in which we extended the eligibility of free school meals—that was a proper action by a proper Labour Government.

I said earlier that in our 13 years we had a political objective of decreasing poverty together with the policies to make it happen. I welcome the fact that the coalition has said that it will maintain the objective of ending child poverty, and that those living in poverty will be protected as the Government deal with the deficit. Indeed, the Prime Minister has said:

"The test of a good society is how…you protect the poorest, the most vulnerable, the elderly, the frail."

The Deputy Prime Minister has even said that the cuts will be "progressive". Labour Members will hold them to that, but I have to say that the omens are not good.

Kate Green: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Child Poverty Act has provided for the relative poverty measure to continue to be an element of the way in which we measure success and progress on poverty? Does she agree that that is the most meaningful measure for determining that we are ensuring that living standards for all, including the poorest, keep up as society's wealth improves?

Helen Goodman: I certainly do; my hon. Friend anticipates one of the points that I was going to make.

As I was saying, the omens are not good, and I fear that the rhetoric is not matched by the reality. Only this morning, the independent Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development forecast a rise in unemployment to almost 3 million as public sector workers, mainly women and the low-paid, are thrown on to the dole. In fact, it is difficult to see exactly what the strategy of Her Majesty's Government is. So far, the two coalition partners can agree on getting rid of the child trust fund and the future jobs fund, but what will be the effect of those cuts? The child trust fund was the first serious attempt to tackle intergenerational poverty by enabling low-income families to build up assets for their children. As the Minister said, it is vital to encourage a culture of savings, and it was designed to do precisely that, but it is going to go.

The coalition Government were also able to agree to cut the future jobs fund, despite the fact that before the election both coalition parties said they would continue it. That means that 80,000 young people will lose their chances of work this year, and perhaps 150,000 next year. The whole reason why we introduced the fund was that we saw the scarring effects of youth unemployment in the 1980s and '90s. Because we took measures over the past 18 months during the recession, long-term youth unemployment is now one tenth of the level that it was then. However, the coalition parties have clearly learned nothing and care less. One must ask oneself why that is, so let us examine where the cuts in the future jobs fund will fall most heavily—the west midlands, the north-west, Wales and Scotland. The future jobs fund is about real jobs.

Chris Grayling: May I point out to the hon. Lady how proud I am to have many new colleagues on our Benches from the west midlands, the north-west, Wales and so on? Will she confirm to the House that a couple of weeks ago, this Administration announced tens of thousands of new apprenticeships, which are likely to have a much longer-lasting impact on securing proper careers for the future for young people?

Helen Goodman: Of course Members from the coalition parties could be elected in those areas, given that they did not say before the election that they would cut the future jobs fund. They promised that they would continue it, and now they have cut it. That is the problem. I suspect that the Government's real agenda is to make young people do the same work that they were doing under the future jobs fund, but whereas everybody was paid at least the minimum wage through that fund,

under the schemes that the Minister and the Government are proposing they will have to live on benefits. What will that do for poverty levels, and where does it leave the Liberal Democrats' commitment to raise the minimum wage for people under the age of 24?

It is ironic that the one thing the partners in the coalition really cannot agree about is the role of the family. The Tories want to reintroduce the married couples allowance, but that is one of the few matters on which the coalition agreement allows the Liberal Democrats to abstain. Who will benefit from it? Not the widow, the abandoned mother or the woman who has left her husband because of domestic violence. The Liberal Democrats should have the courage of their convictions, and they should vote against it. It is a wholly regressive and retrograde step. As the Deputy Prime Minister said during the election campaign, it is

"a throwback to the Edwardian era"

and "patronising drivel".

The Secretary of State, who unfortunately is no longer in his place, revealed on 27 May that he was still looking to the Treasury for an extra £3 billion to reform the benefits system. The coalition agreement states that

"initial investment delivers later savings through lower benefit expenditure...based upon the DEL/AME switch"—

the departmental expenditure limits/annually managed expenditure switch. That is obviously based on the work of the Centre for Social Justice, which we examined in some detail when we took evidence on the Child Poverty Bill. The Secretary of State even seemed to be laying his job on the line later on 27 May when he said that he had not taken the job to be a "cheeseparer", and stated:

"If somebody tells me I have to do something different then I won't be here any longer."

I suspect that the Chancellor of the Exchequer may be telling him to do something different right now, because he says that tackling the deficit is the priority. If Ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions can persuade the Treasury that the extra £3 billion is the goose that will lay the golden egg, we shall be extremely surprised.

A further complication in trying to tease out the Government's strategy is that No. 10 has appointed my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field). We have not yet seen his terms of reference—I do not know whether they are to think the unthinkable—but there seems to be something strangely familiar about the situation. Last Saturday *The Guardian* said that he was going to look again at the definition of poverty. That really would be unthinkable. What is the point of it?

Mr Frank Field: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Helen Goodman: I will, because I would like my right hon. Friend to answer two questions. Is the purpose of moving away from the definition agreed in the European Union and the OECD to tell poor people that they are not really poor, or to avoid future embarrassing comparisons?

Mr Field: I am disappointed that my hon. Friend does not know the Labour Government's record better. If she examines the last publication that we produced, she will see that we said there was a choice of four definitions of poverty. I shall go into them more if I catch your eye later, Mr Deputy Speaker, but that document asked for views on the balance among the four and whether we should add others. By all means let us have a go at each other about this on a personal level, but let us also be clear where the Labour Government left the debate.

Helen Goodman: I think my right hon. Friend ignores the fact that it is less than three months since the Child Poverty Act 2010 received Royal Assent. It committed any Government to eradicating child poverty and set out the four measures that will be used to make that judgment, which are of absolute poverty, relative poverty—that is the one agreed in the EU and the OECD—persistent poverty and material deprivation. Everybody in the House supported that Act, and I hope that the Government will not renege on that support.

The main problem with the Government's position is that it is incoherent. They are divided on family policy and welfare strategy. Everyone knows that worklessness is one of the key drivers of poverty, but the proposals that we have heard from the Government so far will increase unemployment and the north-south divide.

Ms Buck: Was my hon. Friend surprised that the Minister made no mention of child care, which is critical to employment levels, particularly of lone parents? Does she share my disappointment that just before the election, the Mayor of London chose that moment to abolish child care from the London Development Agency's work and to start unpicking measures such as the child care affordability programme? Does she agree that affordable child care must be at the heart of the wide range of programmes and policies that we use to tackle poverty?

Helen Goodman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I hope that what the Mayor of London has done is not a precursor of what the Government intend to do. The Labour Government increased resources for child care significantly. We provided for three and four-year-olds to have 12 and then 15 hours of free provision, and we provided an element in the tax credits for people to pay for the child care that they found convenient. Our manifesto set out a commitment to extend child care provision to two-year-olds as well, because of the importance of the developmental needs that the Minister talked about so eloquently little more than 15 minutes ago.

The proof of the pudding will be whether the Government commit the policies to match the rhetoric. We fear that that will not be the case, and that there is now a serious risk of a double-dip recession. I urge DWP Ministers to be very careful indeed, lest they frustrate their no doubt good intentions by agreeing to cuts in the coming Budget.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Just before we move on, may I point out that Mr Speaker has stated that Back Benchers will be limited to 10 minutes?

1.29 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye so early in this debate. It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, and I think that you are the first successful

[Andrew Percy]

Labour candidate I have ever voted for. I have to confess that, as I voted for you and for my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans), I realised that as a Yorkshireman I had cast my ballot for two Lancastrians. I was consoled by realising later that I have at least silenced two Lancastrian Members for some time—*[Laughter.]*

As the first Back Bencher to speak in this debate, I have no previous maiden speeches to commend, but I have spent the last week and a half in my place, and I hoped to be called in the education debate last week. I heard more and more maiden speeches, and there were some fantastic examples. I only hope that I set the bar sufficiently low that everything that comes after me today is an improvement.

I pay tribute to my predecessor in Brigg and Goole, Mr Ian Cawsey, who was indeed my only predecessor, as the constituency was created in 1997. I also wish to apologise to the House, not for ridding the country of a Labour Member of Parliament, which I think was rather a good thing, but for helping to break up the world's only parliamentary band, MP4. Mr Cawsey served the group with some distinction as its lead singer. I have been approached by one or two of the remaining members to take his place, but alas that is not to be. Ian served the constituency incredibly well. He was very decent in the election campaign and in my dealings with him in the past three and a half years. I genuinely wish him and his family, who are extremely loyal to him, all the very best for the future.

As I said, the Brigg and Goole constituency has only existed since 1997, and before then the area was covered by other constituencies and represented by several distinguished Members, including—I am pleased to say—my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), who served the Boothferry constituency between 1987 and 1997. The Brigg part of the constituency was served by Michael Brown, who will be remembered on both sides of the House and is still active in public life today. The previous Member for Scunthorpe also served a portion of my constituency for a time.

Since my election, several people have asked me, "Where exactly is Brigg and Goole?" My job today is to enlighten the House about the delights of the constituency. Mine is a difficult task, because I represent one of the few constituencies that cross county boundaries. The constituency is two thirds in North Lincolnshire and a third in the East Riding of Yorkshire, where I was born and bred. Being a Yorkshireman representing a Lincolnshire seat can have its challenges, and I have to tread a careful path. My predecessor had the same problem, especially as Brigg Town football club often play Goole Town football club—a potentially dangerous situation for a Member of Parliament. My predecessor had a clever approach to the problem, courtesy of the communications allowance, and regularly sponsored both clubs' matches—a pleasure that will not be open to me.

The constituency was formed when the dreaded Humberside authority existed, and we are all delighted to have seen the back of that—[Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."] I am grateful for support on that point. However, the Humberside name still exists, and I will probably have more to say on that in the weeks and months to come.

The constituency has a long history, going back centuries. Brigg is a small historic market town in north Lincolnshire, with a famous fair that dates all the way back to 1205. Brigg is also the gateway—depending on which way one enters—to the beautiful Lincolnshire wold villages, many of which have played an important role in the history of this country. I also have the pleasure of representing a unique area of the country called the Isle of Axholme—a portion of land bounded on all sides by major rivers that was actually marshland until it was drained by Cornelius Vermuyden in the 17th century. In an early example of English jobs for English workers, Mr Vermuyden was a Dutchman who brought Dutch workers over and came into conflict with the locals. The King had to intervene and ensure that half the work force was English—something that the previous Prime Minister was unable to achieve.

The Isle of Axholme also houses the beautiful market town of Epworth, the birthplace of Charles and John Wesley, the founders of Methodism. It also has one of the world's largest trolleybus museums at Sandtoft. I confess that I have yet to visit it, but I will do so shortly. The area is also home to Britain's oldest traditional tussle, the Haxey hood, which takes place on the 12th night after Christmas. It has various interesting characters, including the lord of the hood, the chief boggin and a fool. As I look round the Chamber, I have allotted some positions for next year, but it would be rude to go into details.

Goole is in the East Riding of Yorkshire and is Britain's biggest inland port. It is a company town, having been formed through the creation of the Aire and Calder canal. Also in the East Riding is the small village in which I live, Airmyn, which has a long history with the Percy family. We—I say we, although I suspect that my links to the Percy family are more illegitimate and feudal than I might like them to be—used to hold the title to Airmyn, and the pub is still called the Percy Arms. Its recent refurbishment finishes today and it will reopen at 7pm tonight. All are welcome.

My constituency also played a major role in the second world war, with parts of the Mulberry harbour being completed in Goole. We also housed several airfields, including RAF Sandtoft, RAF Elsham Wolds and RAF Snaith. The latter has a fantastic memorial team, which I am involved in supporting.

Before becoming a Member, I was a schoolteacher, and I intend to champion the issues of school funding, deprivation and exclusions. I am delighted to have been called to speak in the debate on poverty because although I represent a large rural constituency I was brought up in a neighbouring constituency of Hull as a proud comprehensive boy, and I am pleased to say that there are two comprehensive boys now in Parliament, one on each side—*[Interruption.]* I meant two Hull comprehensive boys. I have taught in some of the most deprived schools in Hull, so the issues of child poverty and deprivation are dear to me.

In my time in Parliament I wish to champion the cause of excluded children, who under the last two Governments—and perhaps also under previous Governments—have not received the attention that they deserve. In particular, children who receive free school meals are three times more likely to be excluded from school. As a practitioner in the last few years, I know that we had fine words from the previous Government,

but we were hamstrung in schools by a commitment to social inclusion. The social inclusion agenda was introduced for good reasons, but it had the opposite effect to that intended in secondary schools, because it tied the hands of schoolteachers who wanted to deal with discipline, which is at the core of many of the problems we face in schools today. I do not have time to go into great detail today, but I intend to champion the cause of excluded children in the future. We are moving in the right direction with the pupil premium, but we must accept that dealing with excluded children is expensive. We need to follow the examples of excellent practice around the country and make progress on this issue.

I would have liked to talk for longer on this subject, but that is not possible. So I shall end by saying that I intend to be an independently minded local champion for the fantastic people of Brigg and Goole.

1.39 pm

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): I welcome you to your new position, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank you for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech during this important debate on poverty, following the excellent maiden speech by the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy).

It is a great honour to serve as the Member of Parliament for Leicester West. My constituency has a proud history, as part of an open and diverse city that has welcomed people, commerce and ideas. In Roman times, Fosse Way, which still runs through Leicester West, was one of the main routes across Britain. This road helped to bring trade to my constituency in wool and leather during the middle ages, and later in textiles, hosiery and shoemaking—industries for which Leicester was long and rightly famed.

These industries gave birth to the co-operative movement, which still has a strong presence in my constituency today. In 1936, Leicester's co-operative society hosted the Jarrow marchers on their way to London, providing them with a much-needed change of boots from one of the city's many shoemaking factories. I am proud to be a member of the Co-operative party and, I might add, a frequent customer at my local Co-op on the Narborough road. Co-operative principles of mutuality and solidarity are at the heart of the Labour movement and my constituency.

Since helping the Jarrow marchers, my constituency has continued to welcome people from throughout the UK, many of whom come to study at Leicester's excellent universities, and from across the world. Leicester West has been enriched by our Asian communities, from east Africa, Gujarat, Punjab, Pakistan and Bangladesh, by our African-Caribbean community, by people from eastern Europe, including Poland and Ukraine, and more recently by people from Turkey and our new African communities, including those of Somalia, Sierra Leone and Cameroon. All the different communities in Leicester—white, black and Asian, Christian, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim—are what make us a great city and country. As the MP for Leicester West, I will always champion and celebrate the strength that this diversity brings.

As is customary in maiden speeches, I pay tribute to my predecessor, Patricia Hewitt. She was a dedicated local MP, passionately committed to serving her constituents. She worked tirelessly, not only for Leicester West, but for the Labour party and Government. As Britain's longest serving Trade and Industry Secretary and Cabinet Minister for Women, she pioneered family-friendly employment, including the right to request flexible working, alongside improvements in international trade, equality and human rights. As Health Secretary, she was responsible for Labour's ban on smoking at work and in public places. The ban was very controversial at the time, not least in some of the working men's clubs in my constituency, but I believe that in years to come, it will be remembered as one of the most important achievements of the Labour Government.

I am proud of Labour's record in Leicester West. The new deal for communities has helped to transform Braunstone, which was one of the most neglected parts of my constituency in 1997. The new Brite centre, skills centre, health and leisure centres and Business Box are helping local residents get the training, jobs and services they need to build a better life for themselves and their families. As a former director of the Maternity Alliance charity, I know that the very earliest years of life are critical in determining children's later life chances. Sure Start children's centres are providing help and support to families with young children in Beaumont Leys and Stocking Farm, Braunstone, Braunstone Frith, New Parks, Rowley Fields and the west end.

The dedication and hard work of NHS staff, alongside Labour's investment, mean that patients in my constituency now wait a maximum of 18 weeks for their operations, which is down from 18 months in 1997. Our investment has also built brand-new schools, such as the award-winning Beaumont Leys. This has helped transform not only the physical environment of the school, but the attitude, self-esteem and motivation of pupils and staff. That is why I am extremely concerned about the Government's plans for Building Schools for the Future and why I will fight to ensure that our proposals to rebuild or refurbish the remaining secondary schools in Leicester West will now go ahead.

Despite these improvements, poverty and inequality still blight the lives of too many families and communities in my constituency. More than a third of children in Leicester West are still growing up in workless families. Children born into poverty in Braunstone or New Parks are more likely than children in better-off families to die before they are five, more likely to leave school without qualifications, less likely to go to university and get a well-paid job, and more likely to die before their time. This is simply unacceptable in the 21st century in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. That is what I came into politics to help change, and that is what I intend to do as Leicester West's MP.

Improving education is the key to tackling poverty and inequality in my constituency. Real progress is now being made. We have seen improvements in maths and English results, and our GCSE results are improving faster than the national average. My No. 1 priority is helping to build on this progress to achieve a step change in education, skills, training and aspiration in Leicester West, starting with young children, and continuing through school and on into adult life.

I will also champion local businesses and jobs. One third of jobs in Leicester are now in the public sector, but we cannot rely on public services to create the majority of new jobs over the next 10 years, as they have done in the previous decade. Leicester has the potential

[Liz Kendall]

to be a leading centre of modern manufacturing in this country, if we continue to invest in our transport infrastructure and skills, and to combine the entrepreneurial zeal of our local businesses with our experience in design and technology and the knowledge in our universities.

Making life easier and fairer for every community in my constituency means increasing the amount of affordable housing, particularly social housing, tackling crime and antisocial behaviour, and giving young people more things to do, particularly in the evenings and at weekends. Fantastic services are available in some parts of my constituency, and we now need them in every local area—services like Street Vibe's dance teams, the Mashed-up's DJ van and our community boxing gyms in New Parks and Home Farm.

I am pleased that the Government have matched Labour's commitment to restoring the link between earnings and pensions. We also need radical change in the way we care for our ageing population. This issue is one that our society has barely begun to address in areas such as social care, dementia services, and end-of-life care.

My job as a Back-Bench MP is to stand up for my constituents. I will play my part in providing a strong and effective Opposition. I will not oppose the Government for the sake of it, but I will judge them on whether their policies boost jobs and growth, and increase fairness and opportunity for people in Leicester West. So if the Government go ahead with their plans to scrap the future jobs fund, which is helping young people in my constituency to get work and new skills, and to reduce benefit bills, I will oppose them. However, if their pupil premium gives more money for children in deprived areas in Leicester West, without cutting funding for other vital programmes, I will support them.

But the improvements we need cannot be achieved by the Government alone. Change must come from within communities by empowering people to take more control over their own lives. This is already happening in many parts of Leicester West, through the tireless work of our community organisations, public services, local businesses, and voluntary and faith groups. However, they rightly expect, and need, more support. I cannot promise to address all the challenges we face in Leicester West—and my constituents would not believe me if I did—but I can promise I will continue to listen and do everything I can to serve the people who have given me the greatest privilege, by electing me as their MP.

1.48 pm

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): May I, too, welcome you to the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker? It is a privilege to speak in this important debate on poverty and to follow such outstanding maiden speeches from the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy).

I pay tribute to my predecessor, who is soon to be ennobled as Lord Spicer of Cropthorne in the county of Worcestershire, for his years of service to the West Worcestershire and, prior to that, the South Worcestershire constituencies. He was elected to Parliament nine times during his 36 years of service to Worcestershire residents, and during my almost four years as parliamentary candidate, I met so many people on the doorstep who paid tribute to his service as a constituency MP and to his energetic pursuit of his casework. He set a standard that I shall strive to maintain. For three decades he championed the case for a new community hospital for Malvern. I am delighted that, after 30 years, my constituents and I will welcome the opening of its doors this coming October.

Here in Westminster, Sir Michael had a stellar career as well, serving as a Minister under Margaret Thatcher and being known latterly to Conservative Back Benchers as the chairman of the 1922 committee, a position for which he stood for many years unopposed. He was clearly admired by colleagues here every bit as much as he was by his constituents. I will not presume to match his achievements, but merely work hard on behalf of the constituents of West Worcestershire and try every day to serve their interests to the best of my ability.

I would also like to reassure all my neighbouring hon. Friends that, unlike my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley), I need not aspire to any neighbouring territory in any future boundary review. That is because the Baldwin ward is already part of the West Worcestershire constituency, and is named, of course, after Britain's three-time Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, who lived at Astley. Stanley Baldwin's Bewdley constituency contained much of the same beautiful scenery as the current West Worcestershire constituency, and I have often been asked on the doorstep whether I am his granddaughter; in fact, more often than not, people say, "I hear you are Stanley Baldwin's granddaughter."

I am grateful to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to put the record straight in *Hansard*. My maiden name was Eggleston, and my husband was christened James Stanley Baldwin—obviously my mother-in-law was a big fan—but so far we have not been able to find any family linkage beyond the name. Indeed, I was so concerned about possibly being elected on false pretences, with an overestimation of both my ability and my ambition, that I even answered the question in my election address. Nevertheless, I am proud to be called Baldwin, which is a very good and widespread surname in West Worcestershire.

I hope that hon. Members will indulge me if I paint a picture of the main attractive aspects of the West Worcestershire constituency. It is the heart of England, and from the fertile plains of the Severn valley rises the solitary, final western hill of the Cotswolds, Bredon hill, which was an inspiration to A. E. Housman, the great English poet. The River Avon meanders around the beautiful Georgian town of Pershore, on its way to join up with the River Severn, creating flood plains and fields that are famous for being able to grow the most succulent asparagus. On the west of the River Severn, across more fine fields, pasture, orchards and common land, the Malvern hills rise up suddenly, to a great height. It is said that someone standing on the top of the Malvern hills and looking due east will not see a higher hill until they get to the Urals. [Hon. Members: "Ah?"] It is true.

The county border runs along the summit, but the West Worcestershire constituency, which stretches to the north and west of the hills, runs up the River Teme valley to the town of Tenbury Wells, and then as far north as villages such as Bayton and Mamble, which

have Dudley postcodes. The four main towns of Malvern, Pershore, Upton upon Severn and Tenbury Wells are complemented by more than 70 different parishes, all with their own charms. It is particularly worth noting that the great English composer Elgar was born at Lower Broadheath. Throughout his life he drew musical inspiration from the scenery and landscape of the Malvern hills.

Food production is important locally. I have mentioned the asparagus crop, but visitors can also eat delicious local cherries, apples and pears, and enjoy locally raised chickens, eggs, turkeys, geese, beef, pork and lamb. To drink with that, they can enjoy the pure Malvern water, or beer, cider or locally produced wine. I am sure that other hon. Members will want to join me in my efforts in this place to promote our wonderful local food.

Visitors can buy locally produced milk and honey as well, but in this afternoon's debate on poverty, I want to use this opportunity to highlight some of the causes of poverty in West Worcestershire. I was delighted to hear the Minister mention drug use, which is not unknown in my constituency, particularly in some of the more deprived parts. I do not need to remind hon. Members of how badly drug use can ruin lives. I am particularly keen to use my time in the House to work with local residents, the police, charities and social enterprises to help people to tackle addiction and ensure that those who deal in drugs are shown no tolerance.

The population of West Worcestershire has one of the older demographic profiles in this country, and I want to raise some of the challenges of poverty among the elderly. I am keen for the Government to make progress on the issue of paying for long-term residential care. Many of my constituents worry about having to pay for their care or sell their homes in old age. I hope that we can support them with a voluntary insurance scheme and that the coalition Government come forward with other proposals that will help us all to afford the increasing cost of looking after our elderly citizens with dignity and respect.

Before coming into Parliament, I was a pension fund manager. One of the many scandalous legacies of the outgoing Government is the way in which they destroyed our private pension system, which used to be the envy of the world. However, the unfunded liability of the public pension system has increased enormously. We are all living longer, so the current situation is completely unsustainable. A pensioner in my constituency on modest savings who has lived responsibly and within her means all her life has to face an annual increase in her council tax, which is often due to the need for the local council and local police to make an ever greater provision for their future pension entitlements.

That results in real poverty for pensioners who have a small amount of savings and are thus unable to claim pension credit. These days, very few people in the private sector are saving enough for their greater longevity either. We are storing up terrible pensioner poverty for the future in this country. The Government have made a welcome start on tackling the fiscal deficit, but I hope that they and this Parliament can also begin to address the long-term pensions savings deficit in this country.

I am extremely grateful for the opportunity that you have given me to make my maiden speech in this important debate, Mr Deputy Speaker. I look forward to using my time in this House to serve the good people of West Worcestershire, both here at Westminster and in the local community, as the Government take on some of those long-term challenges.

1.57 pm

Gregg McClymont (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (Lab): May I add my congratulations on your election, Mr Deputy Speaker? I noticed that you have the "Directory of Members" to hand. I hope that you will agree that I do not look quite as bad in the flesh as I do in that truly horrific photo.

I come to this House from Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East—a constituency served with great distinction by my predecessor, Rosemary McKenna. Rosemary's 13 years in Parliament were the culmination of a lifetime of public service. As teacher, councillor, council leader, president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and, latterly, Member of this House, Rosemary served the public with distinction for more than 40 years. Rosemary's distinctions are many, but I would like to emphasise her temperament and character. Rosemary's generous nature, her good humour, and, especially, her serenity served her well. To keep one's head when all around are losing theirs is an asset in every walk of life, but especially, I suspect, in this place. I am sure that the House will join me in wishing Rosemary well in her retirement.

For those who do not know the geography of my constituency—and I suspect that there are a few—Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East sits at the heart of Scotland, roughly at the centre of a triangle formed by Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling. This central location, along with a work force well educated in our excellent local comprehensive schools and colleges, is attractive to employers both private and public. Indeed, Members unlucky enough to receive a call from the Inland Revenue will, I am sure, take some comfort in the knowledge that they are likely being called from my constituency, home to one of the largest Inland Revenue offices in the country.

The economy of my constituency is, I think, much like the economy of the country: it reflects a symbiotic relationship between the private and the public sectors. That is why I disagree with some of the speeches I have heard—not today, but in previous debates—from Conservative Members, who repeatedly draw a stark distinction between the public and the private. To me, that is rather artificial. Our economy depends on interaction between these two sectors. No man is an island, and neither is any private sector enterprise. In my view, the private sector could not flourish without a public infrastructure of roads, rail, sanitation, telecoms or, indeed, a people well educated in our public, by which I mean our state, schools.

That is the perspective that underpins the views of Labour Members on the Government's deficit reduction plan, with all its implications for poverty reduction. Yes, reducing the deficit is important; yes, it is a priority; but cutting before the recovery is established and before confidence is restored is to flirt with disaster. Badly timed public sector cuts of the kind proposed by the Government will not, in my judgment, damage only the public sector, but the private sector, too, as they will reduce demand in the whole economy.

[Gregg McClymont]

I urge Members on both sides of the House to read the report released today by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, whose chief economist has revised his forecasts. Looking at the proposed Government cuts, he now believes that unemployment will reach 2.95 million by 2012 and remain close to 3 million until 2015. That would be a disaster for the poor: when the economy retracts, it is the poor who suffer most. Substantial reductions in poverty depend on economic growth, because in the end substantial poverty reduction depends on the creation of jobs. I am sure we all agree that the single best poverty reduction programme is creating well-paid, secure jobs.

That is the context in which I raise my concern about how the Government are approaching the deficit, with all its implications for poverty in this country. I recognise, of course, that it is entirely consistent for the Conservatives to advance deflationary economic policies. As a historian, I can see them having been put forward in different guises for 100 years, whether it be by Bonar Law in the 1920s, Mr Baldwin in the 1930s, Mrs Thatcher in the 1980s or the new Prime Minister in 2010. The object is generally the same—to reduce the financial burden on those who tend to vote Conservative. That is understandable.

More depressing, from my point of view, is the Liberal Democrat embrace of this deflationary strategy. One hundred years ago, the Liberal party broke with that kind of economics. In his "People's Budget", Lloyd George rejected as inadequate and likely to increase poverty exactly the kind of approach that underpins the new Government's strategy. I wonder what Lloyd George, Beveridge, and, above all, Keynes would make of the Liberal Democrat position. I suspect that those great social Liberals would see the Government's so-called anti-poverty measures—whether they be fractional tax advantages for a minority of married couples, or appeals to the "Big Society"—for what they are. In my judgment, these are measures designed to ease the consciences of those who wish to feel that something is being done about poverty, while the actual priority is that that "something" to be done is of minimal cost.

More positively, I hope the Government can be persuaded that poverty reduction depends, as I say, on well-paid secure jobs. I believe that the minimum wage and tax credits are excellent measures that reward work and have done something significant to reduce poverty in this country. I urge the Government, if I may say so, to embrace them with the zeal of a convert.

I also ask the Government to consider the issue of work that pays not too badly, but too well. I welcome the Government's commitment to ending excessive salaries in the public sector, but I think that we have to look at the private sector, too. Excess public sector pay is not fair and should be curbed, but it is not actively dangerous, whereas inappropriate incentives in the private sector—excessive and poorly calibrated bonuses in particular—have put our entire economy in jeopardy.

Growing up in the new town of Cumbernauld in the 1980s, I saw with my own eyes the harm done by deflationary political economy. It took over a decade of Labour Government to begin to heal the scars left in Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East, and, indeed, in many other parts of the country. We ask not to be targeted again by a new round of deflationary cuts, particularly when the recession was inspired by the financial services sector. What I ask is that the burden is fairly shared.

In the end, I repeat, it is growth that will reduce the deficit in a way that enables the economy to prosper, thus allowing further reductions in poverty to take place. The best way to reduce poverty is to create work with a decent wage, which depends on economic growth. By cutting too fast, too soon, the Government risk a slump in demand across the economy: the result will be even higher unemployment than at present and thus greater poverty too. For me—and, I am sure, for many Members—that is a grim prospect indeed.

2.6 pm

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in today's debate. It is a pleasure to see you in your new role.

As with a lot of new Members, this is not the first time that I have tried to give my maiden speech. Given that this was the third time that I tried to get elected, it was a wait that I was prepared to sit out just a little bit longer. Originally, I stood in the European elections for the west midlands, unsuccessfully, and then in my home town, for Dudley, North, where my father was a councillor for 30 years. To coin a phrase used by a close friend, "Andrew fought Dudley, and Dudley fought back."

I am honoured to represent the people of Burton and Uttoxeter in today's debate, because the subject is a hugely important one for those people. Like many making their maiden speeches, I went to the Library and looked at the contributions that previous MPs for Burton had made to the House, and I have to say that there were some impressive people, particularly Mr John Jennings, who, as well as being an ex-headmaster and making a massive contribution as an MP, rose to the illustrious role of Deputy Speaker.

Then, of course, there was the great Sir Ivan Lawrence, the previous Conservative MP for Burton, who was a well-renowned barrister before he came to this House. Sir Ivan famously defended the Kray twins before moving here, where he defended the Governments of Mrs Thatcher and Mr Major. Sir Ivan is famous for having made the longest speech in this House in modern times. He spoke for some four hours 27 minutes on the vital issue of water fluoridation. Although Sir Ivan was a marvellous constituency MP, defending the interests of the people of Burton and Uttoxeter, and playing a massive role here, my hon. Friends will be delighted to know that I intend to try to fill his shoes, but with just a little more brevity.

Another famous incident involving Sir Ivan occurred when, having been invited to address a dinner of local charities and bigwigs, the time got to 11.45, and after numerous speakers, numerous courses and numerous glasses of wine, he had still not been called. The toastmaster stood up and said, "I now call on Sir Ivan Lawrence to give his address," to which Sir Ivan stood up and said, "267 Newton road. That is where I am going now—goodbye," and left the room.

A wonderful lady called Janet Dean preceded me. She was elected to the House in 1997, having moved to Uttoxeter in 1968. She was a hardworking champion of the people of Burton and Uttoxeter, and was greatly

loved and respected. She did an incredible amount of work in representing people in my constituency on important issues, and she is revered and much loved.

When I was selected as candidate for Burton in an open primary—I know that the Government are keen to promote those further—I was interviewed by a reporter from the *Burton Mail*. I said to him afterwards, "Tell me a little about Janet. What do you think of her?" He replied, "It is a little bit like sending your mum to Parliament." It was with that maternal love, and that maternal respect for her constituents, that Janet Dean presided over my constituency for the 13 years of her reign, and I know that she will be greatly missed.

Burton—or Burton and Uttoxeter, as it is known by many people living there—is a wonderful constituency. I believe that it is one of most diverse constituencies in the country. Of course it is famous for its brewing town and its long brewing history, but if you will allow me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will give you a thumbnail sketch of it.

Outside Burton are some beautiful villages such as Tutbury, which is famous for its castle; Marchington, which is famous for its marvellous pub The Dog and Partridge; and Rolleston, which has rightly earned its title as the most friendly village in Staffordshire. My constituency is a beautiful place in which to live and to work, and I am honoured to represent it. Of course, in the middle of my constituency is Uttoxeter, a famous market town. Although it has now lost its cattle market, it is still heavily influenced by the agriculture that surrounds it, but over the years it has developed and grown as a commuter town for nearby Derby and Burton.

I hope that the coalition Government's proposal to reduce the number of Members in the House by 10% will allow a wrong to be righted and enable the Boundary Commission, for the first time, properly to recognise the importance of Uttoxeter by including it in the name of any future constituency following a boundary review.

The people of Uttoxeter are nothing if not plain-speaking. During the election campaign I was walking around the wonderful Kirk House, a care home for the elderly, and I went into a room where three of the elderly ladies were having their hair done. They greeted me, and were pleased to see me. The hairdresser said, "Are you the gentleman whose pictures I have seen on all the posters around the town?" "Yes," I replied, rather proudly. She looked at me and said, "It is a very flattering photograph." *[Laughter.]*

The constituency also contains Rocester, home of the world-famous JCB, the yellow digger, which is a British icon and a champion of the engineering industry. I applaud the work that is being done in the JCB academy to try to motivate young people to become involved in engineering and develop our engineers in the future. I intend to use my time in the House to promote engineering, and to promote the good work that is done at the academy.

Let me return to the main industry in Burton, which is brewing. Burton has a proud history of brewing, and I hope that it is an important part of our bright future. Hon. Members may be surprised to learn that, as well as being a brewing town, Burton has a wonderful rehabilitation centre for people addicted to drugs and alcohol, the Burton addiction centre, BAC O'Connor. I had the honour of bringing my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) to visit the facility.

We politicians often say that we want to improve people's lives. The BAC is giving people back their lives. I met a gentleman there who had been on heroin and methadone for 30 years; the BAC had got him clean for two years. He said that he had spent his life in state-induced dependency. I hope that the coalition Government will take that issue into consideration, and will develop policies to tackle addiction.

We desperately need to support the brewing industry that is so vital to Burton. We have seen a haemorrhaging of pubs, and of the strength of the brewing community, as a result of 13 years of the last Government. I hope that the new coalition will act to right that wrong as well. Tony Blair told us that the late-licensing laws would usher in a café culture, but that is certainly not what we are finding in Burton, where in just a few weeks there have been a fatal stabbing and two brutal beatings—all as a result of people spilling out of late-night drinking establishments.

I hope that the new coalition Government will do something for the brewing industry and the people of Burton, and tackle our late-licensing problem. I also hope that they will introduce measures to prevent below-cost selling in supermarkets. We are seeing too many young people drinking in parks, and going out to drink when they have already consumed too much alcohol.

Finally, I hope that the Government will introduce the "smart taxes" that were proposed in our manifesto. The last Government, with a Scottish Chancellor, did very well for the Scottish whisky industry. I believe that our proposals to tax the bad and reduce the taxation on low-strength alcohol will help to tackle binge-drinking, and also to support the brewing industry in Burton.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you will note, according to today's Order Paper there is supposed to be a written ministerial statement on special advisers. I have just been to the Library and it was not there, but two media companies have telephoned me to tell me that Mr Andy Coulson is paid more than the Deputy Prime Minister, and that there has been a significant increase in the number of spin doctors at No. 10. Is it possible for a Minister to come to the House to apologise for the discourtesy, and to explain the seeming anomaly whereby a hired hand is paid more than an elected Deputy Prime Minister?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order and not a matter for me, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that he has put it on the record, and has made the point that I presume he wanted to make.

2.17 pm

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen South) (Lab): Let me begin, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by welcoming you to your new position in the Chair. I noticed a glint in your eye when two maiden speakers, the hon. Members for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) and for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), managed to mention, respectively, the opening of a pub and the brewing industry in their constituencies.

[Miss Anne Begg]

I am sure that both those things are very dear to your heart, and I hope that you will enjoy yourself in your new role.

As the first Back-Bench non-maiden speaker to speak today, I think it only fair, before I turn to the matters in hand, to pay tribute to the five maiden speakers whom we have heard this afternoon. I am very impressed: all the maiden speeches that I have heard over the last few weeks have been superb, and I think that that augurs very well for the future of the House of Commons and its importance in the life of Parliament.

The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole spoke in a very easy style, with plenty of humour. I suspect that that is because he was once a teacher. As a former secondary school teacher myself, I can tell him that the behaviour in the House of Commons is probably far, far worse than that of his worst secondary school class.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall), a fellow Co-operative, paid tribute to her predecessor, Patricia Hewitt. I hope that she will continue the work that Patricia did, particularly in regard to the equalities agenda. Patricia certainly caused a stir when she was Business Secretary, because she was the first woman to fill the post. I clearly remember her coming to Aberdeen to open one of the offshore oil and gas fields in a very male-dominated industry. She was a breath of fresh air, but I am sure that the new Member for Leicester West will be as well, and I welcome her to the House.

The hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) waxed lyrical about the beauty of her constituency. If hon. Members do not appreciate their own constituencies, no one else will, and it was clear from her speech that she loves the area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Gregg McClymont) has inherited what I believe is the second-longest constituency name in the House. I think that the longest belongs to the new Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Danny Alexander), but I have not counted the letters. I know that the right hon. Gentleman and Rosemary McKenna, my hon. Friend's predecessor, had some arguments as to whose constituency name was the most difficult to pronounce. I was glad that my hon. Friend paid such a warm tribute to Rosemary, because she was one of my close friends in the House and I miss her very much. I hope that he will pass my best wishes on to her in her retirement. Unfortunately, I will not be able to make her retirement dinner, as it is on the one weekend that I have off in the next two months, but I would have loved to have been there. My hon. Friend might not remember his predecessor but one, Norman Hogg, who came from Aberdeen. He returned to Aberdeen to retire and played an important part in my election campaign, particularly in 2005. Unfortunately, he has since died, and we missed him during this election.

My hon. Friend was not shy in stating his views in his maiden speech. He was clear in the way that he argued his case—certainly in what he said about there not being a false divide between the private and the public sector. I imagine that he will add a great deal of intellect to future debates in the House.

The last maiden speech up to now, by the hon. Member for Burton, was very impressive. He spoke without any notes, which will stand him in good stead, as one of the worst things that can happen when a Member speaks is when Members from the opposing side shout "Reading!" at them. Perhaps it is just as well that the rules of the House have changed and that Members can no longer make four-hour speeches such as the one by his predecessor that he mentioned. The hon. Gentleman will also be a credit to his constituency and we welcome him, as we do all the others. I, too, was very friendly with his predecessor, Janet Dean, and his description of her as a mother figure was all too accurate.

I, too, have a new job this afternoon, Mr Deputy Speaker, as the new Chair of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, and I thank those hon. Members who voted for me. Let me also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), who was a formidable opponent. It was a very close fight, and she would have made an excellent Chair of the Committee. We worked well together in the 2001-05 Parliament. This afternoon, she showed her talent for holding the Executive to account in questioning the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling). I would have liked to welcome him to his job, but unfortunately he is no longer in his place. Such questioning is clearly the role of Select Committees, which are the workhorses of the House. They play an important role and I hope that the Work and Pensions Committee does its job well in holding this Executive to account. Shadow Ministers all say that Select Committees are very important when they are in opposition, but they might change their mind when they get into government.

I was a little disappointed by the way in which the Minister of State handled the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North, because he managed to avoid answering it. I hope that he was not setting the tone for the future. He failed to answer what she was clearly asking, which was what this Conservative Government, albeit a coalition Government, would do differently from the previous Conservative Government, after whom there was an increasing level of poverty, particularly child poverty, an increasing divide between the rich and poor and an increasing dislocation in many communities. As he did not answer that question, I, too, would like to put it to the Government.

As far as I can gather from what the Minister of State said, the Government will do what the Labour Government did, but a lot better with a lot less money. I did not hear what I expected to hear—new ideas and what will be different. For example, what will be different about the way in which the Government deal with mental health issues? I asked about that in my intervention, but his answer could have come from a Minister in the previous Government, because it was about what the previous Government were doing. So, what they were doing must have been working, if the new Government are not saying that they would do anything different that will work better.

We know that these issues are difficult and need to be tackled, but let me say what the Labour Government did. We introduced the minimum wage, tax credits, child care credits, the child trust fund and pension credits. They were all introduced through practical legislation that tackled the issue of poverty. They were not just

warm words or aspirations—they were things that made a difference. On top of all that, we introduced a number of universal benefits to make sure that everyone benefited from the welfare state, not just those at the bottom end. For example, we made sure that there was an increase in child benefit. I do not whether the new Government intend to tax child benefit or whether it will continue to rise at the rate it was rising under the previous Government. Those were all important, practical measures that tackled poverty.

The last Government did other important things such as introducing Sure Start, which we have not seen the results of yet as the first generation of Sure Start children are only just leaving primary school. My worry is that the longitudinal, intergenerational, changing measures that we put in place will be undermined by the new Government, and I seek assurances that they will not, because we know that early intervention works. Indeed, it is one of the few ways in which to tackle the intergenerational poverty that has blighted our society. I hope that the new Government will do more than just say the warm words that we have heard this afternoon. I hope that they will do practical things to make sure that those of our citizens who still live in poverty soon no longer will.

2.27 pm

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech during this very important debate on poverty. I congratulate the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Miss Begg) on her election as Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, and I congratulate all other hon. Members who have made their maiden speech in this debate. May I also take the opportunity to congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your election to the Chair? I might be new, but I know that you have been a stalwart of this Chamber and that you will continue to champion its importance.

It is a real honour and a privilege to be speaking in the Chamber today. It was in the early 1990s that I first visited the Palace of Westminster with my sixth-form colleagues, and ever since that day I have wanted to represent a Kent constituency on these green Benches. With that in mind, I am proud to say that I am the first Conservative MP to represent Chatham and Aylesford. The seat was formed in 1997 from the old Rochester and Chatham, Mid Kent and Tonbridge and Malling seats, so I benefit from the mixed parentage of some excellent Conservative parliamentarians, such as Peggy Fenner, Andrew Rowe, Julian Critchley and, of course, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley).

It is traditional to pay one's immediate predecessor a tribute. I am told that that is occasionally done through gritted teeth, but I have nothing but genuine respect for Jonathan Shaw, who represented the constituency since 1997. Members from both sides of the House have praised Jonathan, who entered the House at an even younger age than I, and fought many battles on behalf of his constituents. He is highly regarded locally and has been kind enough to answer a few queries since the election, for which I am very grateful. I hope that I will serve my constituents as well as he did.

I am very proud of my constituency. Although I was born and bred in another part of Kent, I have now made the area my home. It is steeped in history. Chatham was first recorded as a settlement in the 9th century and was home to the Romans, the Saxons and then the Normans. Its significance has always been related to its position on the banks of the River Medway, which has been a harbour for warships since the 16th century. The town formed around the dockyard, which, although not in the boundaries of my constituency, has always been of critical significance to the town. Raids by the Dutch on the north Kent coast in 1667, which wrecked the flagship of the fleet harboured in Chatham, recorded by Pepys and remembered by Kipling, led to the proper fortification of the Medway. That massive rebuilding saw the expansion of Chatham into the large town that it is today. The historic dockyard was closed as a shipbuilding yard in 1984, and sadly many jobs were lost. However, it has evolved into a heritage site and parts have been regenerated into housing and tourist attractions, which range from warships to Dickens World.

Beyond politics, my passion is football and I was therefore delighted to learn that Chatham was one of the founding clubs in the southern England league in the 19th century. However, as a lifelong Tottenham fan, I was less pleased to learn that Spurs crashed to successive league defeats at the hands of Chatham in January 1899, losing 5-0 and 4-0 in the space of eight days. A few days later, the Spurs manager was sacked. A man with the surname of Cameron was appointed and the following season, they won the southern league title. It sounds reassuringly familiar.

Although Chatham is now the largest part of my constituency, the history of other parts goes back much further. Aylesford and the surrounding villages of Burham, Eccles, Wouldham, Ditton, Larkfield and Snodland can be traced back to neolithic times. There have been many finds of archaeological interest, including bronze age swords, an iron age settlement and a Roman villa. Now the area is dotted with numerous listed buildings, industrial estates, a vineyard, quarries, playing fields and picturesque oast houses.

Nearby is Blue Bell hill, well known to many motorists in Kent as a key intersection between the M20 and M2. However, I mention Blue Bell hill today not for its historical or transportation value, but for its supernatural element. The ghost stories are legendary, and sightings have been reported in the local papers on numerous occasions—including, I was amused to see, by a current member of the Press Gallery, Mr Nigel Nelson, whose article, which was written for the local paper before I was born, is still cited by today's paranormal investigators.

The newspaper industry is hugely significant in my constituency. Not only have many who worked at the Kent Messenger group, based in Larkfield, gone on to trade in political journalism, including the Prime Minister's press secretary, but the UK's largest paper mill is based in Aylesford, providing 400,000 tonnes of newsprint per annum—the equivalent of 1% of the world's total newsprint, and all from recycled and recovered materials.

There are many more wonderful things that I am sure I should mention about my constituency, but with time being short, I want to say a few words about today's debate. Parts of my constituency are reasonably well off. Many residents have solid family relationships, comfortable jobs and a decent wage. However, other parts are not. Across Medway, poverty affects nearly 12,000 children—a shocking 22%. Two wards in my constituency are the most severely affected, and sadly,

[Tracey Crouch]

one features in the top 10% of most deprived areas nationally. That is not a league table in which any area wants to be included, but it highlights the fact that there are huge challenges locally. Inadequate health and housing, low standards of living and high unemployment continue to characterise parts of Chatham, which for many years have been left behind.

There is no easy answer. It is not just one thing that needs to change. Low income, family breakdown, addiction, mental health problems and criminal behaviour contribute to a lack of expectation that, in turn, leads to inactivity. Charities find themselves too small to help; agencies find it too difficult and authorities find it too expensive. Complex problems may require multiple solutions, but unless we invest our time, energy and support, deprivation in parts of one of the most advanced countries in the world will continue to blight our nation.

I have heard many maiden speeches over the past few weeks, and the one thing all new Members share is the desire to make a difference. While I am in Parliament, I want to accomplish many things on behalf of all my constituents, but I hope that improving the plight of the poorest will be my greatest achievement. The Government must of course cut the deficit, but our legacy must be to reduce the dreadful levels of poverty and give every person in my constituency and throughout the country the standard of living they deserve.

2.34 pm

Mr Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): I am pleased that you were in the Chair when I rose to speak, Mr Deputy Speaker, even though you are about to leave the Chamber, because I can add my congratulations to those of others. It is a particular pleasure to see someone from the north-west in the Chair.

As the debate is rightly dominated by maiden speeches, I wanted to comment on how I felt more than three decades ago when I made my maiden speech, but from what I have experienced in this debate, my recollections will be irrelevant. For days, my insides were chewed up with nerves because I was worrying about making that maiden speech. The good news that I thought I would be bringing to Members making their maiden speech today is that it does not get any better. However, I can see from their performance that their confidence and the quality of their contributions far exceeds that of the intake of 1979.

I am grateful for the chance to contribute to this wide-ranging debate on poverty. I hope the House will forgive me if I focus narrowly on part of the canvas rather than addressing some of the wider aspects that Members have already touched on. A starting point for me is our debate on the Child Poverty Bill before the last election, when I expressed both admiration for what the Government had done and a sense of worry about where we would go from that position of relative success.

If we cast our mind back to the then Prime Minister's objective to abolish child poverty by 2020, we can only exclaim that it was one of the most audacious targets set by any Government. I happened to be a Work and Pensions Minister at the time, and I learned about the target for the first time when I went into my room at the Department and saw Sky News on the television. That is when I learned that the Government's objective was to abolish child poverty by 2020, even though I was a Minister with some responsibility for it. Others will have shared my sense of awe about how decisions came down to us—lesser Members—from Mount Sinai.

Had I been consulted beforehand, I hope I would have advised the then Prime Minister that although we should commit ourselves to the objective, the formula was one that no other country in the free world had achieved. We should not set targets for people, nations or Governments to fail; we should set targets they can achieve. It was thus immensely important before we fought the general election that we not only set out attempts to broaden our understanding of how we might measure poverty but put them in an Act of Parliament. That process is being developed and possibly taken a stage further in the review that the Prime Minister has asked me to undertake.

It gives me considerable pleasure that I have been asked to carry out the review, but it would have given me even more pleasure had my own side asked me to undertake that activity. The terms of reference took some time to agree—about seven times as long as the coalition agreement. They are public—they are certainly on my website—and I shall set out what I hope the review will achieve by Christmas.

In interviews, I have cited just one study, although there are many others that we could cite from our constituencies. The study relates to the work of the Prince's charities in Burnley. It is a wonderful project, where volunteer mothers make sure that children are up in time for school. The children are taken to school. If need be, they are washed at school, fed breakfast and made ready, with all the other children, to start their day's activities and endeavours.

My plea to the House is that if anyone thinks that those projects will be made irrelevant simply because we increase household incomes, however necessary basic income is, they are doing a disservice to poorer families and to the poor generally. Indeed, one of the great purposes of the review, if it fulfils its ambitions, is not only to run alongside the monetary definitions of poverty considerations of what non-financial aspects push children into poverty but, more importantly, to move the debate on. Until now, it has been obsessed with inputs—what we put in, and how much money is at stake, crucial though that is—and we need to consider outcomes. Therefore, part of the review will consider how we can together construct an index of what determines children's life chances, how we can extend those life chances and, more importantly, how we can measure that, so that we can report back to our constituents on whether we have been successful during each Parliament.

Helen Goodman: I should like my right hon. Friend to be specific. I am not sure whether we were at cross-purposes earlier. My concern is that we do not redefine the poverty level. That is the major concern among Labour Members. We should not say, "Oh, 60% of median income is far too high. We want to go to 40%." I draw his attention to the full definition that we put in the Child Poverty Act 2010. We now take into account a wide range of things: outdoor space in which to play, celebrations on holiday and at Christmas and swimming

at least once a month. Those items are under a continual process of renewal, because that index is based on surveys of the whole population and what the whole population thinks it is reasonable for a child to have.

Mr Field: I am happy to give assurances to my hon. Friend. The law is quite clear about the objectives. I have no idea what the report will contain, but those objectives that we have are ones that we should achieve. The primary definition that we used before the 2010 Act was not only difficult to achieve mathematically, but has not been achieved in any country in the free world—hence we asked in the document that we published whether we should use an average of those countries that do best in achieving that definition in setting our target.

Time is scarce, and I obviously do not want to be delayed by a narrowly focused, technical debate on definitions—I hope there will be plenty of time for that—but my hon. Friend says that other aspects of the 2010 Act that are used to define poverty are important. Of course they are important, but I want to focus much more clearly on pathways out of poverty and on increasing life chances. I hope that those Members of Parliament who have views—they clearly have, given today's maiden speeches—that will add to that side of the review, as well as to the debate on the technical definition of poverty, will contribute to the review.

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that measures such as the future jobs fund, tax credits and the increase in child benefit provide an important pathway out of poverty? I hope that he will touch on that—I see from his notes that he might—because I am very concerned about the coalition Government's proposals to undermine those schemes.

Mr Field: If my hon. Friend had really good sight, he would be able to see that No. 3 on my extensive notes is the jobs fund.

There will be two tasks for Opposition Members as the Government begin the necessary task of reducing public spending towards the level of what people in this country are prepared to pay in taxes. We will no doubt have a rigorous debate, but even when the details are decided, I hope that stage 2 will be to argue whether any cuts are being made in the right areas. My plea to Ministers is that they look most carefully at their choice of making initial cuts to the new deal jobs fund programme. When I sat on the other side of the House, I was clear in my criticisms of the new deal. One has only to look at the outcomes regarding levels of unemployment, levels of NEETs—those not in education, employment or training—and levels of retreads to conclude that that huge area of expenditure clearly needs to be examined.

The one thing that I hoped we would do in our first year in office—we got round to it only towards the end of our time—was to ensure that we could give some job guarantees to our constituents, including our younger constituents. That is important for two main reasons, the first of which is that, as we all know from our constituencies, many people try desperately hard to get jobs yet fail to do so, and the cumulative effect of that failure has an enormously crushing effect on them. The jobs fund was beginning to offer concrete jobs for people to go to, and that was a lifeline that had never been offered by any amount of new deal, any amount of retreading the new deal, or any amount of rhetoric from our side. The fund was one of the most precious things with which the previous Government were involved.

The second reason why the scheme was valuable was because we all have individuals in our constituencies, especially young lads, with no intention of working, although this is not the time for us to delve deeper into why that is so. If we are telling people that their benefits will be time-limited, cut or ended, we will carry the electorate with us only if we can definitely offer someone a job. Those young lads who have worked out how to fiddle the new deal and know that, if they turn up in a certain state, no employer in their right mind would ever give them the job on offer will know that it is decision time for them if, through the jobs fund, we can guarantee to offer them jobs irrespective of how they turn up. As I said, the fund was one of the most precious initiatives that the Labour Government introduced, so although I am not arguing with Ministers against their cuts, I ask them to think differently about how the cuts are distributed among people on benefits whom we would hope would be seeking work.

I am grateful for being called to speak, and I am even more grateful for the interventions because they have given me a bit of extra time. I look forward to hon. Members' contributions to both this debate and the review.

2.48 pm

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): It is a particular honour to be following the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) in a debate on poverty, and I congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your new role.

We are in the season of maiden speeches and have heard a good many today. I congratulate in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch). She spoke with great passion and conviction about her constituency and we will all have learned much from her.

I wish to pay tribute to my predecessor, Helen Southworth, who represented Warrington South for 13 years. She was a Treasury Parliamentary Private Secretary and, for about four years, a member of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. She made her biggest mark in the House, however, through her more informal campaigns. As chair of the all-party group on children who run away or go missing, she did a number of things that will have changed many lives for the better. I did not know Mrs Southworth well, but whenever I met her I was impressed by her compassion and dignity.

The history of Warrington and the Warrington South constituency is carved out of water. The town was founded by the Romans on the banks of the Mersey—it was the first place they could find to cross that river. Later we were bisected by the Bridgewater canal—the first to be built in this country—and subsequently the Manchester ship canal, a huge engineering triumph that says much for the people of Warrington, their entrepreneurial flair and their persistence. Even to this day, large boats travelling along the canal stop the traffic in Warrington, which can be something of a problem. The canal still carries freight—6 million tonnes are carried right now.

[David Mowat]

The major landmark in Warrington is the golden gates, which stand in front of our town hall. They are a magnificent feature. The town hall, also built by the Victorians, is a beautiful building, and I am pleased to be making my maiden speech in front of a former Warrington borough councillor, the hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue). The gates themselves were not constructed for Warrington: they were made as a gift to Queen Victoria, for the front of the Sandringham estate. When the Queen came to the town to receive the gift, however, she was somewhat disappointed to see a large statue of Oliver Cromwell in the centre; she declined the gift and Sandringham's loss became Warrington's gain.

The statue does not imply disloyalty, but it is true that Warrington has close links with Cromwell. He kept an army there during the civil war, and during the war Warrington was something of a fulcrum. We have a slightly less controversial relationship with Lewis Carroll, the creator of "Alice in Wonderland". There are many monuments around Warrington in tribute to Lewis Carroll; in particular, Daresbury parish church still has the Cheshire cat emblems standing in its grounds. Over the past few weeks, as I have become more accustomed to being an MP and struggled with procedure and process in this House—particularly with getting an office—I am reminded of Alice's comment as she burrowed around: "Curiouser and curiouser!"

I pay tribute to a prominent citizen of Warrington, Helen Newlove, who has recently been created a life peer. Members will be aware of the tragic death of her husband three years ago. They will know of the courage and fortitude that she has shown since then and of her campaigning zeal. She will be a tremendous addition to the other place and give immeasurable assistance to debates there.

Before I leave Warrington, I pay tribute to our rugby league team, winners of the Challenge cup last year. I have never tried to hide the fact that my background in rugby, such as it is, is in the other code. None the less, slowly but surely I am coming to grips with rugby league, and I am proud to be the only Conservative Member of Parliament with a super-league rugby league team in his constituency.

I shall now say a little about the subject of the debate. Warrington South contains some wards that are among the most affluent in the country and some that are among the most deprived. Four of our inner-city wards are in the bottom 20% by income, and in both Bewsey and Latchford East, one in four children are being brought up in workless households. The existence of such disparities is troubling. I acknowledge that the previous Government, through pension credits and in-work credits, tried hard, but it is a fact that throughout the last Parliament, levels of both absolute and severe poverty increased.

To make progress, I believe that we have to address two issues: first, our country has 8 million people who are economically inactive; and secondly, our country is the worst in western Europe in terms of the number of children growing up in workless households. The best way to help many people out of poverty is to create the well-paid, sustainable jobs that will make a difference. We have to do so over the next few years in a period in which we are going to reduce our dependence on financial services and on unsustainable public sector jobs. In my opinion, the only way in which that can be done is through increased investment in applied science, engineering and innovation.

I was particularly pleased that the Gracious Speech made reference to measures to create a large number of apprenticeships, but it is important, too, that we make sure that we create enough professional engineers to make a difference. It is a particularly sad fact that over the past three decades, in spite of the increase in higher education, the number of engineering graduates from our universities has decreased. That is not the case in India or China; indeed, it is not the case in any other country in continental Europe.

On the fringes of Warrington is Daresbury science park, which is a brilliant place that takes some of the best ideas produced in universities in the north-west and combines them with marketing skills and venture capital. Such places are going to create the jobs that we need in the medium term to fight the battle against poverty. In my view, social mobility is a hallmark of a civilised society. It is sad that in the past decade, social mobility fell in this country. I believe that the coalition, of which we are all part, will be judged, at least in part, on our ability to reverse that decline in social mobility.

2.56 pm

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): May I welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker? I congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) and other Members who have made maiden speeches this afternoon.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make my second maiden speech, which might sound like a contradiction in terms. I can say one thing with certainty: I do not intend to make a third. I am delighted to represent Leyton and Wanstead in the House, having represented Hornchurch for eight years until the last election but one. Leyton and Wanstead which, like Hornchurch, is in east London, is a great place. I shall observe the traditions of the House by paying tribute both to my predecessor and to my constituency.

Harry Cohe: built a reputation over many years as an assiduous and hard-working constituency MP. He championed certain causes over many years, including Tibet, for which he fought—although I do not mean physically. He represented Tibet in the House, and he was a leading light in the all-party Tibet group, which I joined this morning. He fought, too, for asylum seekers—some of the most persecuted and vulnerable people in the world, and he did a great job on that. He led the campaign to save Whipps Cross hospital in the constituency, which was under threat of closure from the Tories for many years, but whose future was secured under the Labour Government. Whether it will be secure from now on remains to be seen.

Leyton and Wanstead is one of the most diverse communities in Britain, with a huge range of religions, races, languages, beliefs, persuasions and outlooks. Across all those communities there is a high level of tolerance. People with widely divergent views and backgrounds can live together in harmony most of the time—recently, in fact, all the time—which is one reason why I like it so much. There have been one or two notable MPs for

Leyton and Wanstead. Winston Churchill was MP for the old Wanstead and Woodford seat to the north of the constituency, until he retired in 1964. In the 1960s and '70s, Patrick Gordon Walker was the MP. He fought an infamous by-election after he had lost his seat unexpectedly in the 1964 general election. A vacancy was created in the old Leyton seat by putting the sitting MP, Reg Sorensen, into the House of Lords, so that he could fight it at the election, but he lost the seat. He regained it at the next election, but for a short time he was the unelected Foreign Secretary in Harold Wilson's first Government. These days it is unimaginable to think that somebody who was unelected could hold such high office, but there we go.

I want to touch on three key local issues. The first is Whipps Cross hospital, which, as I said, was under threat for many years under the Conservative Government. Under the Labour Government, £30 million was spent on it, but it needs more investment. Whether that will be forthcoming, whether the hospital's future will be secure after all the threats of cuts that we have heard from the Treasury Bench in the last few weeks remains to be seen, but I and others will fight tooth and nail for its future.

The second issue concerns the safer neighbourhood teams, which come under the aegis of the Metropolitan police. They face cuts. We have a Conservative Mayor, Boris Johnson, and a Conservative Government, both of whom, particularly the Mayor, have promised cuts. Those teams have made a significant impact across wards in London, particularly in Redbridge and Waltham Forest in my constituency, and to start reducing community officers in those teams would reverse that impact on our communities.

An issue that is particularly close to my heart is that of the Sure Start centres. We are not quite clear where we are with Sure Start. Before the election, the Conservatives said that they would cut them pretty extensively. *[Interruption.]* This is a maiden speech so hon. Members should pipe down. I do not think that the Lib Dems have quite discovered what Sure Start is yet, but they probably will in due course. However, cuts seem to be in the pipeline.

Sure Start has made an impact in some ways in alleviating child poverty, which brings me to the subject of today's debate. The Minister got very excited about the idea that child poverty increased under the Labour Government. It is slightly difficult to put the words "the Minister" and "excited" in the same sentence, but he did get a bit worked up about it. The fact is that in 1997 when Labour came to power, the number of children living in poverty was 3.4 million. In the first two terms of the Labour Government, the number fell to 2.4 million, so we took a million children out of poverty. The figure went up to 2.8 million and then levelled off.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) mentioned, the most recent figures that we have cover the year 2008-09, the penultimate year that Labour was in power, and they demonstrated that during that financial year, 100,000 people were removed from poverty and the increase in child poverty started to level off.

The coalition Government now say—we have heard this on a number of occasions—that tackling poverty is one of their priorities, yet three factors lead me to think that that may not be the case, or that the rhetoric may not be matched by the reality. First, we will see cuts in the child trust funds, which have been one of the most successful exercises in encouraging people, particularly from lower-income backgrounds, to save. We have seen a trebling of saving among families with children, predominantly among lower and middle-income families.

Secondly, there is the cancellation of the public housing programmes. Again, we are not wholly clear about this, but it is pretty clear that there will be some cancellations in the public housing programmes that were pushed through in the last year or two of the Labour Government by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), who was an outstanding Housing Minister. They should have happened years earlier. They should have started in 1997, but at least we started them in the last two years, and billions of pounds were going to be pumped into them.

Finally, there is the agency workers directive. Agency workers are some of the most exploited and low-paid workers in Britain. That directive took years to negotiate in Brussels, and it may not make as big a difference as I would like, but it will have a modest impact in creating a certain equality between agency workers and full-time, permanent workers. Very often agency workers are used to undercut the permanent work force.

Again, we do not have a clear position on this. That is partly because the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has Ministers from different political backgrounds. In fact, the Secretary of State has been in more parties than Paris Hilton. It seems that the directive may be abandoned, watered down or renegotiated. That will have a significant impact on some of the most vulnerable workers in Britain.

The roots of Britain's current position with regard to poverty go back to the 1980s. In 1979, the last time that we left office, we left the country with one of the most egalitarian societies in the western world, rivalling Australia and West Germany in terms of income and wealth distribution. In 1997, when we returned to power, it was one of the most unequal societies in the western world, and the figures back that up. If a Government privatise and deregulate like a bunch of medieval crusading zealots and insist on shackling and attacking trade unions, removing the rights and protections of some of the most vulnerable workers in Britain and ripping up and eviscerating whole industries and communities on the basis of economic fundamentalism and political vindictiveness, an explosion of poverty, like that which came about in the 1980s, can hardly come as a surprise. That was the result then, and it is plain for all to see.

The coalition accuses us of a failure to tackle poverty. In reality, the criticism that can be levelled at the last Labour Government is that we did not go far enough in repairing the damage of the previous 18 years. There were modest attempts to do so, but they did not go far enough, and my worry is that this Government have now come back to finish their previous job. The price of the cuts that we hear about will be paid by our constituents, who are some of the most vulnerable in Britain; Opposition Members will be representing people on the receiving end. The Deputy Prime Minister talks about "progressive cuts", but it is easy for him to say that when he comes from a background of wealth and privilege and is not going to be on the receiving end of the cuts himself. I should like him to come to the House and explain to us exactly what "progressive cuts" means, because I am struggling to find a definition of it.

3.6 pm

Ms Louise Bagshawe (Corby) (Con): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, and may I welcome you to your place? I am much in favour of seeing women in positions of authority and, indeed, high office. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister takes note of that.

It is a great pleasure to be called to speak in this very important debate on poverty, and to follow the contribution of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) and many fine maiden speeches. On those earlier maiden speeches, I can do no better than agree with the characteristically generous tribute from the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Miss Begg), so I shall not try to do so. However, it is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat), who, unlike myself, had the courage to do this without notes, and the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer), who is certainly a most passionate advocate of his constituency. Surely the fact that that was his second maiden speech will explain the fluidity and passion with which he delivered it.

I have the honour of following Phil Hope as the Member for Corby, and I hope that Opposition Members bear me no particular grudge for depriving their Benches of such a kind and pleasant man. He was a passionate advocate of Corby and achieved ministerial office early, serving in various Departments, from Education to Health and the Cabinet Office, before winding up as the Minister for the East Midlands. His obvious political ability was matched only by his kindliness and courtesy, which I know must have endeared him to many Members from all parts. In the four years that I was the Conservative candidate for Corby, Phil and I never exchanged a sharp word, and I am glad to see the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) in her place, because he exemplified the principle that in politics our opponents need not also be our enemies.

Urban Corby, the fastest-growing town in the country, is surrounded by the idyllic countryside of east Northamptonshire. We have more than 60 villages, as well as the thriving market towns of Irthlingborough, Raunds, Thrapston and Oundle. Corby is a former steel manufacturing town, and it played its part in the war effort by supplying the pipes used in Operation Pluto, which bought fuel safely to our allies as they fought in Europe. I am well travelled, but nowhere have I encountered such pride in place as Corby people have in their town. If I had to sum up the town in a single word, "pride" is the one that I would use.

Located though it is in the heart of England, the pride of Corby is its diaspora from Scotland. My constituency, perhaps uniquely in England, celebrates a regular highland games, and I am informed by staff at Corby Asda that they sell 17 times more Irn-Bru there than in any other store in England.

Meanwhile, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Mr McLoughlin)—the Chief Whip—and my Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), who I see in his place, will be glad to learn that rebellious women do not fare well in my constituency. The glories of east Northamptonshire include the village of Fotheringhay, where Mary, Queen of Scots met her fate in 1587. Be that as it may, I am conscious—as are, I am sure, many other Members making their maiden speeches today—that I was sent to this place to represent the interests of my constituents here, not the other way around.

My noble Friend Baroness Thatcher inspired me to enter politics. She taught me the importance of ideology—crucially, in the context of this debate, that politics is in its essence counter-intuitive, and that Conservative means deliver liberal ends. On arriving at the House just after the general election, it was something of a relief to discover that, on occasion, Liberal means may deliver Conservative ones.

It is particularly appropriate that the Member for Corby should deliver her maiden speech in a debate on poverty, because the ambitious programme of welfare to work laid out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team will assist many of my constituents, who saw a 103% rise in claims for jobseeker's allowance over the course of the last Labour Parliament. This ambitious programme will provide a way out of poverty and despair for many thousands of families. It is the result of years of focusing on social justice by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and I commend it to the House.

If I myself have a political ambition, it is—perhaps I may ask the House's traditional indulgence for a maiden speech—to suggest a cross-departmental project to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Work and Pensions and for Defence. For several years, I lived in the United States—indeed, my family are American—and I was struck by the exceptional way in which people treat their troops and their troops' families. Over there, the Veterans Administration, which has a seat at the cabinet table, oversees all military welfare, from hospitals to low-cost housing loans. There was much in the Conservative manifesto for our troops to celebrate, from extra money for mental health provision to the application of the pupil premium to the children of military families. Too often in Government, however, the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing.

I am glad to see my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Dan Byles) in his place beside me, for he spoke most movingly in his maiden speech of the need for this House to put Help for Heroes out of business by providing better medical care for our troops. I suggest to him, and to the whole House, that a fully fledged veterans administration might go even further, overseeing all military welfare, from widows' pensions to mental health provision, and that it need not cost too much; rather, it would merely tie all military welfare together.

My county of Northamptonshire hosted no fewer than seven United States airfields during the war, and in my constituency the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes still fly proudly side by side to commemorate the fellowship of our forces. I suggest to the House that we learn from the special relationship where it still has something to teach us. We can, and should, do better by our troops and their dependants. We are considering today issues of poverty; let us ensure that poverty and despair do not touch the lives of those who have given so much for this country.

I thank the House for its traditional courtesy in hearing me out in silence during my maiden speech. It has been an honour to speak in a debate on poverty and to commend the Government's ambitious programme to the House; and also, of course, to speak as the

Member of Parliament for Corby and for east Northamptonshire—the heart of steel in the rose of the shires.

3.14 pm

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): Thank you for calling me, Madam Deputy Speaker, and congratulations on your election.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Corby (Ms Bagshawe) on her confident, interesting and passionate maiden speech. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) on his maiden speech, and I wish every success to his rugby team, except when they play Wigan.

I should like to begin by stating that although I follow the well-respected and esteemed Ian McCartney, about whom I am going to say more later, there are a couple of obvious differences between us—I am female, and I do not have a Scottish accent. I think there might be a slight height difference as well. I wish also to express my pride in being the first female MP for Makerfield.

Makerfield has a proud tradition of electing Labour MPs going back to 1906 and the election of Stephen Walsh, who incidentally was 4 foot 10 inches tall—perhaps another precedent there. The people of Makerfield were so determined to send a Labour MP to this place that they raised the funds themselves to pay his salary and ensure that he could represent the constituency in Parliament. That determination in the face of adversity still characterises the people of Makerfield today.

Makerfield is not one particular, easily identified area but a collection of pit villages that grew up around the collieries, each with its own proud history and identity. Heaven forbid that one confuses Bamfurlong with Platt Bridge and Stubshaw Cross with Bryn. Each area has its own sense of community and history, and many of their people lived through—and, despite the wonderful efforts of the past 13 years and the excellent Labour council, are still living with—the devastation caused in the 1980s. However, there is a lot of grit and determination in Makerfield. It is unequalled, as is the people's warmth and friendliness. During the cold weather spell in January, I came across an 86-year-old woman, Theresa, shovelling snow and clearing paths outside not only her house but her neighbour's. When the council workmen offered to do it for her, she said, "Nay, I've been shovelling coal as a pit brow woman since I was 14, and I can handle a shovel better than you two." Grit, determination and a sense of community with the people all helping each other—that is what sums up Makerfield to me.

I turn to my predecessor, Ian McCartney. The words that I speak about Ian are spoken not by convention but with conviction and affection—an affection that is felt throughout Makerfield and the labour movement. Ian represented Makerfield for 23 years, and his love for the area and its people is nearly as great as the affection and respect that they have for him. His career in opposition and in government was both varied and influential. In opposition he spoke on health, employment, education and social services, and in government he was Minister of State in the Department of Trade and Industry. It was during that period that he introduced a major new package of employment rights, including the national minimum wage. I do not believe it would be an exaggeration to say that millions of people throughout the country have benefited from those measures and have reasons to be grateful to him.

As chair of the national executive committee and the national policy forum, Ian was trusted by both the leadership and the membership—not an easy to balance to hold. That is just one demonstration of his integrity and the high regard in which he is held. Despite his senior positions, he never forgot his roots. His first aim, which he undoubtedly achieved, was to be a good constituency MP. Indeed, he once said to me that all the best legislation, including his campaign that led to the banning of foam furniture that emitted toxic fumes when alight, which has saved thousands of lives across the country, came from constituency casework. Of course, with Makerfield being part of Wigan borough, I cannot leave out the fact that he was the founder member of the all-party rugby league group. Wigan has a proud rugby league heritage and amateur clubs continue to produce world-class players who represent Wigan and their country.

Ian was also president of the Money Advice Trust, and it is credit and financial capability that I now wish to discuss. I have been chief executive of a citizens advice bureau for 23 years, and during that time people have come to me with an incredibly diverse range of problems. However, credit and debt consistently make up the highest percentage of our work, and it has an impact on people's ability to continue in their work, on their health and on their relationships. I have long believed that there are three strands to tackling the problem, each of which is important and requires funding and, in some cases, further exploration and legislation.

Financial capability is the preventive area—teaching children, families and community groups the skills that they need to manage their money and choose their financial products wisely. I am heartened by the partnerships developing between citizens advice bureaux, the Personal Finance Education Group, credit unions and the Money Advice Trust. Indeed, locally my own bureau worked in partnership with Welcome credit union to provide financial education to low-income groups.

The second strand is the availability of credit, especially to low-income borrowers, and encouragements for non-traditional savers to save. I therefore deeply regret the Government's removal of the child trust fund, which was the first time some families had a lump sum to put into a savings account for a child. It has been a practical demonstration to that child and the family of how savings work.

I hope that credit unions will be supported and allowed to expand. My constituency has two excellent and progressive credit unions, Unify and Welcome. Encouraging credit unions, mainstreaming their services and making them a real alternative to iniquitous rates of interest—2,760% in some cases—for people who want to take out a short-term loan are all really important. I firmly believe that we need to explore a range of policy initiatives with mainstream lenders, credit unions and the social fund to end the cycle of credit dependency.

Thirdly, for people already trapped in the spiral of unaffordable borrowing, access to debt advice services is crucial. Funding for that should not be solely for legally aided people, but should be available to all. I have seen for myself the effect of the face-to-face funding for debt advice provided by the previous Government and I have been able to more than match that funding

[Yvonne Fovargue]

from a PCT-funded project to reduce lower level mental health problems. Indeed, a report has come out this week showing that in two cases professionals have downgraded people previously at risk of suicide to no longer needing medical intervention as a result of that project. I urge the Government to continue the face-to-face funding and to explore other funding to help to support people in work to stay in work, maintain their health and their relationships and not let debt destroy families and individuals.

I began by referring to my predecessor and commented on our differences. However, I would now like to finish by stating that I hope that we also have similarities and that the most striking similarity will be that we have both been, and will be, a strong voice for Makerfield.

3.22 pm

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech. I congratulate you on your illustrious elevation and I am delighted to see a fellow Bristol MP in the Chair. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) on her maiden speech, and all the other hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today. I have enjoyed listening to them all, and it has been heartening to hear the passion and conviction with which they have spoken about their constituencies.

For my own constituency, it is both an honour and a privilege to stand here as the new Member of Parliament for Kingswood. Located between Bristol and Bath, within the boundaries of South Gloucestershire, it includes the towns and villages of Kingswood itself, Hanham, Longwell Green, Barrs Court, Cadbury Heath, Emersons Green, Bitton, Willsbridge, Oldland Common and North Common, Siston, Warmley, Mangotsfield, Rodway and Soundwell, as well as a large part of the beautiful countryside that lies within our precious green belt. It is a great place to live, and as the new Member, I hope that I can play my part in making it an even better place to live and work. As a local man, who was born and grew up there and whose family have lived in Kingswood for generations, I am extremely proud to serve the local area that I call home.

Since the creation of the constituency in 1974, Kingswood has been fortunate to be served by some excellent Members whom many in the House will remember, including Terry Walker, Jack Aspinwall, Rob Hayward, and my immediate predecessor, Dr Roger Berry. They all have left behind a record of public service and civic duty that will be hard to emulate. Roger Berry is perhaps best known in the House for his tireless efforts to champion the rights of the disabled and most vulnerable in society, for which I pay him credit and hope to continue his hard work.

Like many of our neighbourhoods and towns, Kingswood has a rich tapestry of history. The town first came into prominence in the late 17th century through coal mining. Kingswood's reputation was first founded on its people—the colliers who mined those deep seams underground. They were fiercely independent in spirit, and one contemporary wrote that

"the colliers were numerous and utterly uncultivated. They had no place of worship. Few ventured to walk even in their neighbourhood; and when provoked they were the terror of Bristol".

It was into this lawless land that the preacher George Whitefield chose to venture. With no church nearby, Whitefield chose to preach beneath the open skies. On a clear night, if one looks out across the horizon of Kingswood, one can see the very spot he chose, Hanham Mount, for it is marked out by the green light of a beacon shining out from one of the highest parts of the constituency. Beneath it is a memorial—a grassy area with a large paved cross—beyond which a gorse-covered bank leads up to a stone platform with a wooden replica of a pulpit. It was here that Whitefield first preached on 17 February 1739. He was afflicted by a squint so severe that no one knew exactly where he was looking, and yet he began to draw vast outdoor crowds who never took their eyes off him. Benjamin Franklin, who later heard him preach many times in Pennsylvania, declared that he had a voice like an organ.

At first the local miners mocked Whitefield's temerity, but his persistence paid off. The numbers attending his sermons grew steadily from a few hundred to nearly 20,000, and Whitefield himself noticed the effect that he began to have on them, not least from the white tracks appearing on their faces—black from coal dust—formed from the tears streaming down their faces. Shortly afterwards, Whitefield was called away for other duties. He sent for his friend, John Wesley, to fill the gap. Wesley later described his initial reluctance to participate in preaching outside, away from the sanctity of a church:

"I could scarce reconcile myself to this strange way of preaching. I should have thought the saving of souls a sin, if it had not been done in a church".

Yet Wesley cast aside his hesitation and discovered his own revelation that there was no better place to reach out directly to the communities around.

We sit here now very much in our own place of worship, closeted away from the outside world. We talk between ourselves, quoting statistics and observing our customs, yet often, like Wesley, we seem hesitant to reach out into the local communities and neighbourhoods that matter and to understand the language that ordinary people speak. As a new Parliament, we have the opportunity to make ourselves relevant, to restore people's faith in us and to create a new relationship with those who need our help—a relationship that looks outwards, rather than inwards.

Over the past few days, I have sat through many speeches, many of which have been excellent. That is testimony to the talent that many hon. Members bring to the House. However, I have been struck by how many hon. Members opposite have felt the need to blame the present problems facing our nation on the events of the 1980s. What we need is not a history lesson, however inaccurate. The past, whatever our respective views upon it, will not provide us with an answer. We need to look forward and to understand that now, in this the second decade of the 21st century, we still do not have all the answers and solutions needed to tackle the desperate poverty still afflicting many areas of our nation.

We will only begin to find these answers if we begin to seek to ask the right questions: how is it that, despite billions of pounds spent, in the past 13 years, the gap between the richest and the poorest has widened? How is it that, despite the state taking an ever interfering role in the lives of local neighbourhoods and communities, local people feel increasingly powerless over the decisions

that matter in their own lives? And how is it that those men and women who once believed proudly in the value of work and the life-affirming capacity that it brings are being forced to stay at home and claim benefits for fear of losing the welfare on which they have become dependent?

It is clear that the state and its money are not always the best solution. Poverty cannot simply be measured in pounds and pence. Those in desperate need cannot be measured by a line on a graph. Each has their own problems and concerns that cannot be met unless we, in the tradition of Whitefield and Wesley, reach out beyond our confines and not just listen, but hear, what they have to say. I do not have an answer to the complex problems that I know the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) will attempt to tackle. I merely know that the direction of the previous Government has not worked.

On that note, it is perhaps best to recall the words of advice given by George Whitefield in one of his sermons:

"Press forward. Do not stop, do not linger in your journey, but strive for the mark set before you."

Indeed we must press forward and not look back. The mark set before us might seem a difficult one, but it is one that, for the sake of all our constituents and this nation, we must now strive for.

3.30 pm

Teresa Pearce (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I am grateful to the House and to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me this opportunity to speak here for the first time. I have listened carefully to the debate, and I extend my congratulations to the hon. Members who have made varied, interesting and eloquent speeches.

This is the first maiden speech by a Member for Erith and Thamesmead, as my predecessor, John Austin, made his maiden speech, in 1992, as the Member for Woolwich, before my constituency was formed for the 1997 election. John Austin is a man who served his community for more than 40 years, first as a councillor, and then as mayor, leader of the council and, in this place, Member of Parliament. During his time here, he took up many causes, fighting tirelessly against injustice and, in particular, for women's rights. I commend especially the work that he did in the Council of Europe on human trafficking. John Austin is one of the handful of men I have met whom I could truly call a feminist.

Like many other urban areas, Erith and Thamesmead has a long and proud multicultural tradition. It is an area where people come to settle. One of our primary schools is called Windrush, in honour of those who came from the West Indies in the '50s and '60s to help Britain rebuild after the war. Many Vietnamese boat people also put down roots in the area in the 1970s. Erith is also the place where Alexander Selkirk, the real-life model for Robinson Crusoe, landed in 1711, when he returned home after many years on a desert island. My constituency is truly a place of homecomings. Over the past decade we have also had a fast-growing African community, which has settled here and intends to make the area its home—so much so, that during the forthcoming World cup, I am sure that the people in that community will be cheering just as loudly for England as they will be for their native Nigeria or Ghana.

The area also consists of places such as Abbey Wood, Belvedere, Lesnes Abbey and Plumstead, where during the late 19th century we had a wonderful football club named Woolwich Arsenal. The team played there until just before the first world war, when Woolwich was dropped from the name and they moved north of the river. I am not quite sure what happened to the club after that. In the north of the constituency, we boast a grade I listed building that has been described as

"A masterpiece of engineering—a Victorian cathedral of ironwork."

which is a lovely way to describe the Crossness sewage works. Crossness houses the Victorian beam engines, which have been lovingly restored by the Crossness Engines Trust, a registered charity that since 1987 has overseen the restoration project.

In the mid 19th century, Crossness was part of the visionary work of Sir Joseph Bazalgette, who built the London sewer network that cleaned up London and wiped out the cholera epidemics that had previously killed hundreds of Londoners every year. It is ironic that Sir Joseph's great grandson is Peter Bazalgette, the TV executive who brought the phenomenon of "Big Brother" to Britain. Whereas Sir Joseph spent much of his life trying to get rid of unwanted waste from the homes of the nation, some might say that his great grandson has done quite the opposite.

I have lived in Erith and Thamesmead for more than 30 years. As for my political motivations, the hon. Member for Corby (Ms Bagshawe) said that she was inspired to enter politics by Mrs Thatcher, and I have to say that I was too, albeit for what I imagine were completely different reasons. I was born in 1955, a child of the welfare state. That welfare state helped my family and millions of families like us to have opportunities that previous generations could only dream of: a free health service; a right to education; and a national insurance system that people pay into when they do not need it, but which is there when they do. The welfare state gave me a ladder, which I fully used and which, in turn, has enabled my two daughters to achieve their full potential.

All those things were Labour developments of which I am proud, just as I am proud now of Sure Start, the future jobs fund and the national minimum wage, which are all key building blocks in the fight against poverty. If there is to be dignity in work, poverty pay has no place in the 21st century. In my previous career, tax, national insurance and the national minimum wage were my fields of expertise. I came across no end of imaginative ways that employers would try to get around paying the minimum wage, but who really pays when business pays poverty wage rates? It is the rest of us—the taxpayers—who pay, subsidising the low-paid through the benefits and tax credit systems, while the employers pocket the profit. As we have heard here today, the best way out of poverty is through work, but it must be work that pays a living wage.

Now is a crucial time economically. The economy is beginning to grow and borrowing is falling. To put that at risk by cuts to the public sector and to job opportunities places us in grave danger of having a double-dip recession. Anyone who, like me, has sat in a jobcentre week after week will know that cuts to services such as the future jobs fund will cut not waste, but opportunity, hope and life chances.

The coalition seems to promise so much change, yet its cuts preclude the change that my constituents need. Indeed, the only change the coalition will bring to Erith

[Teresa Pearce]

and Thamesmead is a change for the worse, by cutting the jobs programme, which, along with Sure Start and the national minimum wage, has brought the first effective reduction in poverty in Erith and Thamesmead for a generation.

I know that the job of government is to govern for all the people, not just for those I consider to be my natural constituents. Contrary to some, however, I believe there is such a thing as society and no matter what people's income or voting tendency, we all live within it. Policies that help the weak, the vulnerable, the unemployed and the disadvantaged thus add to the quality of life of all of us. There is no point at all in paying less tax if someone lives a life with bars on their windows and a personal alarm in their hand.

I also understand that government is about making tough choices. Life is about tough choices, but by tough, I mean strong and durable, not cruel or severe. It is vital for the recovery that we keep people in work. Unemployment reduces national wealth and tax revenues. To insist that we protect jobs is not socialist sentimentality; it is economic common sense.

People in Erith and Thamesmead earn below the average wage and have higher unemployment. One of the reasons for that is that their transport connections are poor. Thamesmead was built in the 1960s and the Jubilee line was meant to run there, but that never happened. Thirty years later, there are 30,000 residents without a station. West of Tower bridge, there are 24 crossings and to the east, just two Victorian tunnels, a ferry and a toll bridge at Dartford. It is not difficult to see that that makes accessing the work and business opportunities in the city all the more difficult for people who live where I do.

I am pleased that the London Mayor and I seem to agree on something, which is that the Abbey Wood line of Crossrail must go ahead. People living in Thamesmead can see the bright lights of the city three miles across the river, but to get there they must travel by foot, by bus, by train and by the docklands light railway, and it takes over an hour—the same amount of time it takes the business traveller from Paris or Antwerp to get to City airport, flying close over the heads of Thamesmead residents.

The people of Erith and Thamesmead are not without pride or without aspiration. They band together to run voluntary and community groups: they run local history projects, they clean the canals, they mentor young people, they serve meals at the pop-in parlours and they help the disadvantaged and elderly through their temples and churches. They are a true coalition, a coalition of the willing who just want to be given a chance.

Finally, I would say that a place such as Thamesmead will be a test of the Prime Minister's big society. This is the big society that is meant to re-localise the economy, re-capitalise the poor and re-democratise power. If the big society is to mean anything other than a slogan, the Government need vision—and a vision of a cross-capital rail link is vital not only to the economy of London, but to that of the UK as a whole. The vision of a living wage, upgraded year on year, is vital to the fight against poverty. I hope to be a strong voice for Erith and Thamesmead residents, making sure that they are able to access the opportunities that should be available to them, living in the south-east corner of a world-class city.

3.38 pm

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate you on your new post, and I congratulate all other Members who have spoken for the first time this afternoon.

I have listened to a number of maiden speeches over the last two weeks, in which a number of Members have wisely mentioned their local press. I would like to follow suit. In the week that followed the election that saw the constituency of Warwick and Leamington change hands for the first time in 13 years, the front page of our local paper kindly announced that a cat had been rescued. I shall display this front page in my new office to reassure me that there are issues of great importance that happen outside this House.

I want to take this opportunity to praise my predecessor. He was an honourable Member who developed a great reputation for being an outstanding constituency MP. I hope to follow his example, and I wish him well for the future. In his maiden speech 13 years ago, he observed that Members had heard little or nothing about our constituency for the past 75 years. He offered a quick briefing, and I wish to continue that tradition.

My constituency is steeped in history, from the magnificent castle in mediaeval Warwick to the elegance and splendour of our spa town of Leamington. We have a third and important town in Whitnash, and an array of Warwickshire villages with all their charm. We are diverse in age, ethnicity, occupation and belief, and we have a great deal to be proud of. We have excellent front-line services, outstanding schools, and a large population of students studying at the well-respected Warwickshire college and University of Warwick. We have household names and independent retailers. We have Aga Rangemaster, Calor Gas, National Grid and Wolseley, with its sustainable building centre. We have agriculture and manufacture. We are an oasis of opportunity. We are middle England, in terms of not only geography but demography. With a fantastic array of charities and voluntary organisations, we are a tightly bound community that has proved time and again that we can unite in challenging times.

As many will know, one name on the list of my predecessors in the House is that of a former Prime Minister, and my constituency has often been referred to as the garden of Eden. A visitor walking down the parade in Leamington, wandering around the marketplace in Warwick or driving along the Myton road, which connects the two towns, might be forgiven for thinking that we do live in a paradise, and very wonderful it is too.

However, as with all constituencies, not everyone in our community is as fortunate as a quick tour of our area might lead people to believe. We have a magnificent heritage of industry and manufacture, but the loss of that industry has been a source of rising unemployment and, indeed, poverty. Warwick and Leamington has many pockets of deprivation, and that is why I would rather make my maiden speech in this debate than in any other.

In 2005 the jobseeker's allowance claimant count was 884; it is now 2,166. The story of one of my constituents sums up the unfairness that many see in the current system. Having been made unemployed, she claimed jobseeker's allowance, council tax benefit and housing

benefit. As someone who wanted to work, she did the responsible thing and sought new employment, and after much searching she found a job in a nearby constituency, just over 10 miles away. She earned about £120 for a 20-hour week, and with rent of £30 a week and council tax of £12 a week to pay, she was left £11 a week better off. Unfortunately, travelling to work cost her £18 a week, which meant that, unbelievably, she was made worse off by trying to do the right thing.

At a time when people speak of the need for higher pay and bonuses to attract people in top jobs, surely it cannot be right for people at the bottom to be given no encouragement to move into employment when they see that they will receive no financial benefit from their labours. We need to create new jobs locally. That is easier said than done, but there are reasons for great optimism. Warwick and Leamington has massive potential to attract new and diverse industry and create new jobs, not least in the thriving video games industry and the green economy, which are our particular strengths. Once we assembled parts for the automotive sector. What is to prevent us from using the same skills to assemble solar panels? The seeds of future growth are here, and we must create the environment in which they can flourish.

The example of my constituent shows that it is not a question of people being unwilling to work; those who refuse to work can be penalised for not doing so. It is a question of making it financially beneficial to people who understand the benefits of working in terms of self-confidence, self-belief and social standing. Last Friday, I visited both the jobcentre and the citizens advice bureau. We must do all we can to reduce their work load and to reduce the anxieties that have been brought on by spiralling debt and crushing welfare dependency.

I am aware of the enormous expectation that the people of Warwick and Leamington have of our new Government and of me as their representative in this place. I know that our Prime Minister is as ambitious for the country as I am for my constituency. What better way to start realising that ambition than by reforming the welfare system and creating the big society that the Prime Minister has spoken about—a fairer society in which those who can work have the opportunity to do so and those who cannot get the help they need?

3.45 pm

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): It is a real privilege to follow the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White), whom I congratulate on his maiden speech. I congratulate him also on his real and obvious passion for tackling the problems of poverty that still exist in this country, as that is a passion I share.

I wish to draw attention to a series of decisions that have been made by the Government that are either very serious mistakes or a damning indictment of their commitment to tackling poverty that we heard earlier. Before I came to the House, I worked in the children's charity sector. Many charities such as Barnardo's and Save the Children are still, despite a great deal of Government support and intervention, grappling with the terrible problem of child poverty. The roots of that problem run very deep, as we have heard. I want to draw attention to one issue in particular that I think has been overlooked.

Many of the children who are growing up in poverty have parents who work, as the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington has discussed. If we are serious about tackling poverty, we have to make work pay. Will the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Maria Miller), consider adopting a living wage policy in her Department and urge her colleagues across government to do the same? Will she also commit to making sure that we have a definition of a living wage outside London in constituencies such as mine where people are also really struggling and would benefit strongly from such a policy?

I want to talk a little about the households living in poverty in which people have not worked for generations. Many hon. Members have talked about this today. We have heard a lot about the legacy that this Government inherited when they took office, but what about the legacy left to the Labour Government? Young people who left education in the 1980s and 1990s and were unable to find work have since had children who have grown up in households where nobody has ever worked. I know that because I have seen it on the front line in my work for the Children's Society. Supporting families to change that situation takes time.

I am concerned by what we have been hearing about the Sure Start programme. One reason why Sure Start has been an important innovation is that it unites families from across the social spectrum. It brings children and their parents into contact with other children and their parents right across the income scale. It helps to build confidence for that reason without any of the social stigmas that can become attached to services that are reserved simply for the poor. I have seen that for myself in the Beech Hill and Ince Sure Start centres in my constituency; it could not be more important to those two communities to have those services that unite people. In his opening remarks, the Minister talked about visiting communities and seeing for himself where people face these challenges. Well, some of us live in them and some of us represent them, and our message to the Minister is that he should not restrict those services but preserve them, as they are hugely valuable to the whole community.

For the same reasons, I also want to discuss the future jobs fund. I have heard today that the Government have, as well as deciding to axe the future jobs fund, announced that £750,000 is to be taken out of the working neighbourhoods fund in Wigan. Together, those two things will cripple my constituency. Despite its relatively short life, the future jobs fund has already brought real benefits to the young people in Wigan. I know that because, yesterday, I received a letter from the chairman of my local Age Concern, writing in a personal capacity. My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) referred to it earlier. I shall briefly read out the comments because they do much more justice to his real anger than I can with my words. He says:

> "Currently we have two able, bright and personable young people who have come to us under the auspices of the Future Jobs Fund. I am angry on their behalf that this scheme has been cancelled. I am even more angry at the hypocrisy of current government ministers claiming that they wish to protect the jobs, particularly of the young, when these two young people find that their opportunity to gain skills and knowledge that would enhance the possibility of their gaining employment has been so casually and thoughtlessly removed."

[Lisa Nandy]

By taking away a scheme that guarantees a real and lasting paid job for young people who would otherwise not have one, we store up trouble for future generations. If we are not careful, we will leave a legacy every bit as devastating for future generations as the one that continues to blight so many children's lives now. We must not repeat the legacy that was created in the 1980s and 1990s. I urge the Minister to think again.

3.50 pm

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Guess what? I, too, would like to congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your new role. I also congratulate those who have made their maiden speeches. They show that there are some very good new Members in this Parliament. I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me today, although it is, inevitably, rather a daunting moment, not only because so many Members from the 2010 intake have spoken so well, but because we follow in the footsteps of many wonderful orators who have made history in the House.

In a maiden speech it is customary to pay tribute to one's predecessors. In my case, it is a little difficult because Mid Derbyshire has been made up of four different constituencies, and I am the first Member to be elected for the new constituency. However, a constituency called Mid Derbyshire was created in the general election of 1885, when Sir James Alfred Jacoby was elected as the Liberal Member of Parliament. He held the seat until his death in 1909, when he was succeeded, after a by-election, by John George Hancock, also a British Liberal party politician, until 1918, when the seat was abolished. He was one of a group of trade union-sponsored Liberals who were instructed by their union to join the Labour party. He held his seat as a Labour Member, without Liberal opposition, in both 1910 elections.

Relations between the Labour and Liberal parties deteriorated after that, and they were expected to field candidates against each other at the next general election, which was anticipated to be in 1915. Hancock decided that he would rather be defined as a Liberal, so he crossed the Floor in 1915 to rejoin the Liberals. He held the seat until the constituency was abolished for the 1918 general election. He was then returned unopposed for the new Belper constituency, also once held by the well known politician Lord George Brown. Belper is in the new Mid Derbyshire constituency.

My constituency comprises part of West Derbyshire, now Derbyshire Dales, part of Amber Valley, part of Erewash and part of Derby North. Hon. Members now representing two of those seats have already paid great tribute to their predecessors in their maiden speeches, and my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Jessica Lee) is sitting right behind me—I hope she will be called today. The three Members who preceded me and left at the election worked hard for their constituents and were well known by them. I will try to be as diligent and hard-working in my duties in the years to come. The fourth Member is, of course, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Mr McLoughlin), who is a long way from retirement. He remains a very successful Member and is part of the new coalition Government.

Before saying more about my right hon. Friend, I want to say how delighted I am to represent the people of the new constituency of Mid Derbyshire. It is a wonderful mixture of urban and rural, and at its heart is part of a world heritage site—the Derwent Valley Mills, birthplace of the factory system. The Derwent Valley Mills and the industrial revolution influenced north America, Europe and, indeed, the world. There are some beautiful areas, including Dale abbey where a hermit lived in a cave. Some of Derby's suburbs are very pleasant, as is the village of Little Eaton where I have lived for many years.

Mid Derbyshire is on the edge of the beautiful Peak district, part of the soft landscape of the southern Derbyshire dales. Derbyshire building society was one of the major employers, although as I said yesterday it is about to close; but we do have the relatively new Derby university.

I am fortunate to have known my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales since just after his narrow by-election win in 1986, when the then Labour Derbyshire county council decided to abolish, not for educational reasons but from political spite, the sixth form at the school that my children attended. As chairman of the school parent teacher association, it was left to me to lead the campaign to save the sixth form of what was, and is, the most successful comprehensive in the county. We even had an Adjournment debate in this place. It did not start until after 3 o'clock in the morning but it was attended by more than 150 parents, staff and children. The campaign was successful and the sixth form was saved.

Since those times my interest in international development has grown through starting a project in Uganda with students from two of the four secondary schools in Mid Derbyshire. We have been to Uganda to see what it is like for children to be brought up in a developing poor country. The project links very well with my interest in education, because we help schools over there. The students pay most of the cost of the trip, but we all fundraise to pay for the rest and for the aid that we take to the two schools that we support. Last year, £12,000 was shared between the schools. It is a good way for students from relatively comfortable backgrounds to see that others can be as successful as them. Just because the Ugandan students are poor does not mean that they cannot succeed.

Students from Ecclesbourne school in Duffield and Woodlands school in Allestree spend many of their weekends fundraising, which has included bag-packing in supermarkets, washing cars, running stalls at fairs and baking cakes for sale. The students have learned to speak in public, either at school to inspire other students to help or in local churches to explain why we have a cake stall after the service. They have also learned that fundraising is hard work.

Those young people see students in Uganda who have nothing but who are getting on with a good education without books or equipment. They study the same syllabus but without a textbook in sight, relying only on the teacher's knowledge to learn, often by rote, from the blackboard. Their schools are in poor rural communities and it has been useful for our students to realise that from an early age Ugandan students have to fetch water from the well before walking up to seven miles to school. They do not have iPods, computers,

mobile phones or the internet—luxuries that our students take for granted. The fundraising has transformed the life chances of the children we have helped in Uganda, as well as giving our students an insight into what real poverty is. I have also been to Rwanda with a Conservative party project, so I am delighted that we are committed to work towards our 0.7% international development goal.

Of course we have poverty in this country. Derbyshire does not have inner-city poverty, but there is poverty. Much of the money going to schools follows free school meal take-up, and I have been told regularly by head teachers that in a relatively affluent area, the problem is that people who suffer poverty are frightened and nervous about asking for free school meals. I would like our Government to look at how we can encourage take-up in schools where relatively fewer people are in poverty.

We need to remember that there are pockets of poverty in rural areas and in certain suburbs. I am delighted that our Government will give local authorities the freedom to spend money as best they think fit. We must ensure that hidden deprivation is not one of those things that is missed, so that the students in our schools get the best educational chance that they can.

I want to represent all the constituents of Mid Derbyshire, from whatever part of the social spectrum, and I am particularly concerned, as I said yesterday, about the problems that we will face with unemployment, given the impending closure of the head office of the Derbyshire building society. I have written to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills to ask him to consider how he can help those people to get back into work.

4 pm

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): I, too, congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your elevation to your new role. I am sure that you are probably getting tired of hearing such congratulations, but I wanted to add mine.

I also congratulate hon. Members on their maiden speeches. Having made mine a couple of weeks ago, I know what a daunting prospect it is. I particularly welcome the contribution by the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham). We were colleagues on Derby city council before we were elected to the House at the general election, so it is especially fitting to address the House directly after her.

Poverty is an incredibly important issue, and a recognition of its importance is shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House. In many ways it defines the sort of society in which we live. I welcome the coalition Government's commitment to the previous Labour Government's commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020. The big question is, of course, how we will get there under the new regime.

I and other Labour Members strongly believe that work is indeed one of the best pathways out of poverty, but to ensure that it is a genuine pathway out of poverty, it is vital not only that we continue to support measures such as the national minimum wage and move towards a living wage, but that we recognise that we must also support initiatives such as child tax credits. Child trust funds have also made a big contribution by encouraging people to save. I very much regret that the Government have decided to do away with those funds. Particularly for families from low-income backgrounds, not to have that start in life or that incentive to continue to save and to build up a nest egg for when they reach the age of 18 is a very big mistake.

On work as a pathway out of poverty and the importance of the measures that I have identified, we must acknowledge—I used to work in welfare rights, so I have some knowledge of this—that the work disincentives that used to exist have now been addressed in large measure. Although I accept that more probably needs to be done, work has become a genuine pathway out of poverty. I stress that I am very concerned about the Conservative party's proposals. The precise detail of some of them remains to be seen, but I would be concerned about any attempt to reduce support for things such as tax credits, which are so vital to the process of helping people into the labour market.

Of course, ensuring that employment pays is one of the most important methods of addressing poverty, but we should also acknowledge the measures that are vital in relation to tackling pensioner poverty and the fact that many disabled people also experience poverty. Again, that is why I would be concerned if measures were proposed to undermine some of the support mechanisms that we put in place. For example, concessionary travel has liberated whole swathes of older people in our country who were previously imprisoned essentially in their own homes, unable to travel beyond their immediate neighbourhoods. The pension credit system has also made a big contribution to tackling poverty, as have the cold weather payments. I remember that many elderly people simply could not afford to heat their homes in the 1980s, but those sorts of things are no longer among the concerns of many elderly people in our country because of the measures put in place by the previous Labour Government.

In the end, growth is the key to tackling poverty, so the big question is how we deliver growth in our economy so that we make the welfare payments that are so important to addressing poverty a reality. Labour Members believe that it is vital that the state and public spending play a role in ensuring that the economy continues to grow. Conservative Members say that they are sick of hearing history lessons from us, but if we do not learn the lessons from history, we will make the same mistakes. It is therefore essential that we acknowledge the role of the state in ensuring that the economy continues to grow.

For example, Bombardier, a company in my constituency, is bidding for the Thameslink contract. We hope that the announcement will come shortly and that it is in favour of Bombardier, because that will secure 2,600 jobs directly in the company, as well as a further 5,000, 6,000 or even 7,000 jobs in the supply chain. If we cut public spending and such programmes, however, that would throw 7,000, 8,000 or perhaps 9,000 people out of work, which would put more pressure on the state, because of increased unemployment benefit, and lead to the downward spiral of having to make cuts to people's welfare provision to accommodate the diminishing tax revenue resulting from a declining economy. I therefore urge Conservative Members to learn the lessons of history because they are otherwise destined to repeat the same mistakes, and it will not be they or many Labour Members who will pay the price of those mistakes, but ordinary working-class people in my constituency

[Chris Williamson]

and throughout the country. They will pay the price for a failed economic prospectus that was tried in the 1980s and the 1930s but proven not to work. For goodness' sake, people need to look at their history books and learn these vital lessons.

Andrew Percy: We are hearing a lot about history from the hon. Gentleman, but the Labour party does not seem to have learned one lesson from history: whenever it has left government, the country has been more bankrupt, more in debt and with unemployment higher than when it came in. Interesting as it is to hear history lessons from the hon. Gentleman, he should perhaps look to his colleagues before he starts lecturing Conservative Members.

Chris Williamson: The hon. Gentleman ignores the fact that we have just experienced the most significant worldwide recession for 80 years. Worldwide opinion acknowledges that the previous Government's leadership, particularly under the auspices of the former Prime Minister, is getting the world's economy back on its feet. It is somewhat unfair for the hon. Gentleman to talk in such terms about the economic situation that the coalition Government have inherited.

As independent commentators have said on a number of occasions, without the measures put in place by the previous Government, at least 500,000 more people in this country would be out of work. The largest proportion of this country's deficit is a direct consequence of unemployment. If the Government parties' policies are put in place, however, I fear that unemployment will continue to grow, which will put further pressure on the public finances and mean that we will not get the growth that we desperately require.

I know that the Government parties are set on a course, but we will scrutinise very closely and expose all their shortcomings to ensure that, at the next general election, they are held to account for the actions they take.

4.10 pm

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to make my maiden speech. Although we are not quite neighbouring MPs, we share an excellent motorway, the M4, which connects our two constituencies.

I congratulate all those who have made some first-class maiden speeches today, two of which I shall highlight. My hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) spoke passionately about her love of football—a love that I share but, the House will be delighted to know, not of the same team, Tottenham Hotspur. My hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) championed the sampling of the fine traditions of Burton's brewing industry. I am sure that all of us suffering greatly from nerves as we headed towards making our maiden speech would have formed an orderly queue to take up his suggestion.

Following tradition, I pay tribute to my predecessor, Michael Wills, who served the North Swindon constituency for 13 years. He had a reputation for meticulous attention to detail and worked extremely hard for my fellow local residents. On my first meeting with Michael, he assured me that one day we would both be in Parliament together. How right he was. I am sure that the whole House joins me in congratulating him on his elevation to the House of Lords, where he can continue to represent the people of Swindon in a different role.

I am a local resident of North Swindon and was a councillor for 10 years, up to the day of the general election. I am grateful that the local residents did not give me a huge amount of free time in allowing me to change roles. Earlier this week, on Monday, my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Mr Buckland) made an enlightening speech in which he set out the proud history of our town, covering its beginning as a small Saxon market town and its development through our proud railway heritage. Now, Swindon is one of the fastest growing towns in the country. In the spirit of teamwork that we show in having joint staff and joint offices, I shall not repeat the summary of history that he gave; instead, I shall focus on some of the more quirky and light-hearted facts that make our wonderful and unique town of Swindon so proud.

All maiden speakers champion the towns they represent, but I am delighted to say that I have some evidence that Swindon is as good as we all claim. In 2008, *The Times* said that it was the best place to buy a house—I welcome any Member who wishes to visit one of our local estate agents. We had the first example of a lending library, and I am pleased to say that two years ago we built a new £10 million central library on time and to budget—an aspiration for many Government Departments. I must say, however, that despite the fact that ours was the first lending library, it took us 40 years to replace a temporary set of portakabins, much to the annoyance of local residents. In addition, the much loved mechanics' institute was the first example of the basis of the NHS.

When I say that I am from Swindon, many people mention roundabouts, and we are indeed famous for "the magic roundabout". I assure those who have never embarked on the magic roundabout—a series of five roundabouts—that doing so is as daunting as making one's maiden speech. Those who know the music industry will know that, allegedly, the famous band Oasis named themselves after our very popular local Oasis leisure centre. I am proud that Swindon is twinned with cities such as Salzgitter, Ocatal, Torun, and Murcia. In addition, thanks to the endeavours and creative skills of local resident Rebecca Warren, we now have a formal twinning arrangement with Disneyland, so the magic of Disney is now being sprinkled across Swindon and our local paper finally has some colourful coverage.

In my role as a councillor, one of my main focuses was on leisure. I played a small part in addressing the subject of this debate—poverty—because I see how sport and leisure can play a big role in raising aspirations and providing opportunities for people. As a result of the excellent work of the sports forum that we set up, we now have more than 60 voluntary sporting groups that come together to share best practice, network and work together to create greater opportunities, as well as to leverage extra funding from external organisations and the council for that work.

Swindon is a thriving sports town. When researching all the different sports other than my main passion, football, I was surprised to find the following names that have all been adopted by local sports teams—I shall be testing hon. Members later. We have Swindon Wildcats, Flames, Sonics, St George, Supermarine, Robins

and, of course, Swindon Town football club, which two weeks ago I was delighted to have the opportunity to cheer on at Wembley. I am afraid, however, that we did not quite overcome the final hurdle and make it into the championship, as we lost the play-off final, but I am sure that we have good foundations for next season. As a diehard blue Conservative, it is the only time people will catch me shouting, "Come on you reds!"

Turning from Swindon to the poverty debate with a rather tenuous link, I am concerned about the long-term quality-of-life issues arising from new build development. In the 10 years in which I was a councillor, I represented a predominantly new build area. When I was first elected in 2000, we had just 3,000 houses—I was very grateful when it took me just a few hours to deliver leaflets to all of them—but when I stood down, there were nearly 10,000 houses, and it took many weeks to deliver leaflets. I saw lots of examples of good development—I live in the area myself—but there were examples, too, of things that were not good, and we are storing up problems for the future, predominantly arising from the increasingly high density of new developments.

The first area of concern stems from the lack of open spaces and parks. That was partly down to the changing classification. Green space was taken into account, but it included hedges and heritage spaces—basically, places where people could not put down jumpers for goal posts. I have a great fear that future generations will miss out on the inspiration of sport. When I was young and Wimbledon was on for a fortnight, we would play tennis. When the Tour de France was on, out came the bikes. When the World and FA cups were on, out came the football. When the Ashes cricket was on, out came the cricket bats, and I was proud to emulate the failings often of some or our national sporting icons.

Without those open spaces, it is no surprise that child obesity has increased. Too often, we look at improving leisure centres, which is a commendable thing, but the lion's share of sporting activity takes place in open spaces. I am concerned that the lack of such space will fuel antisocial behaviour, as young people's endless, enthusiastic energy will not be burnt off.

Parking provision is another problem. It is understandable that the then Government should try to encourage residents to transfer to public transport—I support that principle—but local residents are far more creative than that and would find parking spaces on pavements and roundabouts, causing all sorts of problems, particularly for parents with pushchairs trying to get to local schools, as they had to go on to the road. All too often, emergency vehicles could not get access to roads, which was a serious concern.

The size of household gardens has shrunk by a third since 1960. In fact, 3.3 million people do not have access to their own private garden, so it is no wonder that the amount of time that children spend in their back garden under parental supervision has halved since the 1960s, fuelling child obesity. I enjoyed the outdoors, but too often children nowadays miss out on that.

I am concerned about unbalanced development. In theory, all developments are supposed to have a mix of family homes, private homes, affordable homes and retirement homes, but in my ward I kept seeing developers targeting family homes. We had a high concentration of young children, but despite the fact that every single primary school had expanded to the maximum capacity that the land would allow—and often beyond that—we still could not provide sufficient places in the most popular schools. We need a better mix of development so we can spread the burden on local infrastructure and services.

I sometimes question developer conduct—I certainly never received a Christmas card from developers in the ward that I represented, and I was quite proud of that—for two reasons. The first is their inability to adopt roads—I notice there is an Adjournment debate on the issue later—and the fact that they take far too long to do so. In particular, the moment the last house is sold, all too often maintenance falls away, much to the frustration of residents who are still paying council tax. Secondly, I am concerned about developers who create storage sites, which become an eyesore for local residents.

Sometimes in politics there is an element of luck. As I prepared my speech over breakfast the other day, I turned on the news only to see that the Government had announced that they were going to scrap minimum density targets and increase the power to protect back gardens. I was delighted to hear that and, as the Member for North Swindon, I will be a strong supporter of those proposals, and I will do all that I can to make sure that in future we have better developments that enhance the quality of life of people living on them.

4.19 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is a pleasure, Madam Deputy Speaker, to see you in the Chair. It has also been a pleasure this afternoon to listen to so many eloquent maiden speeches. I made my maiden speech two days ago, and it is amazing how quickly one can feel like an old timer in this House.

I am delighted that we are having a debate so early in this new Parliament about the vital issue of poverty in this country. I think that there is agreement across the House about the damage that poverty does in blighting lives, the harm that it does to our community and the waste of potential that poverty amounts to.

I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for the tremendous work that he has done, and with and through the Centre for Social Justice, in drawing attention to the impact of poverty and the way in which it has destroyed and damaged so many lives. I pay tribute to the way in which he and colleagues have raised our awareness of the complexity of factors that contribute to poverty. I am pleased to welcome him and other Ministers who have a strong identity with the cause to their roles today.

It is important that we take care to disentangle the causes and consequences of poverty, and some of what I have heard from those on the Government Benches suggests a little confusion on that front. It is certainly true that lone parents face an exceptionally high risk of poverty, but it is also the case that poverty and the stress of trying to make ends meet can contribute to family and relationship breakdown. It is important that we help to sustain relationships and keep families together, and ensure that they have adequate resources to remove that stress and concern.

It is also important that we note who faces a particular risk of poverty, and why—disabled people and people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds; where

[Kate Green]

one lives; unequal access to the labour market; and unequal access to and experience within the labour market. Those are the structural drivers of poverty that it is important public policy addresses.

I think we are all agreed that it is important to make work pay if work is to be a secure route out of poverty for as many people as possible. However, we do not make work incentives by making those out of work even worse off. The way to make work pay is to move to higher wages, and I particularly endorse the call of my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) for a move towards the living wage. We make work pay by ensuring that the support is in place to enable people to get into work and then to progress and upskill to improve their prospects at work. We make work pay by improving incentives, and I welcome the attention that the Government offer to pay to addressing the high marginal deduction rates faced by some people as they move into or increase hours of work on low pay.

However, it is also important that we acknowledge that life for those out of work and on benefits is not a life of luxury. I challenge all hon. Members to consider how any of us would manage on a disposable income of £65.45 a week. It is not just my contention that benefits in this country and the relative poverty line at 60% of median income force people into a lifestyle that is beyond sustainable; it is the contention of the research of the highly respected Joseph Rowntree Foundation and its work on minimum income standards, which reflects the wide public perception of what individuals and families need to live. That perception and the work on minimum income standards show clearly that in setting our aspiration at a relative poverty line of 60% of median income, we fall some way short of what the public themselves believe is adequate in order to raise a family and make ends meet.

I also say to Government Members that when evolving policy it is important that we learn from what has and has not worked. I am sure that they will want to do that. During the 1980s and 1990s child poverty doubled, but since 1999 the number of children in poverty has been reduced by 500,000, and that is not by accident. Child poverty has gone down in the years in which Governments have invested in family incomes, through benefits and tax credits, and it has increased in the years in which Governments have not made that investment. The Labour Government's policy of seeking to reduce poverty through increases in tax credits and benefits is not a failed policy; on the contrary, if we had had more of it we might have been further ahead than we are today.

I therefore caution Ministers to consider carefully what the evidence tells them, and to take careful account of the significant expertise that exists outside the House. I was pleased by the almost entirely cross-party support that the Child Poverty Bill secured during its passage through the previous Parliament. The Child Poverty Act 2010, as it became, put in place a recognition of the need to sustain the poverty targets, confirmed the importance of the relative income poverty target and set it once more at the 60% median line. Picking up a point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) made earlier, I note that the Act also acknowledged that, in seeking to set a realistic target, we should take account of what our European and international neighbours are able to achieve. Some of us who were not Members at the time ventured to suggest that the target could have been a little more ambitious, but we have a realistic and achievable target. We know that, because other countries are able to achieve it, and we must do so, too.

I look forward to the creation of the child poverty commission, for which the Act has made provision, and to the strategy that the Government have committed to bring forward by March next year in order to demonstrate the progress that they intend to make so that they can bring about the achievement of those targets. That strategy must focus on good jobs, holistic support and adequate incomes for all. We have learned enough to know that those are the ingredients of a successful anti-poverty strategy, and I look forward to the proposals that the Government bring to the House.

4.27 pm

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I join all colleagues who have spoken this afternoon in welcoming you to your new position? I also congratulate those colleagues who have made their maiden speeches—and some excellent maiden speeches there have been, too. I just hope that mine continues in the same vein.

I represent the wonderful and stunningly beautiful Calder Valley, which at more than 22 miles long has just five small but incredibly diverse townships, Todmorden, Hebden Bridge, Ripponden, Elland and, where I live, Brighouse. They are complemented by a cluster of villages, all nestled on some of Yorkshire's finest moorland.

The constituency was established at the 1983 general election, and since then it has had only two MPs. Some of our older, established Members will remember the first one, Sir Donald Thompson, for his wit and good old Yorkshire charm. As a Member for more than 18 years, he was a hard-working constituency MP whom most people still talk about today when one knocks on doors. Sir Donald, as he was affectionately known, was a solid, stout, no-nonsense Yorkshireman, who worked his way up through the Whips Office before joining the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food as a junior Minister. Sadly, he passed away in 2005, but he is and always will be fondly remembered by the people of Calder Valley.

Chris McCafferty, who had been the MP for the past 13 years, was also known as a good constituency MP. She was a member of the Procedure Committee and the International Development Committee. More importantly, since 1999 she has been a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and she has won a great deal of respect for her commitment to overseas development, sexual health and, most important, the rights of women.

Those were two good, strong local MPs, who, in the true spirit of Calder Valley, excelled in many ways, like so many more of the local people who were born there. In Brighouse and Rastrick, for example, we have the world-famous brass band who, in 1977, stayed at No. 2 in the singles charts for nine whole weeks with their version of "The Floral Dance". Even today, they are considered to be the best public subscription band in the country.

Hebden Bridge saw the birth of Sir Bernard Ingham, who was Margaret Thatcher's press secretary and a newspaper columnist. Mytholmroyd saw the birth of

Ted Hughes, the late poet laureate, who passed away in 1998. His first wife, Sylvia Plath, is buried in our hilltop gem of a village, Heptonstall. Earlier this afternoon, two colleagues mentioned John Wesley. In Heptonstall, we have the oldest Methodist chapel in continuous use not only in Britain, but in the whole world. I am incredibly proud to say that it is also a place where my three beautiful children all went to Sunday school.

Who could forget the town of Todmorden, which has had more Nobel prize winners than 28 countries? It also has the same number of Nobel prize winners as a further 10 countries; and the country of New Zealand as a whole boasts only one more prize winner than Todmorden. Sir John Cockcroft won the physics prize for splitting the nucleus of the atom, and Sir Geoffrey Wilkinson pioneered inorganic chemistry and transition metal catalysts. The amazing thing about these two men is that despite their being a 24-year gap between them, they were both taught at Todmorden grammar school by the very same science teacher, one Mr Luke Sutcliffe—an amazing teacher who taught two amazing students.

That brings me nicely to another amazing group of students. I want to talk about the educational attainment levels of looked-after children in our country. This is about poverty on an amazing scale—educational poverty. Incredibly, Sir Donald Thompson, in his own maiden speech some 31 years ago, talked about the attainment levels of children through education back then. Although the percentage of year 11 looked-after children who achieve five A* to C grades at GCSE has doubled in the past 10 years, it is incredibly sad that that number still only accounts for 14% of them. Nationally, more than 13% of our looked-after children still miss more than 25 days of schooling, sometimes because of exclusions. A third of previously looked-after children are not in education, employment or training at the age of 19. A total of 22% of persistent young offenders were being looked after by social services, and a staggering further 27% had been looked after previously.

Earlier, a colleague talked about aspiration. In 2005, a research report by the Frank Buttle Trust showed that only one care leaver in every 100 children goes to university—a staggering 1%. In 2008, "Care Matters", the ministerial stock-take report by the then Department of Children, Schools and Families, showed that 7% of care leavers went to university. Whatever the current figure is—whether it is 1% or 7%—it compares with 43% of all other children. Frankly, that is not good enough.

In Calderdale, where I have spent the past three years as lead member for children's services, I am glad to say that our looked-after children do significantly better than the national picture. Sadly, however, it is still not good enough. We have a fabulous team in Calderdale who strive for excellence in attainment for our looked-after children. I am incredibly proud of two of the last things that I did as lead member before coming to this House. First, I secured money to fund a virtual head teacher for our looked-after children in Calderdale. In itself that is not unusual, but it is an important and significant step forward for those children. Secondly, under the superb leadership of Councillor Stephen Baines, the Conservative leader of Calderdale council, last year we became only the second authority in the United Kingdom, after Rotherham, to introduce a virtual library so that every child under the age of five gets a free book monthly. That is unusual in itself, but in conjunction with the facilities at Sure Start children's centres, where parents who cannot read are also taught to do so, it is a perfect way of starting to break the cycle of poverty.

I am proud also to say today that I have written to several prominent local people from Calder Valley to ask whether they will sit on my MP's charity, which will be established purely to consider what value we can add to driving the attainment levels of looked-after children. That is intended not to replace what the local authority does but to add value and raise awareness of the need to support our looked-after children and help break the poverty cycle.

I support the Government's policy on poverty and look forward to playing my part within the House and outside in helping to reduce it.

4.36 pm

Mary Macleod (Brentford and Isleworth) (Con): I, too, welcome you to your new role, Mr Deputy Speaker, and thank you for coming to speak to me prior to your election.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech today in this historic Chamber in a debate on poverty, a subject about which I feel strongly. I listened with interest to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker) as he spoke with real passion about his constituency and about poverty.

Most importantly, I thank the people of Brentford and Isleworth constituency for giving me the privilege of representing them. I follow in the footsteps of distinguished politicians including Sir Harold Paton Mitchell, Lord Hayhoe and Nirj Deva. I should today like to acknowledge the work of my recent predecessor Ann Keen, who served Brentford and Isleworth for the past 13 years. She was a well-known MP, had the support of many constituents and was well regarded for her experience in health care. I am also very grateful to the many people who helped me along the way since I first stood for Parliament in 1997. Many who have helped me over the years are in the Chamber today, and I thank them for their support and guidance during my long journey to make it here.

I was delighted to be selected for the constituency of Brentford and Isleworth, because London is not only my birthplace—just across the river at St Thomas's hospital—but has been my home for the past 20 years. It is a creative, successful, diverse and stimulating place. It is, and will remain, a city of opportunity and dreams.

My constituency is just up-river from Westminster, in a beautiful part of west London. It starts at Chiswick and continues north of the river to Hounslow, winding through the historic towns of Brentford, Isleworth, Osterley and Syon. The constituency is an important crossroads for London, as it is where the River Brent meets the River Thames and where the Great West road meets the North and South circular roads. In ancient history, it was the meeting place for ancient British tribes, and it was where Caesar forded the river on his approach to London. We have more green parks than anywhere else in London, and we are also fortunate enough to have five heritage houses in the constituency.

The area is famous for its football and its nylons, its broadcasters and businesses, its brewers and the Brompton folding bicycle, its impresarios and inventors. Lubricated

[Mary Macleod]

by some decades of Fuller's brewing, we are the silicon valley of west London with some of the most prestigious high-tech, media and pharmaceutical companies, such as GlaxoSmithKline, which is now prospering on Brentford's golden mile. I hope that the area, which was the motor of the new prosperity in the 1930s with Hoover and Gillette, will power the new economic era that this Government are eager to create.

The constituency has been home to many notable residents over the years, including the famous artists William Hogarth, Turner, Pope, Yeats and Vincent van Gogh. It is also home to Brentford football club, which is rightly proud of its ninth place in its first season in league one, although it is naturally aiming for the premier league. I am ever the optimist. The club has recently been awarded the prestigious community mark by Business in the Community—the first English football league club to be recognised with that award for its outstanding work in the community.

Multicultural and cosmopolitan, the Brentford and Isleworth constituency is a harmonious cohesion of communities and an example to the rest of the country. I am proud to represent such a diverse and historic constituency. It is a place that demonstrates what London is all about and has a history almost as exciting as its future. It is a unique and vibrant place that people travel to and through, and preserving the balance of those two groups is vital. I am delighted that both the Prime Minister and the Mayor of London have supported the campaign against the third runway, and have already delivered on that election promise. Quality of life is something that should be above politics. I hope that all my election promises will be as easy and quick to implement.

At the election, my constituents voted for change, and this Parliament represents the biggest change in Members for many years. It is a new Parliament in more ways than one. It must adapt to changing times and adopt different methods. If it is new politics, it must also be genuine change. Let us be the change that we want to see in the world.

I am sure that most hon. Members would agree that we need to rebuild trust in politicians. To do this, this place needs to be representative of the communities it serves. In one important respect, this House has further to go. Women remain a minority in this place, but are a majority in the country. That cannot and should not be the case. For many years I have been, and will continue to be, an advocate of encouraging more women into politics, irrespective of their views. Imagine how different the world would have been if another woman, in another London seat and in another time, had decided that the odds were insurmountable. Small in number we may still be in this House, but there is an old saying in business—"If you want a job done well, give it to a busy woman."

Our task in this House is not only to rebuild people's trust in politics but to rebuild the economy. We face many and significant challenges as we attempt to tackle the national debt and set our country firmly on the journey to recovery and prosperity that we all want. We must do that if we want to address poverty. We now have a coalition Government to lead us through these difficult times. I hope that all hon. Members will do everything in their power to put country before party and work together to find the right solutions. These are the things that not only unite us as politicians, but as people. I wholly endorse the coalition and the work that needs to be done together for the sake of the nation, but I will also never forget that I was elected as a Conservative. I will stay true to the principles and values that I hold dear and that I know will help this House in bringing about the changes that are needed in the years ahead. We cannot be less than what we are.

As a coalition, we may have to make decisions that are unpopular, but the measure of a politician is not popularity, but the great and good causes they fight for. At the heart of why hon. Members are here in this Chamber today is a vision of a different world—a world in which children can aspire and succeed whatever their background may be; where those who are ill or infirm are supported, helped and cared for; and a world in which people have aspirations to be the best and can achieve their goals and dreams. It is a world with compassion for those in real need. That is what I want to bring to this great country of ours, and I will spend every moment on these Benches seeking to deliver it, locally and nationally.

Our debate on poverty today addresses these issues. First, I wish to say a quick word about international poverty. As a former ambassador for ActionAid, I believe that whatever economic difficulties we face nationally, we must not neglect our responsibilities as a civilised nation to act to reduce world poverty. Hunger kills 3.5 million children every year—one every 10 seconds—and we must do all we can to end it.

Even closer to home, we have issues of poverty to tackle, and that is even more important now than ever before. I see that in areas across my constituency. Currently, 2.9 million children are living in poverty in this country, which prevents them from having the fair start in life that all children deserve. We will work to change this. I agree with the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) that our first task is to ensure that we give children the best education possible and give them the skills that will make a real difference to their lives. After that, it is about cutting the deficit and creating jobs for the future, so that we can create a strong and stable future for us all.

Finally, we will face many challenges in the lifetime of this Parliament, and we must do so with the courage and energy of the new intake, allied to the wisdom and experience of experienced Members. As the new MP for Brentford and Isleworth, I will take on those challenges with enthusiasm, commitment and determination, and I will stand up for what I believe in and work hard to make a real difference to those in most need. Working together, we can achieve so much more and deliver real change for our country.

4.46 pm

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your election to your post, and I am grateful to you for calling me to make my first speech to the House. I also warmly congratulate all Members, on both sides of the House, who have made their maiden speeches today on enlightening us about the many delights of their constituencies.

I am greatly honoured and humbled that the voters of Bury North have placed their trust and confidence in me to represent them. It is a great privilege. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mary Macleod), I first stood for Parliament in 1997, and I had to stand four times before being elected, which is testament to the fact that perseverance pays off. My predecessor as MP for Bury North was Mr David Chaytor, who while holding very different political views from my own, always treated me with the greatest courtesy and respect. I am sure that my constituents whom he helped during the 13 years he represented the constituency would want me to thank him publicly for the work he did on their behalf. Mr Chaytor made frequent contributions in the House, particularly on education and energy.

Prior to Mr Chaytor, Bury North constituency was represented by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt). He is still fondly remembered in Bury from the 14 years he represented the constituency, and I congratulate him on his ministerial promotion to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Bury North constituency has changed little geographically since the days when it was represented by him. The latest boundary review transferred voters in three of the four polling districts in the redrawn Unsworth ward from Bury North into Bury South. The name "Bury North" reflects the fact that the constituency covers the northern part of the borough of Bury, which was formed in the 1974 local government reorganisation, when the six townships of Prestwich, Whitefield, Radcliffe, Bury, Ramsbottom and Tottington were combined to form a single metropolitan district within the Greater Manchester conurbation. It is the last three of those—Bury, Tottington and Ramsbottom—that together now comprise the current constituency of Bury North. It is, if I may say so, archetypal Lancashire territory, where the people have a strong sense of local pride, identity and community.

Bury grew quickly during the industrial revolution, on the strength of its textile and paper industries. Although those industries are now largely absent from 21st century Bury, there is much to commend it to would-be visitors. Indeed, if there are any hon. Members who have not yet booked their summer holidays, may I suggest that they need look no further than Bury? The list of attractions is wide and varied, starting with the world-famous Bury markets, where people have the chance to purchase the local delicacy, Bury black pudding. Then there is the regimental museum of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, the east Lancashire railway and the wild splendour of the moors of east Lancashire, along with the Peel tower and the Peel statue, which stands in the square in front of the great parish church, commemorating one of Bury's most famous sons, Sir Robert Peel.

Much has been said of the changes that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made to the Conservative party, particularly with regard to increasing the number of women and the number of Members from an ethnic minority background in the parliamentary party. However, surely none of those changes is as noteworthy or striking as the fact that I, as a Yorkshireman from a working-class background, was selected to fight a seat in Lancashire. Although I was born in Sheffield, in common with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, I attended a comprehensive school in Rotherham. It must be something of a record, but this is the second time in less than half an hour that Rotherham has been mentioned, as it was by my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker). In those days, Rotherham was—and it probably still is—referred to as the "Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire". [Hon. Members: "It still is."] Indeed. I am sure that there was no attempt at political indoctrination, but if there was, it clearly failed.

Let me turn to the topic of today's debate. I note that nowadays poverty comes in all sorts of technical categories. We have "severe" poverty, "relative" poverty, "absolute" poverty and "persistent" poverty, but it seems to me that, with our welfare system and the vast amounts that we spend on welfare in Britain today, there is no reason why any of our fellow citizens should be categorised as living in poverty. It is incumbent on us all to look at how we are spending our welfare budget. It is the poverty of aspiration and ambition, which is so pervasive and widespread among many in the lower socio-economic groups, that is the real problem. In that regard, I hope that perhaps my achievements can be an inspiration to others.

Finally, let me say that I intend to be a strong and independent advocate for my constituents in Bury, Ramsbottom and Tottington, speaking up for them with straightforward common sense. I believe in small government, freedom for the individual, less bureaucracy and red tape, an end to political correctness and restoring the full sovereignty of this Parliament, free from control by the European Union. It is for those causes that I will be fighting during my time in this House.

4.54 pm

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): I welcome you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to your new role, and I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to make my maiden speech in the House today. I congratulate the Members who have preceded me, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall), who has just made a magnificent speech. I congratulate other Members on both sides of the House on making eloquent speeches, which I hope I can live up to today.

I must say how delighted and proud I am to be elected to represent the good people of my home town constituency. They have shown a great deal of faith in me, which I intend to repay over the course of my time in the House. I aim to be an excellent constituency representative and to work diligently for my constituents with the same enthusiasm, passion and old-fashioned hard work that I showed during the election campaign.

The Nuneaton constituency in the fine county of Warwickshire in the heart of our country was formed in 1885, following the Redistribution of Seats Act 1885. From that time until the second world war, the seat regularly changed hands between parties of all persuasions. After the second world war, however, the seat became somewhat of a Labour stronghold. That lasted until the general election of 1983, by which time the seat included several wards from the borough of Rugby.

Mr Lewis Stevens became the first Conservative post-war Member for Nuneaton. He was regarded as a hard-working and conscientious Member who was one of the best attendees in the House during his time here and had an excellent voting record. He was also extremely well respected within the constituency. Mr Stevens, who still lives in Nuneaton today, has been a good personal friend, to whom I have always been able to look for

[Mr Marcus Jones]

advice and support. I thank him for that. It is a great privilege for me to join Lewis in such an exclusive club as only the second Conservative Member for Nuneaton since 1935.

In 1992, I cast my first vote for Mr Stevens, although it was not perhaps the luckiest of omens because unfortunately he was sadly defeated by Mr Bill Olner. From 1992 until the Dissolution of Parliament earlier this year, Mr Bill Olner served the constituents of Nuneaton. In my experience, Bill was a reasonable and gentlemanly character, who was a loyal supporter of the Labour Government. I am aware that he seemed to be well liked on all sides of the House. He was a prominent local figure, and like my good self, before his election he served for many years on the Nuneaton and Bedworth borough council before eventually becoming its leader—a privilege that I also enjoyed. Bill was also involved in the establishment of the Mary Ann Evans hospice and is still the president of that fine organisation today. I would like to thank Mr Olner for his work and service to the people of Nuneaton, and I wish him well on his retirement.

The latest incarnation of the constituency sees the wards from the borough of Rugby that came into it in 1983 returned to the constituency of Rugby. I now formally welcome the North Warwickshire borough wards of Hartshill, Arley and Whitacre to the constituency. It was apparent during the election campaign that many constituents from these wards were mostly unaware of the boundary changes. There appears to have been a most unfortunate lack of consultation, from which the House should perhaps learn when we conduct the reorganisation that is outlined in the coalition document.

Both the urban and rural areas of the constituency at one time relied heavily on the industries of mining and mineral extraction, much of which has now ceased, with the notable exception of Daw Mill colliery—the single largest coal-producing colliery in the UK. The colliery is situated right on the border where the constituencies of Nuneaton and North Warwickshire meet.

Nuneaton itself was traditionally an industrial town known for textiles and manufacturing, but like many constituencies it has changed dramatically in the post-war period. The traditional industries have given way, and in recent years, due to its convenient geographical location and unparalleled transport links at the heart of the motorway network, Nuneaton has become an excellent distribution hub. Companies such as RS Components and Dairy Crest have their national distribution centres within the constituency. Other major companies such as Holland & Barrett have their headquarters in the constituency.

Manufacturing is still very much alive, with a number of small and medium-sized enterprises that work in the supply chain to the car, aviation and defence industries. I am aware from speaking to local business leaders that those industries depend considerably on available credit for both cashflow and development. Many have struggled through the current recession, and continue to do so. I hope very much that the new Government will be instrumental in ensuring that credit is made available to SMEs, particularly those engaged in manufacturing. They are vital to our economy, particularly in the west midlands.

Nuneaton also has a fantastic town centre which has done exceptionally well to fend off the challenges from the big cities—the likes of Coventry, Birmingham and Leicester. A key to the success of the town centre is the vibrant and historic street market, which has operated in the town since the charter of 1226 and is going strong to this day, winning the accolade of the UK's best market in 2009 and best market attraction in 2010. Those are proud achievements. However, in 2010 our traditional markets face serious challenges, and we must recognise them if the markets are to survive the test of time as they have so far.

The constituency has been home to a number of famous sons and daughters. Among the most notable is the Victorian novelist George Eliot, born at South Farm, Arbury, as Mary Ann Evans. She adopted the name George Eliot to overcome the prejudice against female writers that existed at the time. Her works include "Adam Bede", "The Mill on the Floss" and "Silas Marner". She was inspired by Nuneaton's Arbury estate, the jewel in whose crown is Arbury hall, built during the reign of Elizabeth I. Arbury hall is still recognised as one of the most authentic stately homes of the era. A previous owner of the estate, Francis Newdegate, represented Nuneaton in this very House, and the Newdegates are still the owners and custodians of the estate. Although Nuneaton is not necessarily renowned as a tourist destination, it does attract many tourists from as far afield as Japan, who come to see where George Eliot was inspired to write such great works.

Probably the most famous son of Nuneaton was the late entertainer Larry Grayson, who Members of a certain age may remember entertaining us on Saturday nights during the 1970s and 1980s as the effervescent host of television's "The Generation Game". They may recall such sayings as "Shut that door". Nuneaton is also linked to two former giants of this House, Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone, fierce rivals who both owned land in Nuneaton. The original deeds with which the pieces of land were transferred are still on display in Nuneaton and the neighbouring town of Bedworth.

Nuneaton is a friendly and homely place in which to live, and on the whole still enjoys an excellent community spirit. Demographically, the constituency is very diverse. We have areas of relative affluence, but pockets of real deprivation. In fact, three wards in the constituency are in the bottom 20% in the country. Over the past 13 years the last Government made much of the need to narrow the gap between rich and poor in such wards and ensure that child poverty ended, and substantial amounts were spent during that time, but outcomes were often not proportionate to expenditure.

Although well intentioned, the last Government received very little for their money in terms of social mobility and a reduction in the gap between the rich and the poor, and they have further fuelled a culture of benefit dependency in which children grow up seeing parents and grandparents who have never worked as their role models, in which people are better off living apart than living together, and in which there is no incentive to work because of the fear of becoming worse off.

I must say that I am enthused by the coalition document, and particularly the work conducted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), with his practical and pragmatic ideas to simplify the benefits system, help people into

work, and prioritise early intervention which will help our most deprived communities. I am sure that the new Government's commitment to such measures as the pupil premium and support for further education colleges and universities will give the young people of my constituency the educational opportunity that will make them more socially mobile, raise their aspirations, unlock untapped potential and let individuals take control of their own lives once more.

I particularly welcome the new Government's commitment to providing an additional 50,0000 apprenticeships, which I am sure will engage and enthuse many young people who do not have the necessary aptitude for—or, more often, are not attracted to—further academic studies. I hope that many of those apprentices will be employed in Nuneaton. I am also convinced that there is no better way of regenerating our areas of deprivation than to create an environment in which the private sector can thrive. We must reduce regulation and business taxes and get credit moving, so that businesses can create the jobs that the skills provided by our Government will deserve.

Let me sum up by again thanking the people of Nuneaton, whom I now represent. I will work hard and to the best of my ability properly to represent them both in the constituency and in the House. I will do whatever I can to make a contribution that will have a more positive effect on their lives.

5.5 pm

Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con): Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Deputy Speaker. May I congratulate you on your election? Having just fought my first election, I know how arduous it can be, so I congratulate you on having fought a second one so soon after the first.

It has been a pleasure to listen to the maiden speeches of so many hon. Members on both sides of the House today. I envy the fact that so many people are post-maiden, while I still have that ordeal ahead. At least, unlike earlier today, I can speak to a hushed and listening House, although perhaps *Hansard* can show that that is because there is quite a lot of green space on the Opposition Benches. I do not, by contrast, envy anybody their constituency as I think that I represent quite the nicest bit of this great country. The constituency of Devizes encompasses a large chunk of central Wiltshire. We have the vibrant market towns of Devizes, Marlborough, Tidworth, Durrington and Ludgershall, as well as the armed forces garrisons at Tidworth, Netheravon, Bulford, Larkhill and Upavon. We have 111 beautiful villages, the neolithic monument at Avebury, miles of rolling chalk landscape and the tranquil Pewsey vale. It is wonderful and I urge all hon. Members to visit as soon as possible.

We host the Devizes to Westminster canoe race, which some might say is an easier way of getting here than fighting a general election. We are also home to the Wadworth brewery, which brews with pride the famous 6X beer. That is why I am such a fervent supporter of community pubs and why I would like taxes on beer to be lowered when the economic circumstances that we have inherited improve.

There are many useful lessons in the Devizes constituency for budding politicians to learn, and I shall mention a couple of them. In the Devizes Market place there is a cross bearing the legend of Ruth Pierce, a market-woman who, when doing a bit of dodgy dealing in the Market place, said, "God shall strike me down if I am found to be telling a lie." She was struck down immediately, bearing the proof of that lie in her hand. I think that is a valuable lesson for politicians when making speeches.

The need to create legislation that endures is also obvious in my constituency. The oldest piece of legislation never to be repealed was passed by the Parliament of 1267 that met in Marlborough, so there is another lesson to be learned about passing legislation that stands the test of time.

The legendary Devizes Caen Hill lock flight on the wonderful Kennet and Avon canal, which is the longest in-water canal in the British isles, shows us what local energy and activism can do. It was the local business people of that town who paid for the canal to come to the top of the hill, where Devizes sits, when it would have been so much easier for it just to go around it. Energy, activism and a refusal to "go around" are all things that my predecessor, Michael Ancram, demonstrated abundantly. When he was elected to represent Devizes in 1992 he was already an experienced politician, having first been elected in 1974. In 1979, he beat a young Scottish Labour politician—one Gordon Brown—for the seat of Edinburgh, South. It took another 31 years for my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) to emulate that feat by beating the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown) in the general election.

Michael's distinguished political career spanned almost four decades and took in the roles of Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, shadow Foreign Secretary, shadow Defence Secretary and chairman and deputy leader of the Conservative party. While I might, in my wildest moments or in my cups, aspire to follow in his political footsteps, it is his personal characteristic of unfailing courtesy, his dedicated work on behalf of his constituents and his great love for the part of Wiltshire that he represented that I would most like to emulate. Indeed, it is my great love for Wiltshire, which has been my family's home for the last decade, that has brought me into politics.

I live in a small Wiltshire village, so I have seen at first hand the damage to rural Britain that was caused by the last Government—possibly the most urban-minded Government that Britain has ever seen. Our farmers have struggled with mountains of red tape, unchecked animal disease and an indifferent Government who were not interested in buying British food or dealing with the dishonest food labelling regime. We have had multiple grandiose regional spatial strategies in Wiltshire, but we still lack affordable housing, transport links and the broadband infrastructure that is so important for building a living and working countryside. A shocking legacy of the previous Government is the NHS quangocracy, which means that my constituency has the worst ambulance response times in the region and no minor injuries unit.

However, the lacklustre state of the rural economy and embedded rural poverty trouble me most. Employment in my constituency—that great driver-out of poverty—is still weak, and unemployment has more than doubled in the past five years. As the former Government's rural adviser said, there are huge traditional barriers to gaining employment in rural areas: poor public transport, less training and less guidance provision—a bit of new

[Claire Perry]

Labour gobbledegook that means that we do not get as many jobcentres per head of the population in rural Britain.

There is genuine poverty in rural Britain, and it is often well hidden behind a chocolate-box façade. Examples of that hidden poverty include the pensioner who is too proud to claim benefits; the family travelling 40 or 50 miles on poorly maintained roads with high petrol prices to get to work; the unskilled labourer laid off when the nearest job is 40 miles away, and the single mother who came to my surgery who is sleeping on her parents' sofa because she cannot get on the housing list. We need to tackle those issues, and I know that my constituents do not feel that the previous Government listened to them. This Government will not overlook them.

No discussion of my constituency could be complete without a mention of the armed forces. As my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray), likes to say, I am the Member of Parliament for most of the British Army. That is a small exaggeration, but my constituency is home to more than 11,000 soldiers as well as at least the same number of dependants, not to mention the several thousand Ministry of Defence civil servants. That is why I am so proud to support the armed forces. I know that all Members of Parliament do so, and many of us on these Benches welcome the imminent strategic defence review and a Government who are more supportive of our current operational commitments.

I was not successful today in the private Members' ballot. I wanted to introduce a Bill to make Remembrance day a national holiday so that all generations can understand the sacrifices that our armed forces have made and pay their respects to our past and serving troops. I assure hon. Members that they will be hearing from me about that in future, and I would welcome the support of Members of all parties to get it done.

Although the name of my constituency is derived from the Latin "ad divisas"—I did not learn that at Nailsea comprehensive school—or "on the boundaries", reflecting the town's historical position on the edge of two local manors, I want the people of Devizes no longer to feel that they are on the edge of policy making, on the political boundaries or forgotten by the Government. Instead, I want them to know that their aims and aspirations are at the heart of our Government's outlook. It is my job to make that happen; it is a job that I am proud to do.

5.13 pm

George Hollingbery (Meon Valley) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech today. I welcome you to your position—I will just mention that I voted for you.

I applaud all hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today. My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Ms Bagshawe) in particular left me feeling somewhat inadequately prepared. The hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) referred to a former Member for the seat whose constituents had a whip-round to pay his salary. It is beginning to feel a bit like that round here at the moment. I especially congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), whom I follow. She has left me quite a challenge.

First, I thank my constituents for sending me here. It is a privilege to be given the opportunity to represent them, and I give my assurance that I will do so to the very best of my ability. As a new Member with a new constituency, I am often asked where Meon Valley is. My constituency sits in the southern part of Hampshire, to the south and east of Winchester, and to the north and west of Portsmouth. It was made up of the bottom half of Michael Mates's seat and the bottom half of Mark Oaten's seat—that description has raised the odd eyebrow.

We take in the beautiful green lush Meon valley itself, with life revolving around small market towns, but the bulk of the population live in the south-east corner of the constituency, in Waterlooville, Cowplain, Hart Plain and Horndean. Living there are people I describe as bedrock Britain—many of them ex-services—the very engine of our country. Many of them are finding life increasingly difficult, a subject to which I shall return before I conclude.

The constituency contains many highlights, and given his well known evocation of the English countryside, the right hon. Sir John Major would be comfortable visiting us. In Hambledon, we have a village that can boast the first record of its cricket club in 1756. The club can claim to have given us much of what we recognise in the modern game, and was the focal point for the sport until the MCC took over in 1787.

As for beer, it is to be regretted that our major brewery, Gales in Horndean, closed after a recent merger with Fuller's, which is based in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mary Macleod), who spoke earlier. However, in Gladys avenue, Cowplain the fight-back has begun. We have many excellent ales, but I single out Michael Charlton, backyard brewer extraordinaire, who won last year's Hampshire beer of the year with his majestic Havant Finished, produced in his garage. I look forward to launching Havant Forgotten with him in November, in aid of the Royal British Legion. As a Conservative Member with an active and dedicated association, I think it wise that the subject of old maids is probably best avoided.

Both my predecessors are hard acts to follow. Michael Mates enjoyed a highly distinguished career in the Army and for 36 years from 1974 sat on the Conservative Benches, serving with great distinction in many senior roles. Michael is an expert in diverse fields, but it is for his record in the House on defence matters and on Northern Ireland that colleagues will know him best—oh, and the Flanders and Swann.

As a constituency MP, Michael was no less well regarded. I have met countless people across the constituency whom he has helped. Aided by his long service and consequent connections, he unlocked bureaucratic logjams for many of his constituents.

Mark Oaten from the Winchester constituency is someone I am pleased to call a friend. Starting with a controversial two-vote majority at the general election in 1997—

Claire Perry: Gosh.

George Hollingbery: Two votes it was. In a November rerun—the first election I participated in—Mark converted those two votes to 21,500, which was not the most auspicious start for my political career. That figure

stood Mark in great stead in following elections, not least against me. He held various prestigious positions in the Liberal Democrat party and made a contribution to the orange book—a tome whose pages are now more important than ever before.

More than anything else, Mark taught his constituents what to expect from an MP. Nothing was too much trouble for him. He accumulated a reputation as the acme of a local champion. If I can ever establish a reputation in Meon Valley as widely and deeply felt as Mark's in Winchester I will truly have achieved something extraordinary.

I am delighted that the coalition has made clear its plans to return control of housing targets to local people, and has acted to restrict back garden development and to remove density requirements. It is incredibly important that all of us work to ensure that those changes are seen as an opportunity. We have been given the freedom to shape better communities that work for all our citizens, and to do it to our own design. But there is an obligation on us, too.

In a country as wealthy as ours, it is uncivilised that so many people are on housing waiting lists—some 3,500 in the Winchester district alone and another 3,000 in Havant borough. Those numbers are unsustainable. Most people in Meon Valley understand that and recognise that new housing is needed. Without the skirts of Government-imposed housing targets to hide behind, none of us should shirk the task of making that case to our communities. My experience, in Meon Valley at least, is that most people agree if the proper facts are laid before them.

Furthermore, under the auspices of the dreadful planning policy statement 3, far too many developments crammed affordable housing into flats and small dwellings so that central targets on density could be met—the perverse effect of central Government targets at work. In my view, communities with vision will now use the removal of those targets to build larger dwellings for those who cannot otherwise house themselves. A proper family home, with adequate living space and some privacy both indoors and outdoors, must be a fundamental ingredient of happier lives and less troubled, more contented communities. It is down to us and all our councillors to go out and make that argument. We can and should seek to persuade our constituents that it is in all our interests to do so.

Finally, let me say a brief word on a threat that we must all recognise. Among my constituents there are a great many people who, to their enormous surprise, find themselves in challenging economic circumstances. Most of them are in their 70s. They often own an asset, in their own homes. They have saved and accumulated pensions, but rarely are any of them more than modest in scope. Over the past several years, through a combination of low returns on savings, the lack of eligibility for state help, rising energy bills and, particularly, the cost of ever-increasing council tax, many of them are finding it very difficult to get by. Yes, they could sell their homes, but most of them already live in small dwellings and cannot practically downsize without moving away from their friends and family. Yes, they could use equity release schemes and enjoy a modestly increased income from capital, but many of them now struggle to find such products or, in fact, are scared of using them.

These people may seem asset-rich, but they are certainly income-poor. The asset that they strived so long and hard to obtain is now an impediment to getting any kind of help. We now face a future where many of those whom we would all regard as model citizens and who have paid much of the tax that allows the Government to function regard doing the right thing as a poor piece of advice to give to their children and wider families. That, surely, is something that we should be very concerned about.

5.21 pm

Jessica Lee (Erewash) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for inviting me to give my maiden speech this afternoon. It is perhaps an afternoon of debuts, and I, too, wish to congratulate you on your appointment to the Chair, as well as welcoming and thanking all the other hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches this afternoon. The bar has, yet again, been set very high for those of us who follow. In particular, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Meon Valley (George Hollingbery) for his fine speech.

In time-honoured tradition, I should like to begin by paying tribute to my predecessor, the retiring MP, Liz Blackman. Ms Blackman represented Erewash with compassion and commitment and is remembered in particular for her contribution on issues to do with education and children with autism. I note from Ms Blackman's maiden speech that she commented that she was the first Labour MP for Erewash and that she hoped that Erewash would continue to return Labour MPs for many years to come. I hope that she will forgive the electorate of Erewash who have perhaps taken a different view from hers on this occasion. I do, of course, wish her well for the future.

I wish to mention two earlier predecessors as Member of Parliament for Erewash: first, Peter Rost, and secondly, Angela Knight, both of whom will be remembered fondly by the House. Angela Knight has been very supportive to me and continues to contribute extremely well to public life.

Now, for the benefit of the uninitiated or perhaps the unfamiliar, I wish to explain that the constituency of Erewash is, in fact, in south-east Derbyshire, in the heart of the east midlands, between the cities of Nottingham and Derby. The constituency derives its name from the River Erewash, which meanders through the constituency. It is right to say that the river is not without its literary references. Indeed, the author D. H. Lawrence makes reference to the River Erewash in some of his novels.

The geography of Erewash consists principally of two towns—Ilkeston and Long Eaton—as well as a number of pretty villages and a stretch of beautiful countryside. Indeed, the stretch of countryside that I refer to is under possible threat from developers through the access routes on the old Stanton ironworks, and I assure the House that I will do all that I can to preserve our green belt and valuable open space in Erewash.

The ironworks was once at the centre of employment opportunities in my constituency. Erewash has been blessed with a fine history of lace making, manufacturing and engineering. Indeed, the last, sole remaining traditional lace factory in the country still operates in Ilkeston. It is called Cluny Lace, and it has a dedicated work force and an impressive family history of work in the industry. Other industries, such as high-tech engineering, the service industry and information technology, still service

[Jessica Lee]

the Erewash economy, but it is right to say that the traditional industries have suffered enormously in recent years. There has been a steep decline in manufacturing over the past 10 years and the effects on the economy are still felt most keenly. It is to the credit of my constituents' ingenuity and entrepreneurship that a number of small and medium-sized businesses have started, with niche markets being reached and new technology helped. However, Erewash itself was not assisted by the policies of the previous Labour Government, who used their best efforts to stifle entrepreneurship and made small businesses suffer.

Erewash has much to offer any business investor: a willing work force; excellent transport links, with the M1 running through the constituency; and well-located business premises. I will do all that I can to bring investment and much-needed jobs to the families of Erewash.

We are lucky to have a well-respected and flourishing organisation called the Erewash Partnership in my constituency. It acts as an effective umbrella organisation for the local authority, all local small businesses and the voluntary sector. I shall do all that I can to support the partnership's vital work.

One route back into employment can be through volunteering; indeed, national volunteers week has just drawn to a close. My strong commitment to supporting volunteers is a principle that was impressed on me from my school days. We are lucky to have a strong army of volunteers in Erewash who help the vulnerable, the elderly and families in many different ways, and long may that continue.

There is a campaign in Erewash for the reopening of the train station, which I hope can be achieved because it would assist businesses and residents in Ilkeston. Erewash has a proud history of service on the train network. Indeed, my dear, late grandfather worked for many years as fitter on the steam trains across the east midlands. I know that he will be cheering me on from above on that particular campaign.

I am grateful to be able to contribute to this extremely important debate about poverty. As we heard earlier, more than 3 million children in the UK are living in poverty. There is a pressing need to tackle the problem, so I applaud my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's recent announcement that there will be a review on poverty in the UK and how the state can assist the least advantaged. The whole House benefited from the contribution to the debate made by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field), who will lead the review, and I look forward to assisting in any way that I can.

Agencies working together locally to assist families is the key to fighting poverty. The reality is that the state cannot and should not seek to provide all the answers to this complex problem by itself. We have a dedicated voluntary sector with many large and small charities that help disadvantaged families in the UK. Further steps to enable the third sector to work hand in hand with social services and adult services are to be encouraged.

Before I was elected to the House, it was my privilege to work as a lawyer specialising in cases concerning children and their welfare. The consequences for children of a life in poverty were all too clear in my daily work. Family breakdown, substance misuse, personal debt and educational failure can all too easily follow, and the consequences for children can be far-reaching and devastating. I will contribute in any way that I can to the ongoing debate on protecting children and ending the cycle of poverty that can perpetuate.

I am extremely grateful to the voters of Erewash for putting their trust in me to represent them here. Like many of my new hon. Friends, I am already enjoying attending events, dealing with constituency case work and tackling problems. I particularly enjoyed opening the local Riverside football festival recently. I made it quite clear to the organisers that although I would do anything that I could to help their club and the festival, I would perhaps draw the line at wearing a small pair of football shorts.

On arriving in Westminster and this magnificent building, the responsibility of one's duty to serve becomes more acute. I am sure that many of my new hon. Friends feel the same way. It is a privilege and a duty to be here. My family and schooling have taught me the value of service and helping others. Now, I continue with those principles as I commence my journey of serving the constituents of Erewash and speaking for them in this House.

5.30 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): This is my first outing at the Dispatch Box. I know it is customary for Front Benchers to start by saying what an excellent debate it has been, regardless of whether that is true, but I can in all sincerity say that today's has been an excellent debate and I have been pleased to be able to sit here listening. Members on both sides of the House have spoken with conviction and passion about the fight against poverty, which blights so many lives and communities. Of course, we have also heard many excellent maiden speeches, in which new MPs have demonstrated their determination to do their utmost for the people they represent and the constituencies they serve.

The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) disappointed the House by telling us that he had turned down an invitation to join MP4, but given that the current membership consists of one Tory, one Scottish nationalist and one Labour Member, perhaps in the new politics we should be looking for a Lib Dem to join them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) made an excellent speech praising the diversity in her constituency and her predecessor for introducing the ban on smoking in public places.

The hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) confirmed that she is not related to Stanley Baldwin and dwelt in some detail on the wonderful food produced in her constituency, which I think was rather unfair to those of us who were trapped in the Chamber all afternoon and not able to get out to have some lunch.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cumberland, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East—how did I do with that?

Gregg McClymont: Cumbernauld.

Kerry McCarthy: Oh, I wrote it down wrong. It is not my pronunciation that is wrong but my literacy. My hon. Friend told us that he was better looking than his

photo in the parliamentary guide— I shall have to check that out—and spoke eloquently about the poverty in his constituency and the previous Government's progress in tackling it.

The hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) told us that he is not better looking than his election photo, much to the disappointment of his constituents who met him on the election trail. He also told us that one of his predecessors had, as a lawyer, defended the Kray twins and then, on being elected to Parliament, defended the Governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major. I am not sure which was the most difficult task.

The hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) talked about her great love of football, of which I am already very much aware, having attended a Chelsea-Arsenal game with her. Perhaps she could have done a little more to endear herself to the Press Gallery: pointing out that one member of it, Nigel Nelson, was writing articles before she was born might not be the best way to get into their good books.

I missed the speech of the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat)—I popped out to take a phone call—but I am told that he spoke without notes and with great eloquence about issues such as social mobility and worklessness.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer), making his second maiden speech after returning to Parliament, delivered a passionate speech about the need to protect Sure Start and child trust funds, and about his support as a committed trade unionist for the agency workers directive.

The hon. Member for Corby (Ms Bagshawe) did not quite live up to the romance of her previously published works—novels such as "Passion" and "Sparkle". I am the proud owner of an autographed copy of "Passion", which she sent to me—we have never met, only communicated through Twitter. Perhaps an autographed copy of her maiden speech should follow.

My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) confirmed that she is taller than her predecessor, Ian McCartney. I want to place on the official record the fact that I too am taller than Ian McCartney, although it is perhaps a slightly closer match. She spoke with great passion about her interest in financial capability and the need to promote it, as well as her work with credit unions. I look forward very much to seeing her promote those agendas in the House.

The hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), who is my neighbour, although we have yet to meet—he should get on Twitter; that is how I make all my friends—praised the work of his predecessor. I have to say that, in Roger Berry, he has a very hard act to follow, but I wish him well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) will not, I suspect, be glued to the television watching the new series of "Big Brother", but she raised an important issue. Tackling poverty is not just about putting money in people's pockets and a household's immediate resources, but about things such as transport. The poor transport links in her constituency make it difficult for people to gain access to jobs.

The hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Dan Byles) praised his constituency, and discussed the need to promote more green jobs there. I was pleased that the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) discussed her support for international development, and I hope that she puts pressure on her colleagues in the Department for International Development to carry on its good work linking international development with work in schools. The hon. Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), as is almost customary for Members making maiden speeches about Swindon, mentioned the magic roundabout, and perhaps persuaded me that I ought to get off the train more often when I pass through Swindon on the way to London.

The hon. Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker) discussed his experience as the lead member for children's services when he was a councillor. I was pleased that he expressed support for his local Sure Start scheme. The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mary Macleod) said that she was pleased to see more women in politics—I am too, and I am glad that we are no longer looking at a row of men in suits on the Government Benches. Perhaps the Front Bench has a little more work to do, although I am glad to welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Maria Miller), to her ministerial position.

The hon. Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) tried to tempt us with the delights of Bury black pudding, which I shall pass on. The hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) gave us a cultural tour that ranged from George Eliot to Larry Grayson—quite a wide span. The hon. Member for Devizes (Claire Perry) discussed how she wished to support members of the armed forces in her constituency and their families, and I wish her all the best with that. The hon. Member for Meon Valley (George Hollingbery) explained to a bemused House exactly where his constituency is. We are all very much in the picture now—somewhere around the Winchester area, I think. The hon. Member for Erewash (Jessica Lee) discussed the importance of volunteering and the experience that she will bring to the House as a lawyer who has worked on child protection issues. I am glad that she will pursue those interests in Parliament.

We also heard speeches that were not maiden speeches, including from my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field). I was pleased that he described Labour's job guarantee as precious, and I hope that in his new role he can do something to protect our future jobs fund. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Miss Begg) on her election to Chair of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions. I am sure that she will do an excellent job.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Chris Williamson) made an excellent speech in which he rightly highlighted the progress made by the Labour Government in tackling pensioner poverty, for which we did not get enough credit. We heard two speeches from people whom I had the pleasure of working with on child poverty issues in the last Parliament: my hon. Friends the Members for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) and for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green). My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan spoke from her experience at the Children's Society and discussed the legacy of communities that have been ignored and suffered from a lack of investment going back to the 1980s. Once that intergenerational cycle of poverty and worklessness is created, the issue cannot be solved overnight; it is a difficult problem to crack. I thought that she spoke incredibly eloquently

[Kerry McCarthy]

about that. My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston, who was chief executive of the Child Poverty Action Group, impressed us all with the experience and knowledge of the issue that she brings to the House. I hope that Ministers listen closely to what she has to say.

In the short time remaining—I appreciate that we do not have long, given that many Members wish to speak—I should like to ask the Under-Secretary a few questions. I am pleased that Ministers managed to secure a debate on poverty, as it at least suggests that it is an important issue for the new Government. However, I have heard very little to convince me that the reality will match the rhetoric, and that their professed desire to tackle poverty will triumph over their desire to implement savage cuts. It was notable that when the Secretary of State replied to the Queen's Speech debate on Tuesday there was barely a mention of any policy at all. I hope that we can hear a little bit more from the Under-Secretary today.

The Labour Government did not just talk about poverty but acted to tackle poverty. We acted to lift 1 million pensioners out of poverty with our pensions guarantee, the pensions credit, the winter fuel allowance, free bus travel and eye tests, and by cutting fuel poverty by insulating pensioners' homes. We lifted half a million children out of poverty, not just by putting more money into their families' pockets, but by helping their families move from welfare into work. It is a complete fallacy to suggest that the Labour Government did not try to move people from welfare into work. The suggestion is that we were quite happy to leave people languishing on benefits and that we did not address that. That is exactly what we were trying to do with nursery places, tax credits, and making work pay to ensure that people were better off in work. I could list a range of other policies that were all intended to address that issue.

When the Minister replies, will she say how, in terms of looking at the bigger picture, the Government can claim to be serious about tackling poverty, when, through their planned programme of cuts, they will undermine the package that the Labour Government tried to put together in the last 13 years to support people on their route out of poverty? How can they claim to be serious about tackling poverty and yet axe the future jobs fund, which aims to break the intergenerational cycle of unemployment that the Government claim to deplore? How can they say that they want to enhance the life chances of children growing up in poverty when they are scrapping child trust funds, and cutting tax credits, and when they will not confirm what is meant by their proposal to streamline benefits? Does that mean cuts in benefits for people or not?

How can the Government claim to care about so-called broken Britain—a phrase that I reject—when they fail to support Sure Start and family intervention projects, which work with families with the most difficult problems, when they oppose things like compulsory sex education in schools, which would have helped to address the issue of teenage pregnancy and lone parenthood, and when they are slashing public sector jobs and public services without a thought for the consequences?

The Government say that they want people to stand on their own two feet, but how can they do that if the Government pull the rug from under them? I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

5.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Miller): I warmly welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was a firm supporter of yours in the recent elections. I also warmly welcome the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) to her position. She has been sitting in the Whips Office for a number of years now, and I am sure that standing at the Dispatch Box beats that any day of the week. I congratulate those hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today, which I will come to in a bit more detail later.

First, I want to pick up on some of the points made by the hon. Lady in her closing comments. The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), began the debate with the bleak picture of poverty that the country faces. Despite record levels of spending on benefits in the last 13 years, we have more working-age adults living in relative poverty than ever before. The hon. Lady said that the Labour Government acted to tackle poverty, but I am afraid that her rhetoric does not match the facts. Income inequality is at its highest since records began, and a higher proportion of children grow up in workless households in the UK than in any other EU country. That is a damning indictment of the previous Government's legacy, a legacy that I am afraid was absent from the opening comments of the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman). The facts could not be clearer. The tired old ways of continually throwing money at the problem, no matter how deeply entrenched or seemingly intractable, lie discredited.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome the hon. Lady to her position. I am sure that she will do some very important work in the Department. Will she confirm that the number of children living in workless households has fallen significantly since 1997, having previously risen substantially?

Maria Miller: The shadow Secretary of State fails to point out that the previous Government completely failed to tackle the level of poverty in this country in the way that they set out that they would, and they did not hit their child poverty targets. They have left us to put in place a firm strategy to address that issue. The right hon. Lady should not be too selective with her facts.

It could not be clearer that we need fresh ideas if we are to reverse the dreadful situation that we face; and it could not be clearer that, if new approaches to tackling poverty are to have any effect, they require new, clear thinking. That is exactly what our coalition Government are able to offer: a new vision and a new strategy to tackle the root causes of poverty. Family breakdown, educational failure, addiction, debt, worklessness and economic dependency are the pathways to poverty and the underlying problems that can lead to a lifetime—even generations—of worklessness and welfare dependency.

Kate Green: Will the Minister give way?

Maria Miller: I am sorry, but I cannot. I hope that the hon. Lady will forgive me, but I need to comment on a number of maiden speeches.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister said, such a multi-faceted problem demands an holistic solution, and many contributors echoed that point. The problem requires supporting families in order to give children the right start at home and in education; it requires the reform of our welfare system, by simplifying it and removing disincentives to work; it requires supporting disabled people effectively to give those who need it the specialist support that will help to prepare them for work; it requires supporting a savings culture, helping those who try to get back on their feet and encouraging families to take responsibility for their debt; and it requires all of us throughout all Departments, the Government and the House to work together.

Before I pick up on today's maiden speeches, I shall draw the House's attention to a couple of other contributions. I am sure that the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland did not mean to sound complacent about Labour's record on poverty, but she did, and she needs to think about that if she is to rebuild Labour's credibility in the eyes of the country. She picked up on several issues, including the future jobs fund and free school meals, on which I should like to give her some clarity.

All pupils who currently qualify for free school meals will continue to be eligible, and we will continue with pilots in Newham, Durham and Wolverhampton to see whether there is a robust case for extending free school meals. Taxpayers would expect us to do that. On the future jobs fund, recent statistics show that only 9,000 out of the 25,000 jobs that were promised are being delivered. The Government want long-term job opportunities and sustained employment, and that is why we are putting our faith in 50,000 new apprenticeships and the Work programme that will help to fill that gap.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Miss Begg) made an important contribution to the debate, and I congratulate her on her new role as Chairman of the Work and Pensions Committee. I look forward—at least I think I do—to having detailed conversations with her, including in the Committee's sittings, I am sure. I would have liked to pick up on some of the issues that she raised, and particularly on Sure Start and its effectiveness, but I fear that time does not allow me. Suffice to say, I hope that she will look at the Office for National Statistics data on Sure Start and, in particular, at how we can make that programme much more effective at tackling poverty.

The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field), who is not in his place because of a prior engagement, spoke with great authority about the importance of the non-financial support that we give children and families who live in the most difficult circumstances, and I look forward to his independent report and the contribution that he will undoubtedly make to this debate in the coming months.

The maiden speeches were, in the great tradition of this House, independent and spirited. My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) spoke powerfully about the importance of supporting excluded children. He also stressed the fact that he will be an independent-minded Member, and I am sure that the Whips will have taken special note of that.

The hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) spoke about her co-operative roots and the pride that she has in her community and, particularly, its multicultural heritage. My hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) paid tribute to Sir Michael Spicer, and I echo the tribute that she paid to a man who made a great contribution to the House. She also noted the damage that has been done to the pensions industry over the past decade, and I am sure that, with her considerable financial expertise, she will contribute to the coalition Government's work on that.

The hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Gregg McClymont) has the prize for the constituency name that is most likely to stump Ministers, and he will forgive me if I did not pronounce it very well. My hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) made a very humorous contribution to the debate and drew on the colourful characters who have previously represented his part of the country, as well as discussing its brewing heritage; I think that perhaps the two things are not unconnected.

I know how highly regarded my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) already is in her constituency, because I have been there and visited her local Sure Start centres. Its residents have a great Member of Parliament in her. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) spoke of famous past residents, including Lewis Carroll. He referred to Alice in his quote from Lewis Carroll's work. I would perhaps have referred to the Mad Hatter's tea party, because it can often feel like that in this place; he will know what I mean shortly, I am sure.

The contribution by the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) challenged the House's tradition of listening in silence to maiden speeches. I apologise if I joined some other Members in exclaiming at some of the things that he said. I will not pick up on those points in detail now, but perhaps we can talk in the Tea Room.

My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Ms Bagshawe) made a fluid and assured speech in which she drew the House's attention to the excellent support that forces families receive in the United States through the Veterans Administration. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends who deal with defence issues will study her comments closely. The hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) spoke of the grit and determination of her constituents. I am sure that the House will benefit from her 23 years' experience of working in a citizens advice bureau.

Turning to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), I clearly remember his moment of victory on general election night—it was something that stood out. In his maiden speech, the House caught a glimpse of the intellectual, analytical and, above all, compassionate approach that he will have to his job. The hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) reminded us that her constituency is the birthplace of the Arsenal football team. I will remind my sons of that, as they are great fans.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) gave us a thoughtful account of his feelings about poverty and the fact that it affects all parts of the country in many different ways. The hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) spoke movingly about the working poor and the role of Sure Start. She also mentioned the future jobs fund. I would merely say to her that under that programme 100,000 jobs have been granted to the successful bidders.

[Maria Miller]

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) drew our attention to the fact that hers is a new constituency, and I know that it will benefit from her extensive experience. She spoke movingly about opening the eyes of the next generation in her constituency to poverty in Africa; that is something that will have helped them.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) talked about his bit of Swindon being the new Disneyland. He also said that Swindon is famous for roundabouts. Speaking as the Member of Parliament for Basingstoke, I think that we are more famous for roundabouts—I will challenge him on that one.

My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker) spoke with pride and passion about the part of the country that he represents, and reminded the House that we all have to improve the life chances of looked-after children. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mary Macleod) reminded us that her part of the world is the new silicon valley of west London. Importantly, she pointed out that she will put country before party, in the best spirit of this coalition Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) was getting us all booking our holidays to Bury this summer when he talked about the wonderful part of the country that he represents. My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) reminded us that he represents the home town of the late Larry Grayson. He also spoke movingly about the role that inter-generational poverty can have in the context of this debate.

I very much welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry) to the House. I know that she will contribute greatly to the work of this place. She will be a dedicated and effective voice for us, drawing on her extensive experience before coming here.

My neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Meon Valley (George Hollingbery), reminded us where his constituency is and also of the importance of the entrepreneurial spirit in Hampshire, which is alive and well among the backyard brewers of his constituency. We were all pleased to hear that.

Last but absolutely by no means least, I think the House will agree that my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Jessica Lee) spoke eloquently about the history and heritage of her constituency. I reassure her that football shorts would not really be in the dress code of this place—well, not at the moment. Maybe we are far too conservative in such things and should change that.

This has been an important debate. It was important that we put the issue of poverty before the House early on in this Parliament to explain how we as a Government will tackle it. Members have heard in the comments of the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell, and myself about this Government's commitment to tackling poverty throughout the country. Poverty comes with a host of other problems that have a visible and measurable effect on families across the country. If we fail to address those challenges, we will fail many of those families and their children.

Opposition Members who contributed to the debate of course tried to explain what they feel the previous Government achieved, but they also have to listen carefully to what is said about the areas in which they did not make progress. If we are trying to draw together a more consensual Government who build together for a future of success, we need to ensure that we work together on matters such as this. Through the newly established Cabinet Committee that will consider these issues, we will draw up a child poverty strategy in line with the Child Poverty Act 2010. I hope that Opposition Members will be able to contribute to that strategy so that it enjoys the support of all Members.

We must take steps to deal with the underlying problems that have made poverty such a corrosive issue in this country for too many years. Through radical welfare reform, we will reinforce fairness and encourage responsibility, and I believe that we will start to build a stronger community for a better Britain. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House can come together to deliver that.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the matter of tackling poverty in the UK.

New Roads (Adoption)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Bill Wiggin.)*

5.57 pm

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me this evening. May I congratulate you on your elevation to your rightful place in the Chair? I am pleased to say that I voted for you, but it actually made no difference because your victory was overwhelming.

I thank Mr Speaker for giving me permission to hold this debate on a topic of extreme importance to my constituency. In conducting research on the issue, I have found that it is a growing problem across the country and will affect the constituencies of many hon. Members up and down the land. If there are Members present who wish to give local examples of how it affects their constituencies, I will be very happy to take interventions at any point.

The issue that I wish to raise is the adoption of local residential roads. In most of our constituencies, most residential roads are adopted by the local highways authority. In counties such as Northamptonshire, that is the local county council. However, when roads are built on new housing estates, they are in the ownership of the developers until they are handed over to the county council at some point. An adopted road is maintainable at public expense, but if a road has not been handed over to the local highways authority, it is the responsibility of the developer or, more worryingly, of the owners of properties with frontages in that road. Indeed, the Transport Minister in the previous Government wrote to me on this issue and confirmed that the local authority, as the highway authority, is responsible for maintaining those streets that have been adopted by it or its predecessor authorities—

6 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Stephen Crabb.)*

Mr Hollobone: If the street has not been adopted, the responsibility for maintenance rests with the owner or, more usually, the frontages—the owners of the properties that front on to or abut the streets concerned. Those purchasing a property in an unadopted street should be advised of its status and the implications by their solicitor. I fear that in all too many cases people who purchase properties in unadopted streets are not being advised of the potential liability that they face. My first request tonight to those on the Treasury Bench would be to look at ways in which the estate agents code or the solicitors code could be revised so that purchasers of property in such roads are advised of their potential liabilities. I know that that is not the direct responsibility of the Minister who is being kind enough to reply to the debate, but I would be grateful if he passed it on to the relevant Minister or Ministers with responsibility.

This issue is important for places such as Kettering, because we are experiencing rapid housing growth. Under the present housing targets—they could be revised, and I hope that they are—the number of houses in my constituency is set to increase from 36,000 at present to 49,000 by 2021. That is an increase of one third. Potentially, in the next 11 years, one third of the residential roads in my constituency could be unadopted.

If a road is not adopted, there are lots of potential problems. For a start, almost by definition, the standard of the road surface and the pavement treatment are not up to the requisite Highways Authority standard. In the sort of estates concerned, the size of the kerb between the pavement and the road surface is often far bigger than normal, and represents a major trip hazard, especially for elderly residents, and many difficulties for young mums with pushchairs. I have had representations from local residents of Mawsley, a village in my constituency, on that very issue.

Developers are also responsible for the street lighting in those roads until they are handed over, and it is often substandard. Other issues include local authority access. There are places where local authorities will not send in rubbish carts to collect rubbish because of the lack of suitable access. Furthermore, speeding and parking enforcement cannot take place because the roads are not adopted. The Poppy Fields development in Kettering, close to Kettering general hospital, frequently experiences nuisance parking, but the county and borough councils can do nothing to address it. They cannot put in yellow lines or residents' parking, because the highway is not adopted and is therefore not the responsibility of either local authority.

When I looked into this issue, I was staggered to learn that the Government have no idea how many unadopted roads there are in this country. I pointed this out to the Minister's predecessor and he did not seem very concerned. However, I am hugely concerned, because the available figures suggest that there are some 40,000 unadopted roads with a total length of 4,000 miles. However, those statistics come from 1972, and no attempt has since been made to revise them. One of my requests to a previous Transport Minister was that the Government try to collect more up-to-date data on the extent of the problem, and I pass that request on to the new Transport Minister. I would think that a basic requirement to establish the full extent of the problem.

The difficulty is that there is in law no effective mechanism for the local highways authorities to force developers to get the roads up to the requisite standard so that they can be handed over to public authorities for adoption. Various mechanisms are in place, but when it comes to the crunch, they are effectively toothless. The main problem is section 38 of the Highways Act 1980. Following the debate I secured on this subject, with the permission of the Speaker, on 11 November last year, a previous Transport Minister made one concession: I could meet his officials to talk about the matter. I am pleased to say that, after much effort on my part to hold him to that kind offer, a meeting took place in March this year.

I and senior representatives from Kettering borough council and Northamptonshire county council met in the Department for Transport with some extremely helpful officials, and we made quite a lot of progress. A number of suggestions were made, not least that we find out the extent of the problem around the country. I am pleased to say that Northamptonshire county council contacted its colleagues around the country and was overwhelmed by the response. I shall read out some of those responses. Hampshire country council said:

[Mr Hollobone]

"We have had our fair share too".

Staffordshire county council said:

"We certainly had issues with developments where progress has been slow and sewers hadn't been adopted."

Worcestershire county council said:

"This as you would expect is also a fairly major irritation in Worcestershire."

Devonshire county council said:

"I can confirm that we certainly have such problems in Devon, most notably relating to delayed adoption of sewers".

Hertfordshire country council said:

"Very much an issue here in Herts."

Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) is very concerned about this issue, and is also seeking to get involved with it.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): My hon. Friend is listing the areas of the country where this is a concern, but he has not mentioned—he might not know about it, of course—the situation in the East Riding of Yorkshire, in my constituency, particularly in Hook and the small town of Snaith, where there are several examples of developments where this has happened. This is, indeed, a national problem. As he has intimated, people look to their local authorities for support on this matter, and they ask, "Why are we continuing to pay council tax when we are not getting the same access to services as other council tax payers?" The local authorities are in a difficult position, and this is a big issue in the East Riding of Yorkshire and throughout my constituency. As he said, we need national and Government leadership, because it is not acceptable for his and my constituents to be left in limbo as they are now.

Mr Hollobone: My hon. Friend is spot on. He is absolutely right, and I am grateful to him for adding the East Riding of Yorkshire to my list. If he will encourage his colleagues there to reply to Tony Ciaburro at Northamptonshire county council, we can complete this list and send it to the Government. That was a most helpful intervention.

I shall continue with the list. Lincolnshire county council said:

"We have had some problems over the years."

Dorset county council said:

"Confirm this is an issue in Dorset".

Northumberland county council said:

"NCC and most other Highway Authorities experience exactly the same difficulties."

Essex county council said that

"we certainly have our fair share of these in Essex."

Cambridgeshire county council said:

"It is certainly a problem in Cambridgeshire."

Derbyshire county council said:

"The Highways Act is out of date."

Staffordshire county council said:

"Similar problems in Staffs together with another issue related to roads constructed by developers that are not intended for adoption."

Wiltshire county council said:

"Wiltshire certainly has its share of problems."

Oxfordshire county council said:

"I agree that the legislation as currently set out is well out of date and needs to be re-written".

Flintshire county council said:

"The problem with unadopted roads that you have highlighted are being experienced throughout Wales...Winter maintenance was a major issue on these roads this last winter, particularly on parts of housing estates which appear to be completed but weren't obviously adopted."

That last point is very helpful.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): As my hon. Friend has provided a detailed list, perhaps I could add my local authority of Swindon. Earlier today I delivered my maiden speech, which touched on road adoption, which was nicely timed for this Adjournment debate. I want to echo 100% the sentiments he has expressed so far, and to add some comments about my experience of the issue. In particular, he has highlighted the problems with the lack of maintenance, and with street lighting and parking, which we cannot administer owing to the lack of double yellow lines, which causes problems of access for accident and emergency vehicles. The only practical way to solve the problem is to introduce a bond scheme for developers, whereby money is put into a pot on the commencement of building. I would therefore support the Government in introducing such a scheme. I also agree that residents are frustrated about council tax.

Mr Hollobone: I congratulate my hon. Friend not only on delivering an excellent maiden speech, but on making a most helpful intervention. If Swindon council would like to get in touch with Northamptonshire county council, that would help to complete the national picture.

My hon. Friend mentioned a bond scheme, which is one of the ways in which the Government think the problem can be addressed, but actually does not work. That is because local authorities cannot access the funds held in any bond made by the developer unless the developer agrees. The developer therefore has to go bust before the local authorities can use that money. The idea is one of those things that sounds good in principle, but which, in effect, is toothless.

After our helpful meeting at the Department for Transport, we basically came to the following conclusions. There should be revisions to the Department for Communities and Local Government's circular 11/95 to include model planning conditions focusing on road standards, with a view to giving a clearer basis for planning conditions to be used in this area. It was noted at the meeting that there would need to be discussions with the Department, and that transport considerations would need to be balanced against wider objectives for the planning system. We also concluded that there would need to be refinements to the section 38 arrangements. Perhaps there could be a timing mechanism, so that, for instance, we would not have to wait for an estate to be completed before the roads were adopted. Perhaps there could be a phased introduction of adopted roads.

There would also need to be changes to the building commencement notification requirements, which is an issue that touches on the advanced payment code mechanism, whereby payments could be advanced by

developers once building regulation permission was granted. However, all too often local authorities are not advised when building regulations are commenced. It was also suggested that there could be some innovative funding mechanisms aimed at providing a stronger financial incentive for developers to make roads up to an adoptable standard.

What I want to do in this debate, at the start of the new Parliament, with a new Government and a new Transport Minister, is to say, first: this is a big problem, and it is not going to go away. Unless the Government do something about it, millions of our citizens will be living on new housing estates on substandard roads, with substandard pavements and so on. Secondly, we are talking about an issue that can be tackled effectively through relatively simple Government involvement. Thirdly, on behalf of Kettering borough council, Northamptonshire county council and myself, let me say that we are willing to do anything at any time, and to speak to anyone in the Government to try to make progress on the issue. As the MP for Kettering, I certainly do not want a third of my residents living on unadopted roads in 10 or 15 years.

Fourthly, I invite the Minister to visit Mawsley in Kettering, which is a good example of where, despite the best efforts of everyone involved, the roads remain unadopted. Mawsley is a village—a model village in many senses—that is now 10 years old in parts, but where the roads have still not been brought up to standard.

I welcome the Minister to his post. He has a formidable reputation and knowledge of transport and local government issues. We very much look to him to take up this baton and change lives for the better for thousands of residents in my constituency and millions of our citizens across the country.

6.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Norman Baker): I begin by congratulating my coalition colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone), on securing his second Adjournment debate on this issue and on providing the House with a further opportunity for debate. I also thank him for the very positive way in which he has progressed this matter. I know that he raised it with my predecessors, as he mentioned, and that he has had the opportunity, along with representatives of the local district and county councils, to discuss his concerns in more depth with Department for Transport officials, to which he also referred in his contribution. I think he is right to pursue this matter, as are the other Members who intervened on him. Indeed, I might add, from a local perspective, that I am aware of a similar issue in my constituency at a street called August Fields in Newhaven. I thus have some sympathy with the points that my hon. Friend raises. We at the Department for Transport expect all property developers to build roads to a high standard, so that they are ready for adoption by the local highways authorities as a matter of normal practice. However, I recognise that that is not always the case, as my hon. Friend highlighted.

It may help if I begin by outlining the powers that are currently available to local councils to ensure that new streets are built to a decent standard, and the two mechanisms by which those streets, once finished, can be adopted by the highways authority. I will then go on to discuss the concerns raised about the effectiveness or otherwise of these mechanisms.

The uses of planning conditions are set out in planning circular 11/95, to which my hon. Friend also referred. It states that the local planning authorities may impose conditions regulating the development or use of land under the control of the applicant, even if it is outside the site that is the subject of the application. Conditions should normally be consistent with national planning policies as expressed in Government circulars and planning framework documents. They should also normally accord with the provisions of development plans and other policies of local planning authorities. However, it is still necessary to consider whether a condition is justified in the particular circumstances of the proposed development.

In general, conditions that duplicate the effect of other legislation should not be imposed. It is for the local planning authority in the first instance to judge, on the facts of the case, whether a particular development proposal should be approved, subject to planning conditions. Reasons must be given for the imposition of every condition. Reasons such as "to comply with the policies of the council", "to secure the proper planning of the area" or "to maintain control over the development" are vague, and can suggest that the condition in question has no proper justification. Successful challenges in the past might have been due in part to lax phrasing of conditions.

On a number of occasions, the courts have laid down the general criteria for the validity of planning conditions. In brief, these explain that conditions should be necessary; relevant to planning; relevant to the development to be permitted; enforceable; precise; and reasonable in all other respects. Of those six, I feel that my hon. Friend will be most interested in the fourth—enforcement. A condition should not be imposed if it cannot be enforced. There are two provisions that authorities may use to enforce conditions: an enforcement notice under section 172 of the Act, or a breach of condition notice under section 187A.

Given the above, it would be possible for local planning authorities to devise and agree with the developer through the pre-application negotiations, a suitable condition to ensure that those roads that will service the new development are brought up to the adoptable standard. I understand that, in some cases, this period of time may stretch over a number of years, especially in phased developments. People have, of course, moved into their houses in the meantime, and we may find occurring some of the problems to which my hon. Friend referred—lighting not working at that point, rubbish not being collected, and so on.

Andrew Percy: All that is fine and good, but part of the problem is that when some of these developments are constructed, the builder can go bankrupt or disappear, leading to an utter lack of understanding of who is then responsible—and local authorities find themselves constantly in the middle. As I say, it is when builders go bust that the real problems develop.

Norman Baker: I entirely understand that point and the frustration felt by some Members, but I urge my hon. Friend to be patient: there may be some better news in a few moments.

[Norman Baker]

I understand that in some cases the period involved may stretch over a number of years, but circular 11/95 states that conditions may be imposed to ensure that development proceeds in a certain sequence when some circumstance of the case—for example, the manner of provision of infrastructure—makes that necessary.

The authority can require a developer who is building a new property on a private street to enter into the advance payment code agreement mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering. That means that the developer must deposit the money required to make up the street to the required standard. The amount is paid by the developer and put into a segregated account. After the building has been completed, the money, including any interest, is used to make up the street, any difference being the responsibility of the frontagers. I accept that that is not a perfect solution.

Alternatively, the developer can enter into a legally binding agreement with the authority to build the street to the required standard. In return, the authority will agree to adopt the road once it is finished. That is known as a section 38 agreement under the Highways Act 1980. Once the street has been finished, the authority will inspect it to ensure that it has been built to the standard that has been agreed to. If that is the case—or when the developer has made good any deficiencies—the authority will adopt the road. That guarantees to anyone who purchases property on a development that the road will be finished to an acceptable standard, and that they will not be liable for any future charges.

Those mechanisms give highways authorities the necessary tools both to manage the development and adoption of new roads and to reassure property owners that the road in question will be maintained by the highways authority. They also protect council tax payers. Authorities have no liability to pay for the uplift of poorly built roads from the public purse, as it would not be fair for council tax payers to subsidise new developments in that way. Highways authorities are among the statutory bodies that should be consulted about planning applications by the planning authority; in areas where there are two tiers of local government, the same council is obviously not involved. That provides an opportunity to ask for planning conditions to be made, or to allow the highways authority itself to enter into an agreement with the developer under section 38 of the Highways Act for the adoption of the highway at a future date.

It is currently for highways authorities to decide how to use those powers, as they are best able to judge local needs. Not every street will need to be adopted, as some property owners will want to reside in a private street. The highways authority should consider both their needs and any issues created by the type of development on a case-by-case basis.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kettering referred to the number of unadopted roads. Of course it is important for the Government to be aware of the scale and nature of public policy questions in this area. I, for one, accept that the views that have been expressed by Members this evening could be expressed by other Members, because the problems affect constituencies throughout the country. As my hon. Friend suggested, there are about 40,000 unadopted roads in the UK, according to a 1972 survey. I am afraid that there are no more up-to-date figures. However, knowing the number of unadopted roads would not really provide the context, because the vast majority—farm tracks, private estates, service roads and so on—are not really relevant to the issues in question, and it is not necessarily sensible to spend scarce public money on gathering information unnecessarily.

The people who know their areas best are members of local authorities and, of course, Members of Parliament. We greatly appreciate the work that local authorities and Members have done to bring particular problems to our attention and to gather other views and suggestions from around the country, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering has done so ably. The Department has acted on that information. Since the last debate, my officials have met representatives of Northamptonshire and Kettering local authorities to discuss further the points raised today, as such fast-growing areas are the most likely to have to manage issues of this kind.

The Planning Inspectorate provides model conditions to support local authorities in relation to issues that have been identified as problematic. It is in the process of developing a model condition—this was one of the requests made by my hon. Friend—to assist with the problems raised by Kettering. Local authorities will, of course, need to consider carefully the wording of any such condition to ensure that it suits the particular case, and to provide a clear and robust reason for its use in that instance. However, I hope that my hon. Friend considers that to be a move in the right direction.

We are working closely with colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government in considering ways of helping local authorities who are struggling with this problem, and both Departments are in correspondence with Kettering. We are open to practical proposals from authorities such as Northamptonshire and Kettering on how the existing mechanisms can be made to work better. I would welcome any comments from any other Members, or from any other authorities anywhere in the country that wish to contribute to the process.

In exploring solutions to this issue, I am happy to say that I have today asked my officials to consider, with their Department for Communities and Local Government colleagues, options for legislation, including empowering local authorities to require developers to enter into section 38 agreements. In the meantime, we will continue to engage with local authorities and to support them in developing solutions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kettering talked about the fact that some people who purchase properties are unaware of the status of the road. I am advised that householders have some redress against solicitors who have not undertaken full and proper searches. Such action can be enforced through the Law Society. I am also advised that the estate agents' code of practice, although voluntary, is usually followed and that they should be expected to provide information to property purchasers in that situation.

I recognise that this is an important issue. I want streets, when they are developed, to be adopted by the relevant highways authority if that is what is right for the street in question, as it usually will be. Good developers will build streets to a standard that authorities can adopt, thereby transferring the responsibility for maintenance away from property owners. I would like

that practice to become commonplace, but I also understand that a small number of developers will not build to that standard without local authority intervention. I am, therefore, as I have said, open to practical suggestions as long as they would place the cost on the appropriate people and could be implemented quickly so that authorities can better manage the situation.

I congratulate my hon. Friend again on raising this relevant issue. There is considerable force behind his arguments and I hope that the steps I have taken in the short time I have been in office will help to bring about a solution that will render some of these problems redundant.

Question put and agreed to.

6.26 pm

House adjourned.

House of Commons

Monday 14 June 2010

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

QUEEN'S SPEECH (ANSWER TO ADDRESS)

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported to the House, That Her Majesty, having been attended with its Address of 25th May, was pleased to receive the same very graciously and give the following answer:

I have received with great satisfaction the dutiful and loyal expression of your thanks for the speech with which I opened the present Session of Parliament.

SESSIONAL RETURNS

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House Returns for Session 2009-10 of information and statistics relating to:

(1) Business of the House;

(2) Closure of Debate, Proposal of Question and Allocation of Time (including Programme Motions);

(3) Sittings of the House;

(4) Private Bills and Private Business;

(5) Public Bills;

(6) Delegated Legislation and Legislative Reform Orders;

(7) European Legislation, etc;

(8) Grand Committees;

(9) Panel of Chairs; and

(10) Select Committees.—(*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Jobcentre Plus Advisers

1. **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Whether he plans to increase the amount of information Jobcentre Plus advisers may share with local health practitioners and Sure Start children's centres. [1850]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Miller): I have no current plans to increase the amount of information that Jobcentre Plus advisers can provide to local health practitioners and Sure Start children's centres. Social security information can be shared with those parties with the consent of its customers.

Mr Sheerman: One hopes that the new Government will still support Sure Start children's centres. Certainly, an inquiry of the former Children, Schools and Families Committee showed that the sharing of information was absolutely crucial. Does the hon. Lady agree that the sharing of information, knowing how our children are surviving and thriving and when they are in trouble, is vital to children's future health and welfare?

Maria Miller: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. As he will be aware, the coalition Government have protected Sure Start from in-year cuts, and I am sure that he and the whole House will welcome that announcement. He has looked at this issue in detail, and in the most recent report of the CSF Committee, of which he was the Chairman, there was no clear evidence that data sharing between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres was a problem. However, there can be such a problem between children's centres and health professionals. The Government believe that early intervention is absolutely vital in the work that we are doing to alleviate poverty and that co-ordination and signposting between those organisations are important. That is one of the reasons why we have put Sure Start health visitors in Sure State children's centres.

Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): In agreeing with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of co-ordination, may I ask whether my hon. Friend agrees that most of the worst disasters that affect children that have become public are concerned with a lack of information shared between the authorities? Does she agree that it is extremely important that all those who are involved in these matters truly understand what each hand is doing?

Maria Miller: My hon. Friend is obviously talking about a great many different data sources. As I said, information-sharing difficulties between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres is not a particular issue of concern, but I take his point and I am sure that our new Cabinet Committee on social justice may want to consider it to ensure that nothing is being missed.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister explain how sharing and co-ordinating between those agencies will be helped by the reduction in the working neighbourhoods fund, which joins lots of different Departments and local agencies? As a result of the Government's recent announcement, £1.2 million has been taken away from that fund in Nottingham. That money pays for apprenticeships, welfare rights advice and helping to reduce teenage pregnancies. How will that reduction help such work?

Maria Miller: Undoubtedly, the hon. Gentleman will be very pleased about the coalition Government's announcement of 50,000 additional apprenticeships, which will provide the sort of long-lasting job opportunities that his constituents want. Obviously, other decisions on budget taking are made locally, and it is for local authorities to make important decisions on how best to use their local resources.

Out-of-Work Benefits

2. **Mr David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What plans he has to reduce the number of people claiming out-of-work benefits. [1851]

5. **Mr Rob Wilson** (Reading East) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on reducing levels of unemployment. [1855]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): One of our top priorities is to reduce the number of people—nearly 5 million—on incapacity, lone parent or jobseeker's benefits. We will reform the benefits system to make work pay and reassess the position of people on incapacity benefit, through a single, integrated package of support, to give people the personalised support that they need to find work.

Mr Amess: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment. He might be aware that this subject was raised regularly on the doorstep in Southend West, since when I have found out from the Department that 1.4 million people have been on out-of-work benefits for nine or more of the past 10 years. How does he intend to deal with that situation fairly but firmly?

Mr Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The figures are somewhat worse than that—the UK has a higher proportion of children growing up in workless households than almost any other EU country. We have had a very high level of residual unemployment for far too long. The key to dealing with that is the integrated Work programme, which will look at ways of trying to get back into work some of those long-term unemployed—many of whom have been parked on incapacity benefit and forgotten about—and support those who have not been contacted. Something like 40% of unemployed people had not been contacted for over six years; no one had bothered even to speak to them. We will also try to reform the benefits system so that when someone can go to work they will straight away see that it is worth their while to do so, whereas at the moment work simply does not pay, or appears not to.

Mr Wilson: Unemployment has continued to rise in my constituency, and the impact is particularly being felt by young people. What further action will the Secretary of State take to help them after the failure of 13 years of Labour?

Mr Duncan Smith: The first thing I can say to my hon. Friend is that one of the key coalition drives is to stop the would-be jobs tax, the national insurance charge, that was to be imposed by the last Government when they were in power because that would have taken away a great many opportunities for young people. The other thing is to make sure that the targeted Work programme, which the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), will be speaking about in more detail later, helps the youth unemployed get back to work. We must remember that after all the money that was spent by the other Government, youth unemployment is now higher than it was when they came into office in 1997.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Last week, the new Government announced that the jobcentre in Deptford, serving 2,500 of my constituents, is to be closed. Will the right hon. Gentleman meet me urgently to discuss how he plans to help the unemployed in my area, or is this to be the first example of how the coalition seeks to protect the poorest and most vulnerable from its savage cuts?

Mr Duncan Smith: I am very happy to meet the right hon. Lady at a moment of her convenience. I understand that the centre had reached the end of its lease, and we are trying to find a way of ensuring that there is support in the area. I am happy to meet her and deal with those specifics.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Secretary of State says that he wants more people off benefits and in work. He will know that that depends on their having jobs to go to. Can he tell the House exactly how many of the 205,000 jobs planned under the future jobs fund he is cutting as a result of his plans?

Mr Duncan Smith: The right hon. Lady will know that we are not cutting any jobs at all. We are saying that we will stop the part of the programme relating to jobs that were not contracted for. All the other jobs that are contracted for will go ahead. Originally it was estimated that that meant that 140,000 jobs would be found. In fact, we understand the number to be about a third fewer than that—about 100,000—although we will know when we get closer to the time.

I say to the right hon. Lady that the money that we save will go towards preventing the jobs tax—the national insurance tax—that her party was going to impose on those people when they took work, which would have meant fewer people being in work. We will also have the money to make sure that 50,000 new apprenticeships, which are sustainable jobs, come into existence under this Government.

Yvette Cooper: Can the Secretary of State confirm that the Office for Budget Responsibility, which today issued its forecasts based on the previous Labour Government's tax and spending plans, in fact confirmed that unemployment would continue to fall in future years, including the plans for national insurance contributions? Can he also confirm that the Labour Government's plans set out at the Budget were for 205,000 jobs under the future jobs fund this year and next, and his Department's website says that only 111,000 jobs will be funded? Can he confirm that 205,000 take away 111,000 is 94,000, and that he will therefore be cutting nearly 100,000 job opportunities for young people and the long-term unemployed—cutting support for the jobless when they need it most?

Mr Duncan Smith: I know that the right hon. Lady feels personally wedded to this programme, but those figures are quite ludicrous. She poses notional figures of jobs that she might have created had the scheme worked against jobs that we believe are likely to be there, so a silly game is being played out.

Whether the right hon. Lady likes it or not, had she got into government—heaven help us—she would have had to cut back on various budgets, as her own Government at the time said they would. Where would she have made those savings? She cannot, now that she is in opposition, simply say no to everything. Her Government went on a spending spree like drunks on a Friday night, and we have all got the hangover now.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): Would my right hon. Friend agree that the right way to get people back into work is to support our thriving small business and entrepreneurial sector? One of the key measures is to see that the small business sector has access to finance—something that, under the last Government, Labour Members failed to achieve.

Mr Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. What is so often forgotten by Labour Members is the need to make sure that jobs are created by a vibrant small business sector. Of course, the first thing that would have damaged that sector would have been the rise in national insurance, which we have managed to stop as a result of our changes.

Employment (Wales)

3. **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What steps he is taking to promote employment opportunities in Wales. [1853]

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Chris Grayling): Business and the economy are, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, devolved matters. However, Jobcentre Plus in Wales is notified of thousands of vacancies each month. Jobcentre Plus advisers ensure that jobseekers know of all sources of vacancies, and that is included in the review of jobseekers' job search activity every two weeks. That focus on jobs will also be a key part of the support offered to people who are migrating from incapacity benefit to the employment and support allowance. Jobcentres in Wales also regularly hold jobs fairs to highlight employment and training opportunities.

Mr Hanson: Could the right hon. Gentleman tell the House how he thinks cutting £320 million from the future jobs fund will assist job creation in Wales, and will he give me a guarantee today that the almost 10,000 jobs that have been agreed under the future jobs fund, from Rhyl to Rhondda, will not be cut by his Government?

Chris Grayling: What the right hon. Gentleman needs to understand is that Wales and every other part of the United Kingdom need sustainable employment, and that is why we needed to stop the jobs tax that the last Government were planning to introduce. That is also why we need to provide incentives for small employers—those employing fewer than 10 people—to take on people by giving them a discount on their national insurance contributions. Those are measures that can and will make a difference.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Many of my constituents have Welsh connections—*[Interruption.]* It is true. What would the Minister say to a constituent of mine who is physically very fit, but who has mental illness? How will we help people with mental illness back into work?

Chris Grayling: That is particularly relevant to the situation in Wales, where there are substantial numbers of people claiming incapacity benefit or employment and support allowance, as there are in other parts of the country, such as in my hon. Friend's constituency. We need to ensure that we provide the best possible support, so that we give those people an opportunity to move into work. That is what we will do from later this year, when we begin work on migrating people from incapacity benefit to the employment and support allowance. I am confident that we can give many of those people an opportunity to get back into the workplace and make more of their lives.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I congratulate the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) on her ingenuity? I mean that genuinely. However, we will now focus specifically on people who are not associated with or linked to, but resident in, Wales.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Can the Minister assure me that the Government are doing their utmost to protect existing jobs in small companies, for example by encouraging Departments not to take peremptory action on, say, unpaid tax or regulation matters?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: it is necessary for us to support employment in the private sector, particularly among small employers; that is why I made particular reference to our plans regarding national insurance contributions for small employers. I know, because we in the Department for Work and Pensions have already looked, that we have a good record on paying small employers, and I hope that my colleagues across Government will do everything that they can to support those small businesses, as they will provide the jobs of the future. It is not Government schemes that will create wealth and employment in future, but real business people, building real businesses.

Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission

4. **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): What plans he has for the future of the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission. [1854]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): The whole issue of tackling child poverty and supporting families is the key objective of this Government. A significant component of that is that parents should take responsibility for their families, even if both parents do not live together. However, the Government have inherited a significant debt package of £3.8 billion, and some of that debt dates back to before the Child Support Agency was amalgamated into the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission. Furthermore, I understand that CMEC has not set a target for the recovery of the debt. I am meeting the chief executive of CMEC this week, and I intend to ask him to do a review on how arrears are collected, and I will insist that he sets a target for the collection of such arrears as soon as possible.

Philip Davies: I am concerned that the Child Support Agency and its successor body often do not pursue absent fathers who are paying nothing and file those under "Too difficult," and instead target people who are already paying to try and screw more out of them. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission goes back to what it was set up to do—to target absent parents who pay nothing, rather than trying to get more and more money out of the many people who are doing their best?

Mr Duncan Smith: I can guarantee to my hon. Friend that that is exactly what we will try to do. It is not the easiest set-up. There will be changes later in the year to the CSA, but I can promise him that we want it to make sure that those who owe that money pay it. The previous Government let them off the hook.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): It is the Government's stated intention to cut all quangos and non-departmental bodies by 20 per cent. How will the right hon. Gentleman better enforce the payments by absent parents when the budget for the commission is being cut?

Mr Duncan Smith: There are already plans for the organisation to make sure that it improves the quality of its work. It was set up to make sure that absent parents, for whom we all have to pay because they are not paying their way, ante up to their responsibilities, which is good both for their children and for the whole of society.

Departmental Pay Rates

6. **Lisa Nandy** (Wigan) (Lab): If he will bring forward proposals to ensure that all staff of his Department are paid at a rate of at least £7.60 per hour. [1856]

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Steve Webb): The figure of £7.60 per hour to which the hon. Lady refers was the London living wage until last week, and I can confirm that all directly employed DWP staff in London are paid £7.60 or above and, indeed, are paid more than the new London living wage of £7.85 announced by the Mayor of London on 9 June.

Lisa Nandy: I am sure the Minister is aware of the economic as well as the moral case for the living wage that was most recently advanced by the Mayor of London. In the light of that, will the hon. Gentleman confirm that as well as the directly employed staff, contracted-out staff in his Department, such as cleaners, will also be employed on the living wage because they do such important work for the people of this country?

Steve Webb: The hon. Lady is right to point to the position of contracted staff. She will be aware that long-term private finance initiative contracts were entered into by the Labour Government which involve paying people less than the living wage. We have inherited that practice. However, I understand that Telereal Trillium, with which we have our principal contract, including for cleaners, has an agreement with the relevant trade unions to pay higher rates on new tenders.

Child Poverty

7. **Stephen Mosley** (City of Chester) (Con): What steps he plans to take to reduce child poverty. [1857]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Miller): Section 14 of the coalition document confirms the Government's commitment to ending child poverty in the UK. We believe that the best way to tackle this issue is to address the root causes of poverty, because it is only by doing this that we can improve outcomes for children in the most effective way. Over the next 12 months we will put in place a robust, sustainable strategy to end child poverty.

Stephen Mosley: It is impossible to look at the situation of a child without looking at their family situation. To that end may I highlight the pioneering work that is being done by Save the Family in Chester and north Wales under the leadership of Edna Speed MBE? Has the Minister any plans to encourage the expansion of such pioneering family-based schemes across the country?

Maria Miller: I thank my hon. Friend for bringing the important work of Save the Family to the attention of the House. I am familiar with the project in north Wales, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has visited it. Keeping families together is important, and I will do all I can to encourage colleagues who are considering child poverty across Government to consider the work being carried out by Save the Family. Family stability is vital and I am sure it will form part of the strategy that we work on to end child poverty.

Malcolm Wicks (Croydon North) (Lab): One of the root causes of child poverty is teenage pregnancy. Before he assumed office, the Secretary of State—I congratulate the team on their new positions—did important work on the links between poverty and teenage pregnancy. What talks were held last week with the Secretary of State for Education before he announced cuts to local authority education and children's budgets, which will, among other things, undermine the future of teenage pregnancy projects?

Maria Miller: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. Teenage pregnancy is a critical part of the poverty strategy and one of the issues that will be considered in the cross-departmental Cabinet Committee on social justice which we will establish. It is important for the House to remember that, under the previous Government, not enough progress was made on that matter, but we will put that record right.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Can the Minister confirm that the decision taken in recent days not to extend entitlement to free school meals to primary school children whose parents are on working tax credit will mean 50,000 more children living in poverty than otherwise would have been? Yes or no?

Maria Miller: We should be absolutely clear that the rules for determining eligibility for free school meals have not changed, and all pupils who currently qualify for free school meals will continue to be eligible. The issue was dear to the hon. Lady's heart and something that she pushed forward when she was in government, and I should like to reassure her that there are pilots in place in Newham, Durham and Wolverhampton to see whether there is a robust case for extending free school meals. We feel that the extension was prematurely announced, without evidence from the pilots, so I ask her why, if she felt so strongly about the issue, she did not push it forward earlier in the 13 years of a Labour Government.

Unemployed Disabled People (Welfare Support)

8. **Tracey Crouch** (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): What his policy is on the provision of support for people who are unable to work as a result of a disability. [1858]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Miller): The Government recognise that some people will not be able to work, or prepare for work, because of a disability. Those people will receive unconditional support and be able to have help to find employment on a voluntary basis. Financial support for those who are unable to work will be through cash benefits, such as the disability living allowance and the employment and support allowance, replacing incapacity benefits.

Tracey Crouch: I thank the Minister for her reply. Royal British Legion Industries, based in my constituency, provides an important service to people with disabilities. Will the Minister assure the House that the Government will use the expertise of such organisations to help people with disabilities get back to work?

Maria Miller: I thank my hon. Friend for her question and also pay tribute to the Royal British Legion and its work, because it plays a vital role in supporting disabled people into work and helping those who are furthest from the workplace to acquire the skills that they need. The specialist knowledge of such organisations is absolutely vital and will be an important part of the Work programme that the employment Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) has already announced, because those organisations have the on-the-ground knowledge of how best to support disabled people.

Mrs Anne McGuire (Stirling) (Lab): As a former Minister for disabled people, I wish the Minister well in standing up for the rights of disabled people throughout government. Will she therefore tell me what plans there are for the access to work programme? Will the Government honour the previous Government's commitment, or will access to work disappear amid the one, single Work programme?

Maria Miller: I thank the right hon. Lady for her kind comments and congratulate her on the work that she has done to support disabled people. It is absolutely vital that we recognise that a reform of work programmes in this country is long overdue. The Work programme will meet a great many people's needs, but not absolutely everybody's, so specialist programmes such as residential training colleges, Remploy's work and others will continue in order to meet the needs of particular disabled people.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): In looking at the support for those with disability, will the Minister ensure that the work capability test is reviewed in order to see how it applies to cancer patients facing chemotherapy? At the moment, they seem to be assessed as fit for work when they are quite clearly going to be unfit and unable to work.

Maria Miller: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. That group will be exempt under the scheme, and it is important to note that the work capability assessment will be reviewed annually for the first five years of its operation.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I should like to welcome all Ministers to their positions on the Government Front Bench. Does the Minister agree with me and her colleague the pensions Minister that it is important to ensure that those who cannot work for reasons of disability or age receive all the benefits to which they are entitled, and that the 13,000 home visits a week that the DWP local service currently makes to vulnerable households play a vital role in ensuring that that is the case? Does she agree also that, if the local service is cut in the spending review, the most vulnerable households will be the hardest hit?

Maria Miller: Looking after the most vulnerable groups in society is absolutely at the heart of the work that we do in the Department. I reassure the hon. Lady that when we are reviewing services, whether at a local or national level, we keep that very much in mind.

Long-term Deprivation

10. **Simon Kirby** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Con): What his policy is on measures to encourage people into work in areas of long-term deprivation. [1860]

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Steve Webb): Many people in areas of long-term deprivation are also long-term benefit recipients. We will introduce the Work programme to give those benefit recipients access to tailored back-to-work support through an integrated system. Within that, we are actively considering how best to support those with complex barriers to work.

Simon Kirby: I thank the Minister for that answer. Does he agree that many of Labour's top-down schemes, such as the new deal for communities in the areas of Moulsecoomb and Whitehawk in my constituency, have failed to deliver any real difference to people's lives, despite having cost tens of millions of pounds? Does he also agree that this new Government's empowerment of individuals and communities is a much more sensible way forward?

Steve Webb: Yes, the hon. Gentleman is right. We want to see an end to top-down, "Whitehall knows best" government. We want to see local communities and voluntary groups empowered and enabled to provide tailored solutions for individuals and local communities.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Labour in government had planned and funded 50,000 jobs for older people in areas of high unemployment and high deprivation under the future jobs fund. Will the Minister confirm how many of those jobs will be scrapped and what, if anything, will be put in their place?

Steve Webb: As the hon. Lady knows, jobs that are already contractually bound will go ahead. However, she falls foul of the old new Labour fallacy—that just because the Government temporarily fund a job, that makes it into a real, lasting job. I am afraid that life is not like that; the Government's payment of a temporary subsidy does not make a permanent job. We will be investing in long-term, sustainable employment, which will benefit older people far more.

Gordon Birtwistle (Burnley) (LD): My constituents in Burnley suffer more deprivation than most, with areas of high unemployment left to rot by the previous Government. Will the Minister ensure that the Department managing the apprenticeships scheme looks into areas such as Burnley to ensure that they are given a fair chance of providing apprentices for the future?

Steve Webb: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. Part of the reason why he is here in this House, apart from his highly effective campaigning, is the record left by the Labour Government in Burnley and similar constituencies. The new apprenticeships will indeed go to areas such as my hon. Friend's constituency, where they will provide training that leads to lasting jobs, which are what we want to be provided.

Youth Unemployment

11. **Jon Trickett** (Hemsworth) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to reduce levels of youth unemployment. [1861]

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Chris Grayling): Youth unemployment is unacceptably high. We will introduce the new single Work programme in the first half of 2011, which will offer young people targeted, personalised help. That will be delivered through the best of private and voluntary sector providers. We will ensure that young people continue to have access to employment support prior to the implementation of the Work programme.

Jon Trickett: I thank the Minister for that reply. The Tories are the party of mass unemployment; they had left thousands of young people in long-term unemployment in the mining areas and elsewhere in this country when they were turfed out of office in '97. Will the Minister confirm last week's authoritative report that said that the fiscal strategy that the coalition is adopting will lead to there being another half a million people—many of them young people—in the dole queues for at least the rest of this Parliament?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman ought to remember that the level of youth unemployment today is higher than it was in 1997, when the Labour party took office. He should also remember that year after year, despite all the last Government's promises about apprenticeships, which could have provided long-term, sustainable opportunities for young people, the Labour Government consistently missed their targets and promises for apprenticeships. We will take no lessons from Labour about youth unemployment.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): When the Minister is looking at the issues involved in providing more jobs for the young unemployed, will he consider the impact of the Pension Protection Fund, particularly on long-standing manufacturing companies, which may be inhibited from providing new apprenticeships by their future commitments to the PPF?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Steve Webb), will be considering that. It is important to provide the right balance between protecting the pensions of those whose pension provision for old age may be at risk and ensuring that we do not drive businesses out of business as a result. We will be looking at this carefully and attempting to find the right balance.

Mr Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): Does the Minister accept that the future jobs fund offered real opportunities for the young people who were drowning in the prospects of employers' refusal to give them work while at the same time it provided the Government with their only genuine test of whether somebody really wanted to work? Why, therefore, is it being cut when no other Government programme will achieve both those objectives?

Chris Grayling: The right hon. Gentleman knows that what his constituents and other people on Merseyside really need is sustainable, long-term opportunities. The future jobs fund will continue to offer tens of thousands of opportunities over the next few months, but what the young people of Merseyside really need is apprenticeships that can take them into proper long-term opportunities. That is what this Government will provide.

Youth Unemployment

12. **Jim Sheridan** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): How much funding he expects to allocate to programmes for the young unemployed in 2010-11. [1862]

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Chris Grayling): We have allocated more than £600 million for programmes to support unemployed young people back to work. That includes the cost of specific employment support programmes targeted at young people and the support provided through the flexible new deal.

Jim Sheridan: I thank the Minister for that response. According to a recent survey by the Federation of Small Businesses, 95% of businesses are unaware of the wage contributions that are on offer to train apprentices. Indeed, 69% of apprentices work in workplaces where there are 30 or fewer employees. The same research has revealed that even more apprenticeships could be created if the system were simplified or modified.

Chris Grayling: I am all in favour of systems being as simple as possible. One of the things that I aim to ensure will happen when we introduce the single Work programme is that providers build links with local employers and explain to employers the support and opportunities that exist. We need to ensure that we maximise the employment opportunities that are out there for people without work, whether young or older.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen South) (Lab): The Secretary of State made great play of the idea that the best way to get people into work and off benefits is to make work pay. What will the coalition Government do to achieve that—cut benefits or increase in-work support?

Chris Grayling: First, I congratulate the hon. Lady on her election to the position of Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee. My colleagues and I look forward to meeting her and her Committee in the weeks ahead.

The most important thing that we can do is to deliver first-class back-to-work support to help some of the people who have been stranded on benefits for long periods and often do not have a clear sense of what they need to do to get back into the workplace. That will be a key focus for us in trying to ensure that those people get back into work. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is examining the benefits system and how we remove some of the disincentives within it that sometimes make it financially disadvantageous for people to get back into work, which cannot be right.

Future Jobs Fund

13. **Tom Blenkinsop** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): What representations he has received on his plans for the future jobs fund; and if he will make a statement. [1863]

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Chris Grayling): I have so far received virtually no direct representations on our plans for the future jobs fund.

Tom Blenkinsop: I thank the Minister for his response. The future jobs fund affirms the right to work, and it has done that for young people in Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland. Does he share the view of previous Tory Governments that there is a natural level of unemployment?

Chris Grayling: Our job is to get as many young people, indeed people of all ages, as possible back into government—*[Interruption.]* I mean back into employment. Well, our manifesto did say that we wanted everyone to be part of the task of trying to make things work. We need to get every young person we possibly can back into the workplace, and we need to get as many people as possible off benefits and into the workplace. That will be the purpose of the single Work programme, our apprenticeships plans and of the reductions that we are going to make in taxation on small business employers; and it is the reason we are not going ahead with the Labour party's job tax, which would have damaged employment in the hon. Gentleman's area and other parts of the country. Those differences of approach are what the country really needs.

Duncan Hames (Chippenham) (LD): Is the Minister aware that many employees in future jobs fund placements, especially part-time workers on the minimum wage, took home less each month than their placement cost the fund? In future, will he ask for fairer partnerships with employers that provide better value for money for the taxpayer?

Chris Grayling: I can confirm that we will look for better value for money for the taxpayer and the maximum possible effectiveness in getting people into work; not work that lasts just six months, but work that gets them into sustainable, long-term careers that can make a difference to them—not the sort of short-term scheme that characterised the previous Government's last few months.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Office for Budget Responsibility has found that unemployment would have fallen under Labour's plans. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development survey in April also said that unemployment was close to its peak. However, the Minister will know that it has recently revised its forecast and, as a result of the change in policies by the new Conservative-Liberal Government, it predicts that public sector jobs will be cut by 750,000 and unemployment will increase to nearly 3 million. Does the Minister think that it is talking nonsense or does he agree that his proposals for cuts will hit jobs hard?

Chris Grayling: I am afraid that Labour Front Benchers remain in fantasy land about the current financial position. They left a huge debt overhang for the country that will do long-term, lasting damage to every single person in the country if it is not addressed. They themselves had prepared plans for big public spending cuts, but they are now pretending that they never planned those cuts. They should look at the books and in the mirror and ask themselves why the country is in the current financial mess. It is their fault.

Unemployed Disabled People (Welfare Support)

14. **Chris Skidmore** (Kingswood) (Con): What his policy is on the provision of support for people who are unable to work as a result of disability. [1864]

15. **Nicola Blackwood** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): What his policy is on the provision of support for people who are unable to work as a result of disability. [1865]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Miller): I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) earlier.

Chris Skidmore: Many charities and voluntary organisations act as a mainstay for many people with long-term disabilities who are unable to work. Near my constituency, the superb Vassall centre and the excellent disability action group come to mind. What measures will my hon. Friend take to empower those organisations to have a greater say and play a greater role in supporting those with disabilities?

Maria Miller: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He is right that the Vassall centre plays a pivotal role in Gloucestershire in bringing together many different organisations, which provide support for some of the disabled people most in need of it. As I said previously, the Work programme will offer such organisations the opportunity to bring local expertise and knowledge to supporting disabled people into employment or in other ways. I also hope that, through other specialist programmes, we can continue to harness that expertise.

Nicola Blackwood: As the Under-Secretary knows, many people with disabilities depend heavily on carers. During a visit in carers week to the Oxfordshire carers forum, it became abundantly obvious that, despite the drunken spending spree to which the Secretary of State referred, carers remain chronically under-supported. Will the Under-Secretary please comment on the Government's plans to improve support for carers and to reduce the bureaucracy, which too often prevents them from accessing the help that is available?

Maria Miller: I am also delighted to support in carers week the work that carers do. I am particularly looking forward to visiting Barnet carers centre on Thursday as part of that. Obviously, carers receive benefits through carer's allowance, and important support through Jobcentre Plus in partnership management. However, I reassure my hon. Friend that the Government are committed to widening the support available to family carers, and will establish an independent commission on funding long-term care this year.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Conservative Members are right to highlight the work of voluntary groups in supporting disabled people. Is the Under-Secretary also aware of organisations such as Pedal Power in my constituency, a voluntary group that works with disabled people, which recently relied heavily on the future jobs fund for support for its work? What estimate has she made of the impact of the decision to cut the future jobs fund on the very organisations that she thinks can help build a big society?

Maria Miller: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to some of the earlier exchanges, he would have known that we feel strongly that we need to have proper, long-term jobs in place. We will achieve that better through our apprenticeship announcements than through the future jobs fund. However, it is important that organisations such as Pedal Power—which, I am sure, supports disabled people in the hon. Gentleman's constituency—get the support that they need. I am happy to talk to him about that if he has concerns.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): On the subject of carers week, will the Under-Secretary assure us that carer's premium will be protected for those who are unable to find work or need support to stay in work as a result of looking after severely disabled relatives?

Maria Miller: Carers have a critical role to play in keeping people out of the formal state-run care system, and we will ensure that they get the support that they need in our coming reviews.

Pensioner Poverty

16. **Annette Brooke** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): What steps he plans to take to reduce the level of pensioner poverty. [1866]

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Steve Webb): The Government want to see all pensioners have a decent and secure income in retirement. We will restore the earnings link for the basic state pension from April 2011, with a triple guarantee that pensions are raised by the highest of earnings, prices or 2.5%. We will also protect key benefits for older people.

Annette Brooke: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. What action, if any, is he able to take on a problem he himself identified, namely, the cliff-edge situation of women who have completed 30 years employment and who have made the necessary national insurance contributions, but who were born one or two days too early to get the pension that they deserve?

Steve Webb: My hon. Friend raises an important point—in fact, it sounds vaguely familiar—and she is quite right that introducing changes in a cliff-edge manner, as the previous Government did, creates unfairnesses of the sort that she identifies. As she will know, when women are short of the necessary number of years, they can buy voluntary contributions, under a fairly restricted set of circumstances. That will allow some women to get closer to the full pension than they would otherwise have been able to get. However, she is absolutely right that the way in which the scheme was implemented by the previous Government creates an unfair cliff edge.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Many elderly people rely on services from local councils. Can the hon. Gentleman tell the House how the cuts imposed on Durham county council last week will affect, and reduce poverty for, pensioners in the county of Durham?

Steve Webb: The hon. Gentleman is quite right to point out that when public finances are tight, all sectors of society risk having services threatened in the way that he describes. One of the incoming Government's concerns was the huge hole in the public finances, which a Labour Government would also have had to fill. It would be interesting to know which cuts he thinks should be made, because there has been a silence from the Labour party on that very subject.

Topical Questions

T1. [1875] **Mr Edward Timpson** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): Today in Britain, nearly one in five pensioners is living in poverty, and as I said earlier, more than 5 million people are on working-age benefits, and the country has one of the highest proportions of workless households in the European Union. Therefore, the case for radical welfare reform is clear. That is why this Government will establish a new Work programme and simplify our complex benefits system to provide greater support for the poorest.

At the same time, we are rising to the challenge of long-term demographic change in how we support an ageing society. It is more important than ever that we build strong foundations for the future of the basic state pension, which is why, for the first time, as the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Steve Webb) just said, this Government will introduce the triple guarantee for the basic state pension with immediate effect. That guarantee will restore the earnings link and ensure that any future uprating is set at the highest of earnings, prices or 2.5%. I am enormously proud that this coalition Government are doing that. Those are important first steps towards the reform of the whole system.

Mr Timpson: Last week, one of my constituents in Crewe told me how exasperated she had become after wading through the application form for her pension credit, because of the complexities within it and the never-ending series of phone calls that seemed to follow. With one in three pensioners who are entitled to claim pension credit still not doing so, in part owing to the major administrative barriers in their way, what does the Secretary of State propose to do to simplify the system, and to make it fairer and more transparent?

Mr Duncan Smith: First, I say to my hon. Friend that one of the most important steps that we will be taking towards helping those pensioners is re-linking the basic state pension to earnings. That will hugely improve take-up, because that money will go to everybody and people will not be required to claim for it. The other thing that my hon. Friend the Minister will be doing is reviewing the complexity and looking for ways in which

we can simplify the process and make it easier, so that the take-up for those who need it—this point is critical—is better. I can assure my hon. Friend that we will do that.

T2. [1876] **John Robertson** (Glasgow North West) (Lab): Did the right hon. Gentleman have many constituents, including people from young families who do not have a lot of money and who need the extra money to get by, coming up to him during his general election campaign to tell him that they were worried about working tax credits? What will he do to ensure that the working tax credit is maintained and that the ravages of the cuts are taken care of for the people who need that cover more than anybody else.

Mr Duncan Smith: The purpose of this Administration is not to penalise those in most need. We will do our level best to ensure that during these changes—and given the necessity of reducing the budget—we try to protect as many of those people as possible. Ultimately the best thing that we can do for them across the board is to simplify the benefit system so that the take-up is greater and ensure that going to work pays, with people retaining more of what they earn when they go to work than they do at the moment.

T3. [1877] **Mr Rob Wilson** (Reading East) (Con): What action can the Government take to bring the ballooning public sector pension debt under control?

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Steve Webb): Our colleagues in the Treasury are establishing a commission to look at public sector pensions, and we have already had a meeting with our colleagues to try to ensure a fair deal both for the hard-working people who work in the public sector and for the taxpayers who are making a very large contribution to those pensions. It is important that the true cost is made transparent, which it clearly is not at present.

T5. [1879] **Mr Andrew Love** (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): At a time when unemployment is forecast to increase to 3 million, this so-called coalition Government have decided to cut 100,000 jobs from the future jobs fund, but will not replace them until next summer. Is that just another example of unemployment being a price worth paying for this Government?

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Chris Grayling): I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has not been listening. There will be tens of thousands of new jobs created under the future jobs fund in the months ahead. However, we have changed the priorities, because we believe that long-term, sustainable employment is better supported by a programme of extra apprenticeships than by a short-term job creation measure of the kind envisaged by the previous Government.

T4. [1878] **Richard Harrington** (Watford) (Con): Given the shocking number of young unemployed people in my constituency and in the country as a whole, I welcome the proposals for mentoring schemes, whereby young people spend time with the self-employed and other business people. Will those schemes be introduced quickly and efficiently, because they will be very important?

Chris Grayling: I agree with my hon. Friend. The use of mentoring, both to encourage young people into the workplace and to create a sense of belief in their ability to build their own businesses, will be central parts of the Work programme. We are working on the details as rapidly as we can, and I can give him an assurance that mentoring will be a central part of the way in which the Work programme works.

T9. [1883] **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The cuts to the future jobs fund are causing real concern in my constituency. From listening to Ministers this afternoon, I understand that the expectation is that these job losses will be replaced by a growing private sector. Can the Minister share with me the detailed analysis that the Government have undertaken that shows that these jobs will be created, when they will be created and that they will be created in the north-east?

Mr Duncan Smith: The cuts to the future jobs fund are not cuts. We have stuck to the contracted jobs already in existence, which will run until next year. We are talking about the notional jobs that might have been created but were not contracted for, so we are dealing with a game of vague figures. The best thing that we can do for the hon. Lady's constituents is to ensure that the cost of employing people does not rise, which was the plan of the previous Government in raising national insurance. Most of all, the 50,000 apprenticeships that we will create will provide long-term jobs for all her constituents.

T6. [1880] **David Tredinnick** (Bosworth) (Con): Will my hon. Friend be reviewing the rule on annuities? Many people with occupational pensions resent the fact that they have to invest 75% of their accumulated funds in that way and would prefer to put some in other places.

Steve Webb: The coalition Government are sympathetic to the idea of giving people greater choice over annuities. We already have a commitment to scrapping the rule that forces people to annuitise at 75. We also want to look at how people can achieve better value for money from the annuities that they buy, and possibly also have earlier access to accrued pension funds. We take the view that it is their money, not the Government's money.

T10. [1884] **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Has the Minister had any discussions with the Treasury regarding the pay-out for Equitable Life, bearing in mind that when they were in opposition, that crowd over there on the Government Benches hounded us week in and week out about a pay-out? Now can they deliver?

Steve Webb: The hon. Gentleman will know that Sir John Chadwick will produce his report in July. I understand from discussions with the Treasury that a compensation package will be produced on the basis of that, and legislation to bring that forward was included in the Queen's Speech.

T8. [1882] **Andrew George** (St Ives) (LD): As Ministers are no doubt aware, the withdrawal rate of housing benefit and council tax benefit combined can be up

to 85p in every pound earned, thereby contributing significantly to the poverty trap. Do the Government have any plans to review the withdrawal rate and the tapers?

Steve Webb: My hon. Friend puts his finger on a crucial point. We both believe that work needs to pay, but one of the crucial problems at the moment is that as people improve themselves, work harder, train and do overtime, too much of that money is clawed back through the benefit tapers and tax rates that he has described. My right hon. and hon. Friends will be bringing forward quite radical proposals for benefit reform that are designed to tackle precisely the point that he has raised.

Natascha Engel (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): I know that this will surprise everyone, but I want to return to the future jobs fund and the answer that the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) gave earlier about not having received any representations on it. Has he at least made the effort to consult, for example, some of the voluntary and charitable sector organisations that represent young people and support them into work on the effect that cutting the future jobs fund will have on their work? If so, what have they said to him?

Chris Grayling: Yes, we have indeed spoken to those organisations, which will continue to create thousands of new jobs under the future jobs fund during the remainder of this year. However, there is general agreement, particularly among those who have been working with us on the Work programme, that we need apprenticeships, lower employment costs and sustainable long-term jobs in the private sector, not in the public sector—too many of the future jobs fund jobs are in the public sector. We need to create sustainable, long-term employment opportunities for young people and older people on benefits in this country.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Is the Minister aware of early-day motion 159, which is about jobcentres and foodbanks? Is he also aware that charities in my constituency, such as the excellent Harlow foodbank, have been stopped by Jobcentre Plus from giving out food vouchers to the unemployed because of regulations introduced by the previous Government? Does he agree that that is an example of Labour bureaucracy hurting the poor most, and will he take steps to reverse this policy as soon as possible?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Miller): I thank my hon. Friend for raising that issue. Foodbanks have an important role to play in our local communities. It is important that we ensure that people who might benefit from the services that they offer know that they are available, and we will certainly be reviewing whether it is possible to highlight the availability of local foodbanks through Jobcentre Plus.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. Brief questions and brief answers are now of the essence.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): Will the Minister say what help to get off benefits and into work will be available for young people between the future jobs fund ending, which he said would happen in a couple of months, and the Government's new single Work programme, which he said would not be available until March 2011?

Chris Grayling: We will be maintaining all the existing programmes, and in particular the flexible new deal, right up until the start of the Work programme next year. The flexible new deal is by far the largest programme that the previous Government put in place to support young people and older people into employment. It is important to ensure that we maintain continuity of support right up to the point when the Work programme is ready to be launched.

Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con): The Minister will know that spending on welfare doubled under the previous Administration, yet the number of those living in poverty increased. Does he agree that what the previous Administration succeeded in doing was to create the most expensive poverty in history?

Maria Miller: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Record levels of spending on benefits have left us with 100,000 extra children living in poverty since 2004, and the gap between the richest and the poorest has grown wider than at any time since the 1960s. What we need to do is tackle the root causes of poverty to break that cycle of disadvantage, and not do what the previous Government did.

Mr Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): What income guarantee will the Secretary of State give to the worried father who wrote to me last week who gave up his job to look after his disabled son and is now a carer?

Mr Duncan Smith: I would be happy to speak to the hon. Gentleman's constituent with him, but I also guarantee to the hon. Gentleman that the role of carers in society will be one that we continue to support and value. The reality is that if we did not have that informal care in society, the state could never pick up the bill. We look to enhance and support that role, ensuring that carers are valued throughout what we do, and I should be happy to see the hon. Gentleman's constituent, if he wishes.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State knows as well as anyone that what he calls notional jobs are nevertheless factored into the Government's spending projections. Can he tell the House how long it will be before the proposed savings in the future jobs fund will be wiped out by the increased cost of keeping more young people on the dole?

Mr Duncan Smith: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, he is playing a game of notional figures—*[Interruption.]* I know what it is like in opposition, and I must tell Labour Members that they must start to get real about the fact that they were in government three months ago and it was they who went on the spending spree. They would also have had to find savings. We need to use the savings that we have found for this year, and ensure that we do not have the job tax. There will also be a much better chance for longer-term jobs through the apprenticeship scheme, involving some 50,000 people. That is real decision making.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give a guarantee that every job that is found through any Government-backed scheme to move someone from benefits into work will be paid at or above the national minimum wage?

Chris Grayling: Self-evidently, if the providers who work for us under the Work programme are successful in getting someone into work, we will reward them on the basis that they provide post-employment mentoring and stay with the person to ensure that they stay in work—

Clive Efford: Yes or no?

Chris Grayling: Of course, by law, they will have to pay the national minimum wage. That is the requirement for any employer in this country; it is not going to change.

Mr Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford South) (Lab): One of the successes of the future jobs fund has been in the area of sports. I heard the Minister say earlier that he would stop future contracts, but full-time jobs in sport have been found at the end of the period, and I hope that he will look again at that decision.

Chris Grayling: Absolutely; I also expect sport to take advantage of some of the apprenticeship opportunities. There will be tens of thousands of further opportunities under the future jobs fund, as well as additional apprenticeships and further opportunities provided through the Work programme. We intend to do everything we can to ensure that, when this Government leave office, youth unemployment is lower than it is today—unlike the record of the Labour party in its 13 years in government.

Afghanistan

3.31 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on Afghanistan. First, I am sure that the whole House will want to join with me in paying tribute to Private Jonathan Monk from 2nd Battalion the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment and Lance Corporal Andrew Breeze from 1st Battalion the Mercian Regiment, who have both died in Afghanistan. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families and friends. Their service and sacrifice for our country must never be forgotten.

It was my fifth visit to Afghanistan, but my first as Prime Minister. I held talks with President Karzai and visited our troops in Helmand. I want to set out for the House how this Government will approach our mission in Afghanistan, and how that mission is progressing, but first let me stress the importance of such updates. The whole nation is touched by the heroism of this generation of our armed forces, who are fighting to protect us in harsh conditions far from home, and I believe that the country, and this House, are entitled to the facts. That is why this statement will be the start of a pattern. There will be regular updates to the House, with quarterly statements by the Foreign Secretary or the Defence Secretary, and we will publish on a monthly basis much more information on the progress we are making. This will include updates on the security situation, on recruiting, training and retaining the Afghan security forces, on progress in appointing and supporting provincial and district governors, and on progress in development work, including health and education.

Our main focus, however, will be on the security situation. For example, in the six months to March 2010, the Afghan national army grew by almost 20 %, with more than 17,000 people joining the ranks, but the Afghan police are assessed to be ineffective or barely able to operate in six of the 13 key provinces in General McChrystal's plan. Good news or bad, we want to take the country with us in what is this Government's top foreign policy priority.

Let me address the first question that people are asking. Why are we in Afghanistan? I can answer in two words: national security. Our forces are in Afghanistan to prevent Afghan territory from again being used by al-Qaeda as a base from which to plan attacks on the UK or on our allies. Of course, the al-Qaeda training camps and the Taliban regime that protected them were removed from Afghanistan in the months after 9/11, and the presence of NATO forces prevents them from returning, but Afghanistan is not yet strong enough to look after its own security. That is why we are there, and with the help of the greater efforts of the Pakistanis to hunt down al-Qaeda in their own country, we are now placing al-Qaeda under pressure on both sides of the border. Eighteen months ago, the then Prime Minister told this House that some three quarters of the most serious terrorist plots against Britain had links to the border area. Today I am advised that the threat from al-Qaeda from Afghanistan and Pakistan has reduced, but I am also advised that if it were not for the current presence of UK and international coalition forces, al-Qaeda would return to Afghanistan and the threat to the UK would rise.

The next question is how long must we stay. The Afghan people do not want foreign forces on their soil any longer than necessary, and the British people are rightly impatient for progress. Our forces will not remain in Afghanistan a day longer than is necessary, and I want to bring them home the moment it is safe to do so. The key to success is training and equipping the Afghan security forces at every level to take on the task of securing their country, so that Afghans can chart their own way in the world without their country posing a threat to others, and our forces can come home, the job done, their heads held high.

That is why we back the strategy developed by General McChrystal, commander of the international security assistance force, and endorsed by President Obama and NATO. That strategy involves protecting the civilian population from the insurgents, supporting more effective government at every level, and building up the Afghan national security forces as rapidly as is feasible. We want to transfer security responsibility for districts and provinces to Afghan control as soon as they are ready, but that must be done on the basis of the facts on the ground, not a pre-announced timetable.

The current year is the vital year. We are six months into an 18-month military surge, and we must now redouble our efforts to drive progress. Central Helmand has, along with Kandahar, been the heartland of the Taliban. It is from there that they gave safe haven to the al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan. That is why the operation in central Helmand is crucial to the success of the whole mission. Four years ago, we went into Helmand with 3,000 troops. I do not think anyone now seriously argues that that was sufficient. Today, there are around 30,000 troops there, with 8,000 British working alongside 20,000 US Marines. In total, we have more than 10,000 troops in the country as a whole. With the arrival of reinforcements and the continued growth of the Afghan security forces, we are now evening out the ISAF presence in the main populated areas in Helmand.

That is an absolutely crucial point. In the past, we have simply not had enough soldiers per head of population for an effective counter-insurgency campaign. Today, although the rebalancing is still work in progress, the situation is much improved. The arrival of a US Marine expeditionary force, combined with additional contributions from other ISAF partners including the UK, has given a huge boost to the resources available to ISAF in Helmand. For example, the Marines have arrived with some 80 aircraft and helicopters of their own, which are now available to support all ISAF forces in Helmand.

It is clear that we have made real progress in central Helmand this year. A degree of normal life has returned to places such as Nad Ali, where the bazaar is open again and people are going about their daily business in an area that was until recently completely infested with insurgents, but the progress is not yet irreversible. Inevitably, there will be tough fighting as Afghan forces, with ISAF support, hold the ground we have taken and push the insurgents out of further towns and villages.

During my visit, I was able to announce a further £67 million to double the number of counter-improvised explosive device teams, to tackle the most serious threat facing our young men and women. So with the improvements made in the past year, many of the acute shortages that hampered us so severely in our initial deployment in Helmand have been dealt with, but I do

not pretend that every equipment shortage has been resolved. We will need to adapt constantly and deal with problems as they arise.

The whole country is incredibly proud of our armed forces, and I believe we need to do more to recognise these remarkable men and women and place them at the front and centre of our society. That is why I announced a doubling of the operational allowance for service in Afghanistan, backdated to 6 May; and that is why I believe it is right that we renew and reaffirm our commitment to the military covenant, that crucial contract between our country and those who risk their lives to ensure our security.

I do not pretend that we can succeed, either in Helmand or in Afghanistan, by military means alone. Insurgencies usually end with political settlements, not military victories, and that is why I have always said that we need a political surge to accompany the military one. We need better to align our development spending with our overall strategy, and I have announced £200 million to be spent on training, strengthening the police services and government institutions; and, crucially, we need a political process to help bring the insurgency to an end.

As a first step, that means getting individual Taliban fighters to put down their weapons, renounce violence and reintegrate into Afghan society, and the successful peace jirga earlier this month should enable that process to move ahead more swiftly. However, it means more than that. For there to be long-term political stability, everyone in Afghanistan, including those in the south, must feel that the Government is theirs, that it is their country, and that they have a role to play. As I agreed with President Karzai, we must start working towards a wider reconciliation process, leading to a political settlement that works for all the peoples of Afghanistan.

We are seeing a good example of that in Kandahar where, importantly, the process getting under way is largely Afghan-led. Alongside military operations by Afghan security forces together with international forces, it includes, for example, the shura of several hundred local elders conducted yesterday by the local governor, which President Karzai attended, and a major drive by the Afghan Government, with our support, to improve public services and the rule of law. From now on, what is happening around Kandahar and in Helmand should reflect a deeper understanding of the influence of tribal structures in Afghanistan. In the past, we simply have not paid enough attention to that and to the unintended consequences of some of our policies. I want us, for example, to take a careful look at the contracting policy of ISAF, to ensure that the money going into the local economy from the huge contracts that are let has a positive impact and does not help fund local militias or, even worse, the insurgents.

This is the vital year. We have the forces needed on the ground and we have our very best people, not just those in the military, but those leading on the diplomatic and development front. I do not pretend that it will be easy and I must warn the House that we must be ready for further casualties over the summer months, as the so called "fighting season" resumes and as ISAF extends its activity. But I say to the House what I said to our young servicemen and women in the dust and heat of Helmand on Friday: they are fighting thousands of miles away to protect our national security here at home. Like their predecessors, they have the support and gratitude of the whole nation. When we have succeeded in enabling the Afghans to take control of their own security, our troops can begin to come home. Even after our troops have left Afghanistan, the relationship between Britain and Afghanistan must continue as a strong and close one. Likewise, we want to continue to build on our relationship with Pakistan. These long-term relationships are, quite simply, essential for our national security. I commend this statement to the House.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to the two soldiers who have been killed, Private Jonathan Monk from 2nd Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment and Lance Corporal Andrew Breeze from 1st Battalion the Mercian Regiment. Our thoughts are with their families and on the grief of their loss.

I thank the Prime Minister for his statement. I welcome both his early visit to Afghanistan since coming into government and the increase in the operational allowance that he announced. All those serving in Afghanistan should know that they have the admiration and respect of the whole country and of Members from all parts of the House. Will he continue with Armed Forces day on 26 June?

May I restate Labour's support for our mission in Afghanistan, which is, as the Prime Minister rightly said, first and foremost to protect our national security. As this was his first statement to the House on Afghanistan and the first occasion on which we have responded as the official Opposition, may I assure him that as he proceeds to take difficult decisions in the best interests of our mission in Afghanistan and of our troops, he will have our full support. In that spirit, I welcome the £67 million that he has announced to help tackle the IED threat. Will he inform the House in more detail as to what that will be spent on? We understand that there will be 13 extra Mastiff vehicles, and we welcome that. Will they be in addition to the £67 million? As there is also a need for well protected vehicles with greater manoeuvrability, will the Prime Minister confirm that the Government will proceed with a second batch of 200 light protected patrol vehicles?

On the strategy in Afghanistan, the Prime Minister has reaffirmed that, despite the challenges, progress has been made. Will he confirm that the Government are continuing the strategy that the UK has been pursuing and that it has not changed? If it has changed, will he tell us in what respects? It is common ground that our work in Afghanistan needs to bring together security, development and diplomatic efforts. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the discussions he has had with President Karzai? I assure him that the Government will have our support to take through a strategy that sees that the Afghans are strong enough to take responsibility for their own security and prosperity. I welcome the £200 million that he announced for building up the Afghan army, police and civil service. Will he reassure the House that that will not be at the expense of vital existing development programmes elsewhere in the world?

Will the Prime Minister update the House on discussions that he has had with US Defence Secretary Gates and on whether they have addressed the proposed withdrawal of Canadian forces in 2011? A stable Afghanistan requires a stable Pakistan. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the discussions he has had with President Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani of Pakistan?

[Ms Harriet Harman]

On the families of our troops, will the Prime Minister follow through on the important work that the former Defence Secretary was doing, with my support, to back up the wives, partners and families of our armed forces?

On the strategic defence review, will the Prime Minister reassure the House that the front line will not be weakened? In opposition, the Prime Minister and his Defence Secretary argued for a bigger Army and for the expansion of the Army by three battalions. Will that go ahead?

Finally, will the Prime Minister explain to the House the reasons for the departure of Sir Jock Stirrup and Sir Bill Jeffrey? Will he confirm that they will both play a role in the strategic defence review and that they will remain until it is completed? May I ask him to join me in paying tribute to Sir Jock Stirrup and Sir Bill Jeffrey for their service to the nation?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. and learned Lady for her response—both for what she said and the way in which she said it. I know that we will have our differences across these Dispatch Boxes, but on the issue of Afghanistan there is great unity on the Labour and coalition Benches—*[Interruption.]* Well done; well spotted. That is important, because our troops like to know that everyone in the House is behind what they are doing.

On the specific questions that she asked, Armed Forces day will go ahead as planned on 26 June. She asked about the £67 million spent on countering the IED threat and whether it is in addition to the patrol vehicles that are already on order. Yes; I can confirm that it is. She asked about the strategy generally and what has changed. What I would say—I note what the Foreign Secretary said in his speech on the Queen's Speech—is that we are six months into the McChrystal-Obama strategy of the military and political surge and we want to see that strategy through, so there is continuity in that regard. We must be absolutely clear in our focus on the national security perspective of what we are doing. That is not to say that development work and the building of schools, hospitals and other things are not important—it is just to get our priorities straight. In the end, our route home and our route to a successful Afghanistan is to put security first. That needs to be very clear. On the question about development aid, the £200 million is additional to the existing work we are doing in Afghanistan.

I very much agree with what the right hon. and learned Lady said about backing the wives, partners and families of all those who serve in our armed forces. In recent years, we have put enormous pressure on those families and we need to do more to help them. I have RAF Brize Norton in my constituency and I know the very severe pressures that we put on people. In all the issues around military families—whether it is about the schools their children go to, the health centres they use or time for leave—we want to do more to help, and we are going to give real focus to that.

The right hon. and learned Lady asked about the strategic defence review and whether it would cover the size of the Army. Of course, it will cover all of the issues in defence. Finally, she quite rightly paid tribute to Sir Jock Stirrup and Bill Jeffrey, and I join her in paying tribute to them. They both have been, and are, extremely strong and dedicated public servants, and everyone in this country owes them that thank you. Sir Jock Stirrup, as the right hon. and learned Lady knows, actually extended his time as Chief of the Defence Staff before the election because he wanted to see continuity—he wanted to see that service continue—and I was very pleased that that happened. For some time he has had in mind standing down in the autumn, at the end of the strategic defence review—at the end of October—and that is indeed what he is going to do, and what Bill Jeffrey is going to do. That will give the new Government time to put in place a proper transition for a new Chief of the Defence Staff to take on the vital work that Sir Jock has done. Let me say again that he has done a superb job as Chief of the Defence Staff. I am working with him extremely well. He came with me on the trip to Afghanistan, and he deserves the gratitude of the House of Commons.

Mr James Arbuthnot (North East Hampshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a risk of conflicting messages? We are saying on the one hand to the Taliban that we will not cut and run and that we will stay for as long as is needed to do the job, but on the other we are saying to the Afghan Government that there is urgency for them to sort out their corruption and their governance. Does my right hon. Friend give priority to leaving as soon as possible or staying for as long as is necessary?

The Prime Minister: First, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his successful election as Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence. I look forward to reading his reports over the course of this Parliament.

I do not think that there is a contradiction, because I think people in Afghanistan want to know that foreign troops will not be on their soil for an extended period, and it is right not to set an artificial deadline about when troops will leave but to do all the work we can to build up the Afghan security forces to give us the chance to leave, and to put pressure—yes, it is pressure sometimes—on the Afghan Government to do all they can to cut out corruption and put in place good governance. It is important that we get on with this work but, as I said, not to set artificial timetables that we then cannot meet.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. Several hon. and right hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. Colleagues will be conscious that there are a further two statements to follow, and two debates, so single, short supplementary questions and—I know—economical replies are the order of the day.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister referred very briefly to Pakistan and he did not take the opportunity to respond to the questions about Pakistan asked by my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition. Can he give us his assessment of Pakistan's role, for good or ill, across the Durand line, in a political solution and regional stability involving Afghanistan?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The role of Pakistan in this is vital. What is encouraging is that in all the conversations I have had

with President Karzai across the past five years I have never heard him as positive about his relationship with Pakistan as now. Clearly, a stable Pakistan and a stable Afghanistan are two sides of the same coin. The encouraging thing right now is that the Pakistan Government and the Pakistan military are pursuing al-Qaeda in South Waziristan and other parts of the tribal areas, and that is making a difference. But of course we have to convince both the Pakistan Government and the Afghanistan Government that we are there for the long term—not the long term with troops, but the long term with support, aid, diplomacy and development—so that they do not think that we will leave them in the lurch once again.

Sir Malcolm Rifkind (Kensington) (Con): May I commend the Prime Minister for confirming that our only justification for being in Afghanistan is not corruption or the poppy trade but national security? On that basis, will he also confirm that the decision when we start to withdraw our troops should be based not simply on the Afghan army having increased in size or training, but when we are satisfied that it has reached the level of training and ability to ensure that al-Qaeda cannot return?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend is right. It should be a focus on national security and when we can safely leave the job of securing Afghanistan to Afghan forces. That is not about numbers; it is about capability and he is right to measure it in that way.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): On 26 May, during the Queen's Speech debate, I said:

> "It is time to assert the principle that war is too important a matter to be left to generals. We need to assert the authority of this House and the authority of a politically elected Government over the lack of strategy in Afghanistan."—[*Official Report*, 26 May 2010; Vol. 510, c. 246.]

Therefore, I welcome the Prime Minister's keen interest. We have had too much of this war dictated by the red tops, with their jingoism, and the red tabs, with the generals' priorities before those of the nation. I wish the Prime Minister well in what is clearly a change of strategy, with a politically elected Government in charge.

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. I was once told that the first sign of madness is to read out one's own speeches, but I agree very much with a lot of what he said. It is important that the military feel that they can give unvarnished, clear advice to Ministers, but it is also important that Ministers test, probe and challenge that advice. That is how policy should be developed, and that is how it should be done in future.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon South) (Con): Given that one of the problems in Afghanistan in the past has been mission creep, may I thank the Prime Minister for the clarity of his statement? He pointed out that we are still in the United States military surge phase. Can he assure me that, although the US military are already beginning to talk about a future draw-down, we will keep in constant touch with them to ensure that we operate on the same timeline? Will he keep in touch with not only the US but our NATO allies on this point?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election as Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and I look forward to the work that it will do.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right: making sure that we work together with the Americans and our NATO allies is absolutely vital to success. One of the things that strikes me when I go to see what our troops are doing in Helmand is just how close that work is. Sometimes people wonder whether it is right that British troops in Sangin are under American command, and it is right to point out that all the American troops in Kandahar are under British command. Our forces work incredibly closely together, including in the hospitals, and it is a great sight to see.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Could the Prime Minister update the House on the progress made on opium and poppy production and say whether there is now a prison in Afghanistan that is secure enough to hold any of the opium traders should they be arrested?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for that question. There has been progress, as the hon. Lady will know. The province with the worst record of opium production has tended to be Helmand, but production is significantly down this year. There is a question mark about how much of that is due to poppy blight, how much of it is due to the excellent wheat-seed substitution programme that the British Government have been supporting and how much of it is due to security efforts. It is important as part of the picture that, as we see a more secure Afghanistan, we see more farmers pursuing alternative livelihoods. But again, we need to get the order of priorities the right way around.

Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): May I welcome both the Prime Minister's statement and his visit, join him in paying tribute to the soldiers who have lost their lives and to all those who serve, and assure him that his—our—Liberal Democrat colleagues stand four square behind him in the policy that he has announced? May I ask him a question about the implications for policy at home? Will he now review the work of our domestic Departments to ensure that returning troops have full support for their mental, emotional and physical needs, including their housing, after they have served in theatre in Afghanistan?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for that question. We have said that we will examine every part of the military covenant and ensure that we fulfil it in all the ways that we should. Housing is clearly a key part of that, and the previous Government, to be fair, were putting money into forces housing, which we need to go on improving. Mental health is the area that needs the most attention. If we think of the combat stress that has been placed on those young men, now year after year, we should really recognise that this is something that needs to go through the rest of their lives, and we need to learn from countries, such as America, where much more is done to follow up mental health issues. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) is particularly looking at this area, working between the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Health.

Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Further to that question, may I ask the right hon. Gentleman whether he will meet a small delegation, together with me, sometime in the future to discuss this very issue? I serve on a panel of inquiry appointed by the Howard League for Penal Reform to consider this issue and why so many returnees end up in the criminal justice system. Will he spare some time to meet us sometime in the future?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and either I or the Defence Secretary would be happy to meet him and other colleagues. He makes a very good point: because the whole problem of mental health issues has not had enough attention, we are seeing former soldiers fall through the net and, as he says, too often end up either homeless on the streets or, on occasion, in the criminal justice system.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if we are to achieve lasting security success in Afghanistan, it is imperative that we exert the maximum possible pressure on al-Qaeda and the Taliban on both sides of the border? Is it the Government's policy to continue the programme of bilateral counter-terrorism co-operation between the British Government and the Pakistan Government initiated by the previous Government here?

The Prime Minister: Yes, it absolutely is our policy to continue that work. The vital role that will be played by Pakistan will encourage it to go on driving al-Qaeda out of the badlands of the tribally administered areas. That is taking place, partly because there is good security and military co-operation, and there is a sense among the Pakistan Government and military that both the British and the Americans are there for a long-term relationship, to help them with this vital work.

Michael Dugher (Barnsley East) (Lab): Given that our forces are engaged in Pakistan, does the Prime Minister share my anger about how the departure of the Chief of the Defence Staff was announced—in an interview between the Defence Secretary and a national newspaper? Did not the CDS deserve rather better than that?

The Prime Minister: As I said, the Chief of the Defence Staff had for some time been intending to stand aside in the autumn after seeing through the strategic defence review, which is a vital piece of work. That is an appropriate time for him to do so. This is a good moment to pay tribute to the work that he has done, which has been genuinely good—I saw it myself in Afghanistan—and the very good leadership that he has given our armed forces.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): I join my right hon. Friend and the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) in their tributes to two more of our fallen heroes. As some of us in all parts of the House have been pointing out ad nauseam since 2006 that this was an undermanned and underequipped Army, how does my right hon. Friend think it came about that four successive Labour Defence Secretaries were so uninformed?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend takes a very strong view about this issue, and I have listened to him talk about it many times. He is right to say that we went into Helmand province with far too few soldiers and without a clear enough idea of how dangerous the insurgency could become. We also—I made this criticism in opposition—did not have sufficient helicopters and did not move fast enough on vehicles and other equipment programmes. We have to start from where we are and ask ourselves what it is right to do now, and it is right to give this new strategy set out by Stanley McChrystal and President Obama time to work by having a correct number of forces on the ground to deliver proper counter-insurgency and build up the Afghan army and police force so that we can bring those troops back home. The point in the end is, what will make our country safer? Our country will be safer if we can leave behind an Afghanistan that, although it may not be a perfect democracy or a brilliant society, has some level of stability so that it is not a haven for terrorism.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Next year the British and American troops will have been 10 years in Afghanistan. It has cost the lives of hundreds of coalition soldiers and thousands of Afghan people, and the war has spread into Pakistan and created instability in the region. Is the right hon. Gentleman utterly convinced that this strategy of long-term military engagement with Afghanistan is not the cause of future problems and that we should not be thinking of an alternative process of involvement and negotiation rather than constant military activity?

The Prime Minister: Let me try to find some common cause with the hon. Gentleman. I agree with him to this extent: we will not solve this problem by military means alone. There should be a political process, a process for the Taliban to lay down their arms and rejoin Afghan society and, yes, a process led by the Afghan Government of engaging with the Taliban. However, there have to be some red lines. There has to be an acceptance of the Afghan constitution, an acceptance that everything must be done by peaceful means and, above all, the severing of any link with al-Qaeda. So a political process, yes, but let us not pretend that that will come if we walk away militarily.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does the Prime Minister accept that al-Qaeda, as an international terrorist organisation, if it is suppressed in Afghanistan and Pakistan will begin to operate from any one or more of half a dozen other potential harbouring states? Given that it is out of the question that we could ever try to tackle that problem in the extremely costly way that we have tackled Afghanistan, will he undertake to view with an open mind the sovereign base bridgehead solution, which I hope to have an opportunity to discuss with him presently?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, and I know that he has considerable expertise in this area. He is right to say that there are other parts of the world where al-Qaeda is, regrettably, quite strongly established, including Yemen and Somalia, but it seems to me that that does not negate the need to do what is possible to deliver a basic level of security in Afghanistan, so that at least that country cannot once again become home to al-Qaeda. Doing that at the same time as

working with the Pakistan Government can actually help to stabilise a region from which huge amounts of terrorism have come. In terms of the sovereign base idea, I am happy to look at it, and to discuss my hon. Friend's ideas with him, but I think that a military surge that is part of a counter-insurgency must be given time to work.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): In accepting that security and a political solution are of the utmost importance, will the Prime Minister be mindful of the need to advance human rights in Afghanistan? What progress can he report? Will he confirm that there will be no return to the oppression, particularly of women, that was suffered in Afghanistan in the Taliban years?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's question. I think that some progress has been made. When I say, "Look, we're not going to end up with a perfect democracy or a brilliant society," it does not mean that those things do not matter; they do. It is just about ordering our priorities. For instance, at the recent peace jirga, something like 20% or more of the representatives were women. I noted at my press conference with President Karzai that whereas the entire British press were made up of young, white men, all the questions from the Afghan press were from women, which I thought was a sign in itself.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):The Prime Minister has rightly recognised how important the integrated nature of the military operation is, and how the coalition forces are together trying to achieve security for Afghanistan. Does he have a commitment from our coalition partners that they have understood the message that we can leave only once security is established, as the population in Afghanistan has to believe that we have the commitment to see the job through to the end?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. He will know that the Canadians and the Dutch have made their own decision about timetables, but it is very important to do all that we can to encourage other NATO allies—I met representatives of the Danish and Estonian military while in Afghanistan—and to ensure that all other NATO partners remain committed to the task, particularly in this most vital year, when the number of troops has increased in the way that I have described, and when there is a real chance of delivering a proper counter-insurgency strategy that protects the people, pushes the Taliban out and delivers that basic level of stability that we want to see.

Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): The Prime Minister will be aware that the 1st Battalion the Mercian Regiment includes many of my constituents who were formally of the Cheshire Regiment, so I thank him for his statement. He rightly says that the military effort must be the highest priority in the campaign but, given his visits and the reports that he has received, may I ask him to reflect on the engineering resource on the ground? There is no doubt that the engineering resource helps massively with the military effort, but it also helps to rebuild communications, which can in turn help the governance of the country. Is he satisfied that it is at the right level?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. No, I do not think that we have made as much progress as we should have done on the engineering front. Let us take, for instance, the issue of the Kajaki dam: that should be delivering a lot more electricity to a lot more people in Afghanistan. Progress has not been anything like as fast as we would have hoped. That is the sort of tangible progress that people in Afghanistan want to see, to demonstrate that life is now better than it was under the Taliban. We have to deliver that as part of the message of security and stability that will enable us to leave.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I commend and support my right hon. Friend's determination and commitment personally to take responsibility for what our armed forces are seeking to achieve in Afghanistan? Is he aware, however, that there has for a long time been a widespread perception that while we are fighting a war in Afghanistan, Whitehall has not been on the same wartime footing and has not been tackling problems with the urgency that those in our armed services would expect? What is he doing to put Whitehall on a war footing and, in his absence, will he appoint a Secretary of State for Afghanistan to drive things forward?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend takes a great interest in these matters. We have put Whitehall on much more of a war footing, not least by appointing a National Security Council and a national security adviser, who met on day one of the new Government. That is a difference, and it is driving the policy. That message has got through clearly to the Ministry of Defence. Obviously, there are sometimes time lags in getting equipment out to the front line, but we are doing everything we can to make sure that that happens and that the commitment is there.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): The Prime Minister has focused most of his remarks on security issues—rightly and understandably so. Can he say a little more about the development angles of our strategy in Afghanistan, and in particular, what, if any, changes he sees in the overall development strategy, how he feels about the so-called whole Afghanistan strategy which looks beyond Helmand and Kandahar to other parts of Afghanistan, and how he feels about the use of instruments such as the Afghan reconstruction trust fund for the disbursement of assistance? Finally, will he revisit the International Development Committee's report from nearly two and a half years ago, which still has relevant messages to give about development strategies in Afghanistan?

Mr Speaker: I heard four questions, but one answer will suffice.

The Prime Minister: I agree with what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) says about a whole Afghanistan strategy. We must be careful not to be over-focused on Helmand province, although I make no excuse for that, as that is where troops are. In the end, the whole campaign and mission will be judged by progress in Helmand. With reference to how we are changing our strategy, it is to make sure that it is focused, particularly on the issues of security and helping

[The Prime Minister]

to deliver that security. On too many occasions in the past five years, people working hard for DFID have not been able to get out into Afghanistan to deliver aid projects because there is not enough security, so we have to get that right first.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): One of the many problems with our involvement in Afghanistan is that there has in the past been confusion about the key objective, so I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement today, although I remain to be convinced that it can be achieved. Given that there has to be a political solution as well as a military one, how worried is he by the recent resignations from President Karzai's Government of the chief of intelligence and the Interior Minister? Will he support President Karzai in seeking the compromise that is needed?

The Prime Minister: I discussed with President Karzai the resignation of the two Ministers, to which my hon. Friend referred, and the prospects for political settlement and for reintegration. That, combined with the military surge, will be vital to securing the future of Afghanistan and enabling us to bring our troops back home. In the end, particularly in southern Afghanistan, people must feel that they are part of the Government, and that it represents them. That process of reintegration, with the red lines that have been laid down, is a vital part of making that country more secure.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): I am grateful to the Prime Minister for his commitment not just to the House, but to Afghanistan. It has been clear that our forces over there were undermanned. Instead of fighting one five-year war, we have been fighting five one-year wars. The various bases along the Helmand valley where British troops are now taking down the flags should be handed over not to the Afghans, but to the Americans. This is a repeat of Basra. Will the Prime Minister, along with the Defence Secretary, commit himself to counter-insurgency? We have always been good at that, but now we have been leapfrogged by the Americans.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for the question and I know that my hon. Friend has great experience of Afghanistan, including having travelled there a great deal. I do not agree with him, though, that there is somehow a repeat of Basra, as he put it. Under the counter-insurgency strategy we are making sure that we have the correct number of forces spread across Helmand and across Afghanistan to deliver counter-insurgency. In some cases, as he knows, that means moving forces from one place to another to make sure that they are thick enough across the whole ground. It is welcome that there are now 20,000 US marines in Helmand. That should enable us to deliver such security, so we should not be in any way worried or ashamed or anything like that if we move the disposition of our forces around Helmand with our US allies. That is part of delivering a successful outcome.

Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): I welcome the Prime Minister's statement. This autumn, soldiers from 16 Air Assault Brigade, from Colchester garrison, will be deployed to Afghanistan for the third time. In the Prime Minister's statement on equipment, he did not mention unmanned aerial vehicles. Bearing in mind that UAVs are a very welcome tool in identifying insurgents and those who lay improvised explosive devices, will he give a commitment that UAVs will be very much there and part of the equipment programme?

The Prime Minister: I can give the hon. Gentleman that reassurance. On previous trips to Afghanistan, I have had proper presentations on the work of UAVs, drones, Predators, Reapers and other such projects, and what they are able to do is incredibly impressive. A great deal of British investment is going into those technologies, too, and we will ensure that they can be deployed as quickly as possible.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): When I recently spoke to soldiers from the Grenadier Guards who had just returned from Afghanistan, they made the point that the Afghan national police equipment is incredibly poor but the police themselves are very good, so will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister please address that as a key issue?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. The problem has been not just equipment but recruiting, training and retaining good police officers, and obviously we had that appalling incident at Nad Ali last year. This cause has come out among Members from all parts of the House: for too long not enough focus was given to the most important things in Afghanistan, of which training the police was absolutely key. The effort is now going in. I met American and British police trainers, and the police training college in Lashkar Gah is now turning out very good police officers, but for too long that particular issue was ignored.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Does the Prime Minister believe that the mine clearance equipment available to our troops is now the best in the world?

The Prime Minister: Certainly I had a presentation out in Afghanistan on the equipment now being used and the training undertaken, and what our troops are able to do is incredibly impressive. The truth—I am sure that the former Defence Secretary will agree—is that we have to keep on investing and catching up with the latest technologies that the enemy use, because they are incredibly cunning at trying to find new ways of making those things even harder to find.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am grateful to all colleagues for their co-operation.

Office for Budget Responsibility

4.17 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the Office for Budget Responsibility, which the Government created on coming into office.

This morning, for the first time in British history, we have opened up the Treasury books and allowed the publication of an independent and comprehensive assessment of the public finances. From now on, Governments will have to fix the budget to fit the figures, instead of fixing the figures to fit the budget. I should like to thank Sir Alan Budd, the members of the budget responsibility committee and all their staff for the impressive work that they have done in short order. A copy of their report has been placed in the Vote Office and in the Libraries.

There has been some interest in whether the OBR would publish all the relevant underlying assumptions and judgments driving the forecast. Today's report does more than that: there are more than 70 pages of detailed material, much of which has never been published before. For the first time ever, the Government are publishing the assumptions that lie behind the estimates for average earnings, property prices, interest rates and financial sector profits, and, crucially, a five-year forecast for annually managed expenditure. That includes a forecast for the amount of debt interest that we as a country will pay over the coming years.

The creation of the OBR has already impressed the international community and been praised by the International Monetary Fund and the G20. We will now move to put the OBR on a statutory footing with legislation that was included in the Queen's Speech. From now on, Members of Parliament sent to this House to scrutinise how the Government spend taxpayers' money will have access to honest and independent figures.

Let me now turn to those figures and what the OBR has uncovered. First, there are the forecasts for growth in the economy. The OBR is forecasting that growth will reach 1.3% this year and 2.6% next year. In future years, the OBR's forecast is for growth of around 2.8% in 2012 and 2013, and then 2.6% in 2014. Sadly for our country, the forecasts for growth are lower in every single year than the figures announced by the previous Chancellor at the time of the last Government's Budget in March. He told us that growth would soar to 3.25% in 2011, and then to 3.5% in 2012. When those forecasts were given, neither the Bank of England nor 28 of the main 30 private institutions producing forecasts for the UK were offering such an optimistic central view of the economy; we can only speculate as to why such rosy forecasts for a trampoline recovery were produced only weeks ahead of a general election.

I turn to the OBR's forecasts for the public finances. The latest outturn data show that public sector net borrowing for last year was £156 billion. The OBR is forecasting that it will be £155 billion this year. It is the highest budget deficit of any country in the European Union with the exception of Ireland. It is £10 billion less than the forecast given only a month before the end of the last fiscal year, but I can tell the House that, based on the OBR's figures, that £10 billion advantage that we start with decreases to only £3 billion by the end of the Parliament.

The reason for that is that the cyclically adjusted current balance, commonly known as the structural deficit, is forecast to be higher in every single year than what this House was told in March. That is perhaps the most important figure in the report, because the structural deficit is the borrowing that remains even when growth in the economy returns. It is the structural deficit that is a key determinant of whether the public finances are sustainable. This year, the structural deficit is forecast to reach 5.2% of GDP—that is, £9 billion higher than we were told in March. Next year, the structural deficit will be £12 billion higher than we were told before the election.

The OBR's forecast sees debt rising as a share of GDP throughout the Parliament—and the interest on that debt, which we as taxpayers have to pay, also grows every year. Let me be the first Chancellor in modern history to give Parliament those numbers for the coming years. The OBR forecast is that this is what Britain will have to pay for its debts: £42 billion of debt interest this year, rising to £46 billion next year, then £54 billion, then £60 billion and reaching £67 billion in debt interest payments by 2014-15. Over the course of this Parliament, more than a quarter of a trillion pounds will come from the pockets of taxpayers simply to service the debts left by the previous Government.

The figures produced by the OBR also give us a new insight into the spending plans that we inherited as a Government. They show that, given the OBR's assumptions, the previous Government would have had to find £44 billion of spending cuts in departmental budgets to deliver their published plans. I can confirm that I have found no evidence at the Treasury for how even a single pound of that £44 billion was ever going to be achieved.

There are two other very important considerations that relate to these pre-Budget forecasts and understate the situation that we inherited. First, these are central forecasts with a fan chart around them to represent the great uncertainty that exists, rather than Treasury forecasts based on an arbitrary reduction in the trend level of output. As a result, they understate the increase in the structural deficit and the reduction in growth. Secondly, and crucially, these projections have been based on recent market interest rates, which are about a third of a percentage point lower in Britain than at the time of the general election. As is widely acknowledged, that in part reflects investors' confidence that the new coalition Government will take action to deal with the deficit. As a result, as Sir Alan points out in his report:

> "In present conditions the likely result is that these economic forecasts are biased upwards".

That is absolutely crucial to understanding today's figures, because if we followed the fiscal path set out by the previous Government, that would, again in Sir Alan's words in the report,

> "lead to higher interest rates and so lower economic activity"

than forecast today.

Let me conclude with this point. The independent report published today confirms that this coalition Government have inherited from their predecessor one of the largest budget deficits in the world, forecasts for growth lower than the country was told at the time of

[Mr George Osborne]

the election, a larger structural deficit than had been previously admitted, and a debt interest bill larger than the schools budget.

It is indeed worse than we thought. The public would not have known any of this if we had not set up the Office for Budget Responsibility. Next week, I will return to the House to explain what we will do about it. In the meantime, I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Alistair Darling (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): I thank the Chancellor for his statement. My thanks would be more heartfelt had I not received it just 25 minutes ago. There was a time when statements were supposed to be in the hands of the Opposition an hour before the statement was made, and then 45 minutes. I do accept, before the Chancellor says it, that in my time there were occasions when he did not get as much notice as he wanted. All I would say, in the nicest possible way and in the spirit of consensus, is that if we could try to get these statements in the Opposition's hands rather earlier, that would be very helpful.

Turning to the substance of the Chancellor's statement, I welcome the measured approach taken by Sir Alan Budd, and his colleagues in the Office for Budget Responsibility, in presenting his report this morning. Higher borrowing by the Government, as the OBR acknowledges today, continues to support the economy. Indeed, without it, there was a grave risk that a recession could have tipped into a depression; that is why the expenditure was necessary in this country and in other countries across the world. However, as I have said repeatedly, borrowing needs to come down as the economic recovery is established. Has not the OBR forecast that borrowing will be £30 billion lower than I anticipated in my Budget, and does not that flatly contradict the Prime Minister who said last week that

"the overall scale of the problem is even worse than we thought"?

Does not the report say that borrowing is lower not just this year, for which the OBR forecasts borrowing at £8 billion lower than I did, but in each and every one of the next five years? Borrowing is down by more than £30 billion in total. Can the Chancellor confirm whether he and the Prime Minister knew what the OBR's borrowing forecasts were prior to the Prime Minister making his speech last Monday? If he did not, he was just plain wrong; if he did, he owes us an apology. At the election, the Chancellor and the Prime Minister said that they had no need to raise VAT. Now that borrowing is in fact lower than they thought, is that still their policy?

Turning to growth, the OBR has confirmed my forecast for this year, but it has set out a lower growth forecast for future years—just 2.6% next year. This change is driven partly by what Sir Alan has today labelled "recent events", particularly events in Europe, where growth is sluggish at best. Is it not the case that what is happening in Europe, our largest export market, will impact on growth here in the UK? Does not that reinforce the need to put in place measures to secure growth here and in other countries in Europe? Does not the Chancellor agree that the impact of action taken across Europe to reduce deficits runs the risk of depressing demand and setting back the recovery unless accompanied by measures to stimulate growth? Does he not accept that growth is essential to cut borrowing? Japan provides an example of what happens if one gets this wrong—recovery is choked off, growth becomes stagnant, and debt rises.

It was because the private sector was weak as the global crisis hit that the public sector stepped in to support our economy. Sir Alan Budd and his colleagues understand that point, because Sir Alan says in his report, at paragraph 3.20:

"Private sector demand contracted sharply in the recession, while government spending contributed positively to GDP growth."

So much for the claim that our spending was irresponsible and unnecessary. In the same paragraph, he goes on to say:

"For this year"—

2010—

"it is government consumption and inventory accumulation that make the largest contribution to growth."

In other words, without it there would not have been growth this year. The risk of taking large sums out of the economy is that the recovery will be derailed. Is it not also the case that confidence is being affected by the scaremongering that we see from the Prime Minister and the Chancellor? The Chancellor will have noticed the survey of business confidence this morning showing a reduction in business confidence. That shows that what he is saying is, unfortunately, having a very real impact on the economy.

The Chancellor asked us to focus on the structural deficit. However, he will have read Sir Alan's very clear statement, at paragraph 4.40 of the report, that

"forecasts of cyclically-adjusted aggregates are subject to particular uncertainty."

In other words, there is a great deal of uncertainty about what the structural deficit is. But if the Chancellor does take the estimate of structural borrowing from today's forecasts as the barometer of success, he needs to be clear with people what that means. Will he confirm that it is still his policy to remove the entire structural deficit over this Parliament? If so, will he confirm that, on the numbers published today, he would need to find £118 billion by 2014-15? That is £118 billion of spending cuts, tax rises or both, which will affect millions of people and businesses in this country.

Since the Budget, there has been slightly faster growth at the beginning of this year. There is lower borrowing as tax receipts have come in higher than previously thought. Far from providing political cover for the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats for cuts and tax rises next week, does not the report remind us that growth is still fragile, the recovery is not yet secured and growth is essential, not only to cut borrowing but to secure jobs and a lasting recovery?

Mr Osborne: The report reminds us of the complete mess that the economy was in when there was a change of Government.

Let me deal with the right hon. Gentleman's points. First, I apologise that he received the statement only 25 minutes before it was delivered. I was following the normal practice that had been established in the Chancellor's private office. Despite having been on the wrong end of that for three years, I note his complaints about the very first statement, and I will look into that.

Let me answer directly the right hon. Gentleman's question, towards the end of his remarks, about the

fiscal mandate. It will be set in the Budget. There is no credible fiscal mandate in place in Britain because we have inherited from the previous Government a commitment, which most of the rest of world does not believe is a serious and credible effort to reduce the deficit. The fiscal rules never amounted to very much either when the crisis came, but we will put in place new fiscal architecture.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about borrowing and economic growth. I remind him that the whole point about the structural deficit is that it is not the part of the deficit that reduces as growth returns. According to the OBR report, it is increasing above the estimates that were given in the March Budget. That is striking given that the out-turn for borrowing last year was, indeed, lower than the Chancellor forecast just three or four weeks, as far as I can tell, before he received the out-turn numbers. He gave a figure in the Budget and out-turn numbers were lower. It is therefore all the more striking that the structural deficit—the crucial part of the numbers: the black hole in the public finances—is higher by a significant amount than he forecast. Of course, we are all concerned about the situation in the eurozone, but 28 out of 30 independent bodies that look at the British economy did not believe that the figures that he gave in the March Budget were accurate. Indeed, we pointed that out at the time. [HON. MEMBERS: "You haven't answered a single question."] I did not think that the right hon. Gentleman asked many questions; I have answered both of them.

The right hon. Gentleman makes a point about spending cuts and so on. He pencilled in £44 billion of spending cuts. Until a single member of the Opposition provides us with a clue as to how they would even have begun to achieve those £44 billion of cuts, they will not be taken seriously. The leadership contenders are busily taking their party leftwards into the margins of British politics. They are not addressing the central issue about their fiscal plans, which were not credible. Where would the spending cuts have come from? We are prepared to answer that question. Until they do, they are not contenders for being taken seriously in British politics.

Let me remind the right hon. Gentleman of what one of his Ministers, Paul Myners, said. This was the man whom he appointed—or at least agreed to have appointed—to the Treasury, and the man who sat with him in all those meetings over the years. He said:

> "There is nothing progressive about a Government who consistently spend more than they can raise in taxation, and certainly nothing progressive that endows generations to come with the liabilities incurred by the current generation."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 June 2010; Vol. 719, c. 625.]

That is the truth about the Labour party's position.

The right hon. Gentleman says, "Apologise". He is the person who should apologise. More to the point, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), wherever he is, should come here and apologise for the complete economic mess in which he left the country.

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on this unprecedented increase in transparency and openness on economic forecasting? Is it not the case that the increase in the structural deficit as a percentage of gross domestic product means that a robust deficit reduction plan is needed now more than ever?

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is also the conclusion of the G20, the European Union and most international observers of the UK situation.

Mr Michael Meacher (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): If the Chancellor accepts Sir Alan Budd's estimate that around three quarters of the current deficit—about £120 billion—is structural, and if he intends to eradicate that entirely during this Parliament through public spending cuts and tax increases, where does he expect the growth to come from to prevent unemployment from increasing to 3 million and staying there for the next five years?

Mr Osborne: The fiscal mandate will be set out in the Budget. I am disappointed that the right hon. Gentleman was not elected as Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, but perhaps from his current position he will begin to propose cuts—as I said, cuts were even pencilled in to the previous Government's plans—before concerning himself with our proposals.

Mr Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): While sharing my right hon. Friend's dismay at the inheritance he has acquired—the picture is even worse than it once appeared—may I urge him to accelerate the plans that the Conservatives set out at election time to encourage lending by the banks, especially to small businesses, because the money supply figures are at an almost unprecedented low, and there is a real danger that we could see a further downturn?

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to be concerned about the lending figures out there in the economy, and I hope to have more to say on that in the Budget.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): I thank the Chancellor for his statement and the early advance sight of it. That is different from what happened under the previous Government, when such statements tended to come in very late indeed.

There is no doubt that the OBR forecasts show that the previous growth forecasts were too high and the deficit forecast, which is now £155 billion, was also too high. Will the Chancellor reflect that that is not simply a green light to tax and cut more, but that it demonstrates the imperative for sustained and sustainable above-trend growth, which is the real solution to tackling the structural deficit?

Mr Osborne: I thank the hon. Gentleman for thanking me for the early sight of the statement—we are trying to improve on things in the Chancellor's office.

My point to the hon. Gentleman is that the threat to the United Kingdom at the moment is, in part, our very large budget deficit. Indeed, the Governor of the Bank of England identified it as the single greatest economic challenge that we face. Whether we are Scots or English, and wherever we live in the UK, we must deal with that deficit. I would welcome engagement with the Scottish Government in moving forward and identifying sensible savings, so that we can reduce the budget deficit and give our country and future generations a bright future.

Dr John Pugh (Southport) (LD): May I welcome you to your role, Mr Deputy Speaker?

According to the House of Commons Library, the Treasury has, in the past 10 years, been at least as good at accurately forecasting growth as independent forecasters. The background work on the new projections has actually been done by a secretariat provided by the Treasury, and according to Sir Alan, the changes are

"within the normal range of uncertainty".

Therefore, in all honesty, ought we to regard the new independent forecast as a simple downgrade of Treasury forecasts, and avoid unnecessary point scoring on what is a matter for the whole nation?

Mr Osborne: I am always against unnecessary point scoring. I say this to my hon. Friend: I think the new process is a big departure in how Budgets are put together. It is worth reflecting for a moment on what I did in this statement. I have read out what would normally be the first part of the Budget. Everyone now knows the forecasts and the assumptions behind them. He says that the forecasts were produced with the help of Treasury people, but Sir Alan Budd is an enormously respected independent person, and I do not think his independence can be questioned. We now have a set of accurate national accounts. Indeed, when the OBR is on a statutory footing, I want it to do more work on the true state of the national accounts, with regard to private finance initiative liabilities and the like. The big difference is that I must now fit the Budget to the figures, rather than fit the figures to the Budget.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome you to the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Page 11 of the OBR forecast has an illuminating table about the contribution that various elements of spending—in this case, Government investment—make to GDP growth. For 2011, it shows a potential minus 19% effect in one year. Will the Chancellor confirm that his Budget and the spending review will not worsen that contribution to GDP, and will the OBR report on an analysis of the Budget and the spending review in terms of those components shortly after they take place?

Mr Osborne: I will set out measures in the Budget, and the hon. Gentleman will have to wait for that. He highlights the point that I was making—that the forecast is based on the plans inherited from the previous Government. It identifies huge spending cuts, but they never told us where those cuts would fall. I am sure that he wants a future in the Labour party, so perhaps he can take a lead over some of the leadership contenders and tell us what those cuts would be.

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend support the work of the OBR in assessing offsheet balance liabilities, including such things as PFI and unfunded public sector pension liabilities? I hope that he will recognise that it is important that we put all the debts that Labour has generated over the years on the balance sheet once and for all so we know how we can pay for them.

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is right. On page 58 of the report, Sir Alan and the fellow members of his committee set out some of the liabilities that need to be factored into longer-term fiscal forecasts, which include an ageing population, unfunded public service pension liabilities and the PFI contracts. They point out that some £43 billion of PFI contracts are off the national balance sheet.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): In the real world of the real economy, last Friday I met a dozen world-class machine tool manufacturers at their annual exhibition in Birmingham. They were unanimous in their view that the Government were right to borrow to invest in the economy to boost it and their order books. Are they wrong?

Mr Osborne: If they are similar to the machine tool manufacturers I have met in Birmingham in recent months, they are also very concerned about the size of the budget deficit and that, unless we get a grip on it, there will be an ever higher spiral of tax rises and interest rate increases that would do enormous damage to them and to the people whom they employ.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): I note that the former Chief Secretary who left that infamous note for his successors is in his place. Surely the establishment of the OBR heralds a transparency and openness that we have not seen before, and will mean that such a note could never be left again.

Mr Osborne: It would probably have to be published, if it were—*[Interruption.]* Well, just the contents.

As I noted from the remarks of the shadow Chancellor, it is interesting that we have not actually heard from the Labour party about whether it supports an independent OBR. It opposed that when in government—

Mr Darling *indicated dissent.*

Mr Osborne: It was repeatedly opposed by Treasury Ministers when I proposed it. Indeed, one of the most vocal and eloquent opponents was the shadow Education Secretary—I know that the shadow Chancellor has not always got on with him—who put the arguments on why Labour was opposed. If the Labour party wants to change its mind, we are all ears.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): What has the OBR had to say about predictions of levels of unemployment and how they differ from those predicted in the March Budget?

Mr Osborne: For the first time, the OBR has published five-year projections of unemployment and employment. The projection for the coming year, for example, is that employment will fall and unemployment will rise—based, of course, on the pre-Budget measures.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): In Dover and Deal, people tell me time and again that they want more jobs, more money and more economic growth, so it is a real shock to come to the House and see the table in today's report showing that economic growth has been revised downwards, by between 0.5% and 1%. How can that have happened in the three short months since the Budget? Were the Budget numbers fiddled? What has been going on?

Mr Osborne: To be frank, my hon. Friend's question is one that he needs to address to the shadow Chancellor when there is an opportunity.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): I welcome the establishment of the Office for Budget Responsibility and the increased transparency that it brings. However, the point that today's document makes most clearly is that the economic recovery is still fragile. The Chancellor makes interesting points about the structural deficit, but does he agree that the structural deficit depends also on the level of economic growth? What are he and his Government doing to lift the economic growth rate, when there is so little about, given that the future jobs fund, the regional development agencies, and support for industry and universities are all being scrapped?

Mr Osborne: We are providing support to the economy, first, by providing a transparent account that commands international confidence, and secondly, by committing to a clear plan to reduce the budget deficit and taking in-year measures that have commanded international confidence. That has led to a reduction in market interest rates for this country and given enormous support to the economy.

The final point that I would make to the hon. Lady is this. Let us not forget the situation that we inherited: the largest budget deficit in the developed world; rising unemployment; industry that had been brought to its knees; business investment that had collapsed. That is the situation that we are trying to recover from.

Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Will the Chancellor consider asking the Office for Budget Responsibility to think about tax cuts to help economic growth, thereby bringing our budgetary system into a better situation?

Mr Osborne: Sir Alan will give evidence to the Treasury Committee when it is formed, but one of the things that the Office for Budget Responsibility will do is cost Budget measures, including the impact of tax and spending changes. That will revolutionise how Budgets are put together, as well as how the House can scrutinise them, because hon. Members will be able to see that the costings are independently verified, rather than being ones that the Chancellor has signed off.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): I, too, welcome the greater transparency that today's report involves. It shows us that the recovery is genuinely fragile. When I spoke just last week to a company in my constituency in one of the sectors in which Britain leads the world—bio-pharmaceuticals—I was told that manufacturing investment had been moved to countries that were investing publicly in their companies, including from Britain, where it was not possible to secure such investments. How will the Chancellor's Government ensure that such disinvestment, caused by a lack of public support, does not continue to create more unemployment and a weaker recovery for Britain?

Mr Osborne: First, let me thank the hon. Lady for welcoming the creation of the Office for Budget Responsibility—I should have thanked the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) for that as well. The change is a genuinely revolutionary step forward in the making of Budgets that fits with a wider agenda of trying to bring more transparency to the way that the Government do their business. On the point about investment, the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) is right to point out that there was a fairly dramatic fall in investment under the Government whom she supported, but I would say this: the sustainable answer to the problem is a strong private sector recovery, and that is what we all have to work towards.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the real significance of today's independent report is the revelation of the extent of the structural deficit, with debt interest alone forecast to rise to £67 billion, strangling growth and enterprise, and at the same time destroying new Labour's core claim to be the party of economic competence?

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is right—*[Interruption.]* I see one of the leadership contenders barracking from the Opposition Benches. I do not know whether the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) wrote the speech for the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown) in which he told the Labour party conference in 1996:

"Losing control of public spending doesn't help the poor".

That is one area in which I agree with the former Prime Minister.

Mr Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that a major contributor to the reduction in the growth forecasts for next year is the increasingly gloomy situation developing in Europe? Is he at all concerned about the competitive austerity that is breaking out across Europe? Is he also concerned that, if he goes ahead with the programme that he is outlining, we might face a double-dip recession as a consequence?

Mr Osborne: I suspect that everyone in the House is concerned about the situation in the eurozone, but let us be clear what has brought that about. It is a result of market concern about the sustainability of public finances in eurozone countries such as Greece. Those countries are having to take action to reassure markets and therefore keep their interest rates lower. I think that interest rates in Greece rose to more than 10% higher than those of other eurozone countries at one point. That is what happens to countries that do not get a grip on their public finances, and I want to ensure that no question mark is ever put against the name of the United Kingdom.

Richard Harrington (Watford) (Con): The complacency of the former Chancellor of the Exchequer about the small reduction in the expected budget deficit is rather like my saying that I am losing weight because I missed breakfast. We want clear, credible plans to deal with the budget deficit, and we need to know what they are as soon as possible.

Mr Osborne: I suggest to my hon. Friend that he turns up here next Tuesday.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): May I first welcome you to your new post, Mr Deputy Speaker? Will the Chancellor confirm that budgetary policy will remain the responsibility of the Government, who will be fully responsible to Parliament in this Chamber, and that it will not be dictated by the European Union or any of its institutions?

Mr Osborne: Before I answer the hon. Gentleman, I, too, should welcome you to the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] My several visits to Chorley during the general election seem only to have helped you to return to this place. It is good to see you here in the Chair.

In answer to the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), of course I want the elected British Government and the elected House of Commons to have complete control over the tax and spending decisions that affect our country. One way of doing that is to ensure that we never give rise to market concerns about our ability as a country to live within our means. That is the way to retain national sovereignty. We have seen what happens when other countries lose that sovereignty to the markets.

The hon. Gentleman asked specifically about the European Union, and I shall make two observations about that. First, the Budget this year and in all future years will of course be presented first to the House of Commons before being presented to anyone else. Secondly, I know that he will be interested in this and, before those in my party who are interested in these subjects get hold of this fact, I should let the House know that, under the deal negotiated by the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath and the other former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, the British contributions to the EU budget are set to rise from £3 billion in 2008 to £10.3 billion in 2014.

Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con): My constituents, like millions of people up and down the country, are very concerned about the direction of mortgage interest rates. Does my right hon. Friend agree that unprecedented transparency in our national finances of this kind will increase our credibility in the global financial markets and help to keep interest rates lower for longer?

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and it is worth reminding ourselves that the OBR June 2010 pre-Budget report is based not only on the previous Government's tax and spending measures and decisions, but partly on the lower interest rates earned by the current Government in the decisions and announcements we have made over the previous month or so. That is why Sir Alan says in his forward that

"the fiscal path assumed"

by the previous Government

"would lead to higher interest rates and so lower economic activity".

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Lab): Are cuts this year a matter of a small-state ideology or in our economic interests?

Mr Osborne: They are, above all, in our economic interests because of the mess left to us by the previous Government.

Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend had any conversations about these measures with other international financial managers like himself, and if so, what has been the response?

Mr Osborne: I know that my hon. Friend takes a keen interest in these matters, so she will have seen the G20 communiqué signed in South Korea that says:

"Those countries with serious fiscal challenges need to accelerate the pace of consolidation. We welcome the recent announcements by some countries to reduce their deficits in 2010 and strengthen their fiscal frameworks and institutions."

That is, of course, precisely what the OBR does.

Mr George Mudie (Leeds East) (Lab): Has the Chancellor seriously come to this House and told us he does not have any concerns or see any danger of high unemployment or damage to the economy in taking a short-term approach to clearing the structural deficit?

Mr Osborne: We have demonstrated that the OBR, alongside some of the other things we have done, is a commitment to the long-term sustainability of the British public finances, and I remind the hon. Gentleman of the following words of the Governor of the Bank of England:

"The most important thing now is for the new Government to deal with the challenge of the fiscal deficit. It is the single most pressing problem facing the United Kingdom".

Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con): One of the consequences of the previous Chancellor playing fantasy forecasts with this country's growth projections is that the men and women of my constituency—and, I am sure, of elsewhere—feel they have been treated with contempt and as mere collateral damage of an election campaign. It is vital that we restore these people's trust and confidence in Treasury reporting; it is, after all, they who are going to put this country back on its feet again. What will this Treasury team do to support that?

Mr Osborne: First, I will tell the Prime Minister what I am up to, because another thing that emerged over the weekend was that the former Chancellor of the Exchequer hid the numbers not only from the rest of the country, but from his own Prime Minister.

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): May I begin by congratulating you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your elevation to your new role? Will the Chancellor explain why he is obsessed with pursuing economic policies that failed in the 1930s, failed in the 1980s and failed in the 1990s?

Mr Osborne: The most obvious set of failed economic policies is that pursued by the Labour party.

Gavin Barwell (Croydon Central) (Con): If I heard my right hon. Friend correctly, the policies of the previous Administration will lead to us spending an incredible £67 billion on debt interest alone by the end of this Parliament. In the interests of transparency, may I encourage him to put that number in context for the wider electorate, so that we know the amount per household in relation to the amounts we spend on our NHS and school system?

Mr Osborne: That is an excellent idea. I will ensure that that information is circulated not only to Government Members, but to Opposition Members as well.

Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill

4.58 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Chris Huhne): I welcome you to your position, Mr Deputy Speaker. The House will wish to join me in expressing our deepest sympathy to those bereaved or injured in the explosion in the gulf of Mexico on 20 April, and to all the individuals and communities affected by spilling oil or fearing that they will be affected by it over the days and weeks to come. Our thoughts must be, first, with them.

On 20 April, an explosion and subsequent fire on board a drilling rig operated by Transocean under contract to BP in the gulf of Mexico tragically killed 11 workers. On 22 April, the rig sank. On the sea bed, 1,600 metres below, substantial quantities of oil were leaking into the ocean—the blow-out preventer, which should have sealed the leak, failed. The causes of the accident are now subject to a US presidential commission of inquiry, and to civil and criminal investigation.

There has never been such a large leak of oil so deep in the sea. Attempts by BP, under the direction of the US authorities, to seal the leak were not successful. The company then pursued a strategy of capturing as much oil as possible, and in recent days more than 15,000 barrels a day of oil have been recovered. However, it is also thought that the leak is worse than previously believed. The US Government's estimate of the flow of the leak is now 35,000 to 40,000 barrels per day. BP hopes to be able to increase significantly the amount of oil that it is capturing, but a very large quantity of oil continues to be released into the sea. Moreover, the leak will not be fully staunched until August at the earliest, when the first relief well, which BP is already drilling, should enable the original well to be plugged.

An enormous operation is also taking place to address the environmental impact of oil that is already in the water. Working under Admiral Thad Allen of the US Coast Guard, more than 2,000 boats have been involved, skimming the water and using dispersant chemicals. Thousands of workers and volunteers onshore are removing oil and maintaining coastal defences. The House will wish to join me in paying tribute to those involved in that work.

We understand and sympathise with the US Government's frustration that oil continues to leak at the rate that it does. In order for us to appreciate the scale of this environmental disaster, I should point out that each week a quantity of oil equivalent to the total spillage from the Exxon Valdez is escaping into the gulf of Mexico. The US Administration have said that BP is doing everything asked of it in the effort to combat the spill. We, of course, look to the company to continue in that, and we will do everything we can to help. The key priority must be stopping the environmental damage. In their telephone conversation at the weekend, President Obama reassured the Prime Minister that he has no interest in undermining BP's value and that frustrations in America have nothing to do with national identity.

Hon. Members will remember that in 1988 the Piper Alpha rig in the North sea exploded, with 167 fatalities. Following that disaster, our regulatory regime was significantly tightened, and we split the functions of licensing and health and safety in the UK. The US has announced that, in future, separate organisations will deal with those functions in the US, and we hope that we have some experience to offer of building and operating such a system. Officials from my Department and from the Health and Safety Executive have been discussing that with their US counterparts.

It is my responsibility to make sure that the oil and gas industry maintains the highest possible standards in UK waters, and I have had an urgent review undertaken. It is clear that our safety and environmental regulatory regime is already among the most robust in the world, and the industry's record in the North sea is strong. However, as exploration begins in deeper waters west of Shetland, we must be vigilant. Initial steps are already under way, including a doubling of the Department's annual environmental inspections of drilling rigs. I will also review our new and existing procedures as soon as detailed analysis of the factors that caused the incident in the gulf of Mexico is available. That will build upon the work already begun by the newly-formed Oil Spill Prevention and Response Advisory Group. Given the importance of global deep-water production during our transition to a low-carbon economy, I will also ensure that lessons and practice are shared with relevant regulators and operating companies.

I shall now discuss the position of BP. It is hugely regrettable that the company's technical efforts to stop the spill have, to date, been only partially successful, but I acknowledge the company for its strong public commitment to stand by its obligations, to halt the spill and to provide remedy and payment of all legitimate claims. As BP's chairman has said, these are critical tasks for BP, and it must complete them in order to rebuild trust in the company as a long-term member of the business community in the United States, the United Kingdom and around the world.

BP remains a strong company. Although its share price has fallen sharply since April, it has the financial resources to put right the damage. It has exceptionally strong cash flow, and it will continue to be a major employer and a vital investor here and in the United States. In many ways, BP is effectively an Anglo-American company with 39% of its shares being owned in the US, against 40% in the UK.

There has been much speculation in the press about the impact on UK pension funds and about whether the company will pay a quarterly dividend. That is entirely a matter for BP's directors, who will no doubt weigh all the factors and make a recommendation to their shareholders that is in their best interests, which of course include the best interests of many UK pension funds. Many citizens have real and legitimate worries about their pensions, but I would like to reassure the House not only that BP is financially sound, but that pension funds that hold BP shares generally hold a very diverse portfolio of assets and that their exposure to a single company, even a company as economically important as BP, is limited.

In concluding my statement, I wish again to express the Government's profound sympathy to those in the US affected by this accident and its aftermath. The priority must be to address the environmental consequences of the spill, and our concentration is on practical measures that can help with that. The disaster is a stark reminder of the environmental dangers of oil and gas production in ever-more difficult areas. Coupled with the impact of

[Chris Huhne]

high-carbon consumption, it highlights yet again the importance of improving the energy efficiency of our economy and the expansion of low-carbon technologies. We must and will learn the lessons of these terrible events. I commend the statement to the House.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): May I start by thanking the Secretary of State for the advance notice of his statement and for keeping the House informed of developments regarding the gulf oil spill? Let me join him in expressing deep sorrow for the 11 people who died in the accident and deep sympathy to their families. As he said, it is a reminder of the dangers that come with life in the offshore oil industry. We saw that ourselves last year with the tragic helicopter accident in the North sea. We should never forget the people who have lost their lives in this accident.

May I join the Secretary of State in expressing deep concern about the environmental impacts of the oil spill, which he summarised in his statement? I believe it is in the interests of the environment as well as the employees, shareholders and pension fund investors of BP that there should be a clear and co-ordinated response from the Governments of Britain and the United States. In that context, I want to ask him five specific questions arising from his statement. First, on the private sector companies involved in this accident, does he agree that all the companies involved in the Deepwater Horizon project—Halliburton, Transocean, Cameron and BP—should be subject to investigation, and that finger-pointing at BP in particular is not helpful?

Secondly, on regulation, does the Secretary of State agree that any process of learning lessons needs to look not just at the actions of private companies, but at the regulator—the United States' Minerals Management Service—and at the general level of regulatory standards in place in the US and around the world for deep-water drilling? Will he also comment on his specific understanding—I appreciate that things are at an early stage—of the level of regulation in the US compared with that in the UK?

Thirdly, in terms of the implications for Britain, I welcome what the Secretary of State said about the licensing of drilling in deeper waters in the UK, including west of Shetland. Does he agree that it is essential to look at any lessons learned before beginning that deeper-water drilling?

Fourthly, and very importantly for the long-term future, does the Secretary of State agree that the central lesson of Deepwater Horizon is that we cannot, as a world, simply dig deeper and deeper for oil, plundering the world's natural resources? The opportunity should be seized on both sides of the Atlantic by the Prime Minister and the President, in a way that has not so far happened, to send a louder and clearer message about the need to make the transition to a post-oil economy. It will take decades, but the transition needs to start all around the world.

Fifthly, in the same context, does the Secretary of State agree that, after the tragedy of Deepwater, the best thing that could happen is a renewed push towards low carbon and clean energy around the world, with Europe moving to a 30% emissions reduction, America passing a climate and energy Bill and the securing of an international treaty either at Cancun or as soon as possible afterwards? Does he also agree that domestically we need to play our part? That means maintaining industrial policy support for the low-carbon transition. Looking ahead to his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget next week, if we are to make the low-carbon transition ourselves, and send out a clear signal, it is important that the investments promised by the previous Government to Sheffield Forgemasters and Ford, and for offshore wind, go ahead as soon as possible.

The gulf oil spill is an environmental wake-up call for the world. Just as the banking crisis changed the rules of the game for financial services, so this disaster must change the rules of the game across the world for energy policy. That requires strong leadership—including being tough with our allies—in defending British interests, in pushing the United States for a Bill on climate change and in charting a course towards the low-carbon transition. If the Government provide that strong leadership for BP employees, pension fundholders and our environment, we will of course support them.

Chris Huhne: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, not least for the manner in which he has approached this matter. There is not a lot of difference in our approaches. We have seen some examples of what can happen if people attempt to flam up the rhetoric rather than dealing with the issues in a measured way.

The right hon. Gentleman is clearly absolutely correct to say that BP was involved with other partners in Deepwater Horizon. BP's interest is 65%. In addition, the subcontracted rig was from Transocean, which is a well known and respected United States company, and was using technology produced in the United States. I understand that the blow-out preventer was produced by Cameron International to American petroleum industry standards.

All that said, it is absolutely crucial to let the full investigation take its course. We simply do not know exactly what the events were on Deepwater Horizon, not least because, tragically, so many of the people who could have told us what happened are no longer alive. We need a proper process of investigation if we are to learn the lessons.

I have already said something about the difference in the regulatory regime between us and the United States. The most important feature is the decision we took after the Piper Alpha disaster to separate licensing and operational regulation from the health and safety side, but that is certainly not the only lesson that will be learned from this disaster. When we have a clearer understanding of exactly what went on, I am sure that both technical and regulatory responses will be required. In the interim, we have taken the step of improving inspections.

Precisely because we have already announced an increased number of inspections, I do not believe it would be appropriate to stop the drilling west of Shetland. Our regime has been shown to be robust, but we need to go on learning the lessons.

On the right hon. Gentleman's final point, I very much agree that we need to accelerate the move towards a low-carbon economy. Whatever the risks involved with, for example, offshore wind, onshore wind, tidal stream or indeed a future generation of wave technology,

they are not in the same order of magnitude as the sort of risks that we are clearly running by drilling in increasingly hostile environments around the world, as we attempt to find the last hydrocarbons. That message is important. This is an environmental wake-up call. Hydrocarbons—oil and gas—do and will play a crucial part in our transition. We know from our economic history that we cannot suddenly switch off steam power, for example, and move to electricity—these things take time—but it is certainly an important warning to us that there is no time to lose in trying to make that transition as quickly as possible.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for the tone in which he answered the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), which will give reassurance that we are operating in two different environments. As someone who represents a constituency that hosts BP's North sea operational headquarters and more oil and gas-related jobs than any other constituency in the UK, may I say that we need to recognise that these mistakes in a very difficult environment are the responsibility of the whole industry, which will have to solve them in partnership with the regulatory authorities? The 25 billion barrels of oil and gas still to be got out of the North sea need to be got out, but we must ensure that that is done in circumstances where health and safety, the environment and partnership technology all work together.

Chris Huhne: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for the question. He is absolutely right. This industry is crucial for us, and it is in everyone's interest, not least the people who work and invest in the industry, that the standards of environmental safety and health and safety should be as high as we can possibly make them. I can assure him that we intend to make that the case.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen South) (Lab): At one stage last week, I had great fear that we were talking ourselves into a second crisis that would have undermined BP and, indeed, the whole offshore oil and gas industry, but I am glad that things seem to have calmed down over the weekend. Partly to restore faith, BP and its partners must know what they need to do to stem the flow of oil and what their responsibility is with regard to the clean-up, and understand and be able to quantify just how much it will cost to make the reparations that are obviously needed for those on the shore whose livelihoods have been devastated.

Chris Huhne: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. I spoke yesterday to BP chief executive Tony Hayward, and I spoke this morning to another board member, Iain Conn. Until those conversations took place, I had not realised the extent of the co-operative effort across the industry in attempting to find a technical solution. Frankly, it is in the interests of all the oil and gas companies that operate in the gulf of Mexico and, indeed, more widely to ensure that they can reassure their publics and the people who are affected in Louisiana and the other coastal states that there are genuine technical solutions. That is one of the encouraging signs of what is now going on.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I reinforce the Secretary of State's welcome recognition of the human tragedy involved in this disaster. This tragedy has a human face as well as an environmental one. Although the President was reassuring us that he did not intentionally want to affect BP's finances, he may have unintentionally done so. If we can ensure effective co-operation across countries to make sure that the focus is on finding a solution to the problem, that would be most welcome. Specifically, for the north-east of Scotland, his reassurance on the safety regime that applies to the North sea is most welcome—in particular, that our blow-out preventers are subject to rigorous testing and inspection to ensure that such an incident could not happen here.

Chris Huhne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to that. In fact, both in our regime and in the United States regime, blow-out preventers are checked regularly. One of the mysteries appears to be the fact that the blow-out preventer was checked within two weeks of the disaster and still failed. Clearly, that is one of the things that the investigation must get to the bottom of. One of the things that we will need to learn about operating at such depths and pressures is whether yet further fail-safe mechanisms need to be built into the blow-out preventers, and we will certainly look at that. He is also absolutely right to draw attention to the human tragedy and, indeed, the importance of maintaining safety for all those who work in the industry.

Mr Frank Doran (Aberdeen North) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement, particularly the extra resources for technical investigations, but it is not only the technology that is important. BP has identified that three of the seven causes of the spill that it is aware of so far were the result of people ignoring warning signs. That tends to happen when people are badly trained, inexperienced or afraid to challenge their superiors, and it is one of the key lessons that we learned from the Piper Alpha tragedy. Is the Secretary of State aware that over the past few years we have made huge progress in the North sea in involving workers? There are three trade union representatives on the new body that has been set up to examine the spill, which is extremely important. However, there is a major problem in the drilling industry, which has—how shall I put it?—an outdated attitude to employment relations. Those employers include Transocean, which is involved in this issue. Until the problem of worker involvement in the drilling industry in the North sea is sorted out, we will continue to have problems.

Chris Huhne: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I am certainly happy to look at the issues that he raises. It is important to have trade union oversight of these matters in cases where the companies are unionised; it provides another perspective and a guarantee to other employees that safety will be given the attention that it deserves.

Duncan Hames (Chippenham) (LD): As with Railtrack and the Hatfield rail tragedy, is not a critical lesson from the explosion on this rig that companies who outsource environmental and safety-critical processes fail to take their responsibilities seriously when it really counts—before disaster strikes? Railtrack lost its licence to operate. What discussion will my right hon. Friend's Department have with businesses in the energy sector to prompt them to review their corporate governance and get a grip on their direct environmental responsibilities, instead of simply spouting the rhetoric of corporate social responsibility?

Chris Huhne: I thank my hon. Friend for that acute and well directed question. There is an issue about the extent of outsourcing, which has certainly gone on apace in the oil and gas industry; for example, in subcontracting to companies such as Transocean. That may be one of the lessons that comes out of the inquiry. However, there is another side to the issue: the oil majors can argue that the level of expertise of a company such as Transocean may be higher than their own, precisely because it is operating so many rigs and contracting to so many oil majors. That will clearly be an issue for the investigation. All the big oil companies will be much more aware of the potential reputational damage that can be inflicted by an environmental disaster of this kind. I think that they will take that on board, and I hope that it will provide an additional incentive to make sure that corporate governance, including its ethical dimension, is strengthened.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Secretary of State's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Mr Doran). I draw his attention to a helpful written answer from the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, the hon. Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry), on 7 June, in which he revealed that there are some 10 Transocean rigs registered and operating in UK waters. Two are registered in the Marshall Islands, two in Panama, three in Liberia and two in Vanuatu. Given the obvious public concern about where they are registered, has the Secretary of State considered ordering an immediate review of the safety of those rigs, and if not, why not?

Chris Huhne: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. That is precisely why, when we conducted the urgent review of our regime, we thought it appropriate to increase immediately the number of environmental inspectors who can go on to rigs and ensure that the rules and regulations that are set on safety, including environmental safety, are properly applied. That is exactly what we have done. Frankly, much of the world's shipping is registered in what often seem to be exotic jurisdictions, but the key point surely has to be that anybody operating in UK waters, whatever the basis of the registration, should operate to UK standards and must be properly inspected, and we will not take any risks. That inspection is under way, and there is an increase in the pace of inspection as I speak.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. On a more positive note, has he, or a senior colleague of his, considered a visit to the area in question in the United States, to show a bit of good will, and to try to take the heat out of the situation between the United States and us?

Chris Huhne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his suggestion. I have to say that some of the reporting back that I have heard from the United States suggests that another British voice turning up on television screens might not, at this stage of the game, have quite the effect that he suggests. As he has probably seen in the press, BP's efforts are now being directed by one of its American executive directors. We do not want any element of national identity to creep into the issue. BP is, as I have said, effectively an Anglo-American company. It was, after all, previously BP Amoco, and Amoco was an American oil company. It is important that any television viewer in the United States realises that BP will go on playing a very important part in the economy of the US, and the UK, for many years to come.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Congratulations to you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for bringing some calmness to the rather choppy waters of the last week. On the conversation that took place between the Prime Minister of this country and the President of the United States, was there any recognition, on the American side of the conversation, that deep-water drilling is partially a direct result of America's insatiable demand for more and more oil, or that the commentary against BP was doing intolerable damage to a company here, and was grossly unfair? Was there recognition that, in the parlance of Northern Ireland, the Americans should wind their neck in and recognise that such comments are doing damage to our companies?

Chris Huhne: The hon. Gentleman has to understand what would happen in this country if there were an oil spill off the coast of Northern Ireland on the scale of that at Deepwater Horizon. He would be among the first to insist that we did everything that we could to stop it. It would be an absolutely enormous environmental disaster. Let me put the scale of the oil spill in some sort of perspective. I tried a comparison with Exxon Valdez, but we might think back to our experience with Piper Alpha. The situation was not exactly the same, because the problem was largely a gas well, but in Piper Alpha's case, we were looking at 200 barrels of oil escaping a day. In the case of Deepwater Horizon, the latest estimate is 40,000 to 50,000 barrels a day. Given the sheer scale of the problem, we fellow politicians have to understand what our reaction would be if that were going on in our waters.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): May I press the Secretary of State for a fuller answer to the last question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) on investment in low-carbon technologies? Like my right hon. Friend, I welcome the Secretary of State's statement of the importance of the expansion of low-carbon technologies, but that needs to be matched by practical action, particularly—in the context of Sheffield—by ending the uncertainty around the financial support for Sheffield Forgemasters. Does the Secretary of State support me in wishing to see a speedy end to that uncertainty and confirmation of that financial support?

Chris Huhne: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. When I was studying politics, philosophy and economics at Oxford somewhat before the hon. Gentleman, I was told that socialism involved the language of priorities. On the basis of the public expenditure commitments undertaken by the Government in the past six months, including in respect of Sheffield Forgemasters, I do not recognise a Government who were making choices about hard-earned taxpayers' cash. As we have just heard from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Treasury had pencilled in £44 billion worth of cuts without finding a single one. It is inevitable that, having inherited the legacy that we have and the

scale of the Budget deficit, this Government have to review our priorities and identify crucial projects to go ahead with and those that are less important. That is a process that we continue to undertake.

Mr Michael Meacher (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): Given that we are at or very near peak oil annual capacity, that conventional oil will increasingly be available only from very deep sites that are extremely risky such as the gulf of Mexico, and that unconventional oil such as Canadian tar sands involves unacceptable economic and climate change costs, what plans does the Secretary of State have to move the process forward, as I am sure he wants to do, to diminish oil consumption drastically before there is another horrendous catastrophe or the price of oil spikes uncontrollably?

Chris Huhne: I thank the right hon. Gentleman, who has a long and honourable record of interest in these issues. We share many instincts in our approach to them. We will present a series of proposals over the next year, which will attempt to accelerate the process of moving to a low-carbon economy. For my Department, the centrepiece of the Queen's Speech is the energy saving Bill, which will attempt to put forward a comprehensive solution for retro-fitting in our existing housing stock. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, saving energy is by far the most low-cost means of closing the gap as regards our energy use and energy production. We also intend to accelerate the production of low-carbon sources of energy, including renewables, on which we will introduce measures. This is a time of transition, and nothing can be done overnight. We are talking about enormous investments that cannot suddenly be switched off; others cannot be suddenly switched on. We need a clear route map to a low-carbon economy which reduces our carbon emissions by the amount called for by the Climate Change Act 2008—80%—and we intend to make sure that we have a credible route for getting there.

Point of Order

5.32 pm

Mr Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Yesterday various ministerial statements were made to the media about the early departure of the Chief of the Defence Staff. Many of us believe that it would have been far better for a statement to be made to the House first. May I ask you to use your good offices to make representations to the Government to see whether that would have been more appropriate?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): The hon. Gentleman has raised the point, and rightly so. The Speaker was not notified of such a request. I dare say it will now have been taken on board.

UK Policy on the Middle East

5.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Alistair Burt): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of UK policy on the middle east.

May I say, Mr Deputy Speaker, as a north-west chum of years past, that it is a pleasure to see you in the Chair.

As the Minister responsible for the middle east, it is an enormous privilege for me to open this general debate. It is a pleasure also to welcome the shadow spokesman, the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis). We, too, go back a long way to our time together in Bury, and we have always enjoyed the warmest of relationships, as I am sure we will again. I have already had the benefit of his advice, as he recently held my post, and I look forward to his contribution.

Let me say a little about housekeeping for the debate. Those of us who have been in the House for some time know that in short debates the risk is that Front Benchers occupy a great deal of the time. I will do my best to confine scripted remarks to about 15 minutes. I will take a handful of interventions, but try to conclude within 20 minutes or so in order to give maximum time for Back-Bench contributions. That will mean a relatively short winding-up speech, with some written replies to colleagues. It is a short debate and, in deference to the Speaker's request, we want to try to ensure that Front Benchers are not too heavily involved. I hope the House will appreciate that. If I am not able to go into everything in as much as detail as Members would like, and if they want to pursue the subject of Gaza, for example, I commend to them the debate on that issue tomorrow in Westminster Hall. I also intend to meet regularly, on formal and informal bases, colleagues who have an interest in the middle east, as I know many do. With that bit of housekeeping out the way, I shall move on.

The middle east is a topic of great concern to many hon. Members and of great importance to the security, economic and political interests of the United Kingdom. However, the middle east is more; it is an area rich in culture, heritage, history, faith and religion, in which Members have a wonderful opportunity to engage. The world sometimes spends rather too much time on the region's conflicts and concerns, instead of on the great joys, history and cultural gifts that it has given. The Government intend to ensure that we are conscious of the opportunities and great heritage that the middle east brings to the world, as well as spending time dealing with the inevitable human problems that have been centred on the area for so long.

The Foreign Secretary recently said:

"It is one of the strengths of this country that a strong thread of bipartisanship runs through large areas of foreign policy."—[*Official Report*, 26 May 2010; Vol. 510, c. 174.]

That is particularly true of the middle east, and quite rightly, given its international importance. That is why this Government will pursue active partnerships with the people and countries of the middle east to achieve security, prosperity and peace for Britain and for the peoples of the region.

Let me spell out in simple terms, but in no particular order, the Government's aims and objectives for the middle east. We will work to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. The only long-term solution to the conflict is a secure Israel living alongside a sovereign and viable Palestinian state, with Jerusalem the future capital of both states, and with a fair settlement for refugees. We will continue to press for progress, working with the United States and through the European Union. We will also continue working with our international partners to secure changes that help lift Gaza's closure. Let the House be in no doubt: we wish to engage with as much energy as we can in the middle east peace process, because we recognise its huge importance to so many other issues that focus on the region and affect the world.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Alistair Burt: The first voice that I heard was that of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron).

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): In congratulating my hon. Friend on his appointment, I refer him to the proverb, "To every man with a hammer, the problem always seems a nail." Will he do what he can, and get his Department on board, to try to impress on the Israelis the fact that Hamas is more than just a terrorist organisation? It is an idea—a frustration—borne out of many disillusioned and disfranchised Palestinians, and the best way of defeating an idea is not by using force but by coming up with a better idea, such as an equitable, two-state solution.

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend makes a point that almost immediately illustrates the complexity of the area. Whatever Hamas might be as an expression of a movement, it also represents a repressive, authoritarian force which has had a grip on Gaza for too long and held Gilad Shalit unfairly as a hostage for too long. In illustrating that point, I note the clear sense that there must be some movement in the middle east peace process, involving all parties and, inevitably, the slow steps towards progress which invite compromise. Of that, we wish to see more in the future. The Government's position on dealing with Hamas remains the same as the previous Government's, requiring as it does an adherence to Quartet principles before it can move. I do not see any change in that position.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab) *rose—*

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD) *rose—*

Alistair Burt: I shall give way, first, to the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry).

Emily Thornberry: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the proposed Israeli inquiry into the terrible events of 31 May will be "credible, rigorous and impartial"? What discussions have the Government had with the Americans on that issue?

Alistair Burt: I thank the hon. Lady for her inquiry. We have had a lot of conversations, both with the Americans and the Israeli Government. We are keen proponents of the United Nations Security Council

resolution, which was adopted quickly and called for exactly what the hon. Lady asked about—an independent and impartial inquiry. The international element is necessary to ensure credibility. At present, we believe that there is no reason why the inquiry announced by Israel today, with the external component that includes Lord Trimble, should not meet the requirements of the world to provide the answers necessary to the inquiry. That is an important standard, to which we will hold.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab) *rose—*

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab) *rose—*

Jo Swinson *rose—*

Alistair Burt: I shall take only one more intervention at this stage, then I shall make progress; otherwise, the remarks that I made at the beginning will be completely otiose. I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson).

Jo Swinson: I thank the Minister for giving way and welcome what he has said about support for a two-state solution and involving our international partners. No matter what we do as the UK, it is vital that the US should also be involved in trying to unlock the peace process, which seems to have ground to a halt. Can the Minister tell us whether that was one of the issues discussed by the Prime Minister and President Obama on the telephone and whether there will be a renewal in US interest in trying to kick-start the peace process?

Alistair Burt: We very much welcome the kick-start that the proximity talks pointed to a few months ago. President Obama made it clear that a revitalisation of the peace process was one of his key objectives. The recent tragic incident in Gaza has highlighted once again the importance of getting things moving—not only in that area, but in respect of the peace process as a whole. My hon. Friend can be assured that the Prime Minister and the President think as one on that issue.

I shall make some progress. We will work with all our friends and partners across the region to ensure that they are free from terrorism and instability which is a direct threat to their security. We will take a broader approach to our relations with north Africa and the Gulf, supporting civil society and business links and aiming to be the partner of choice for commercial and investment links. We currently export £15 billion-worth of goods and services to the region annually, offering the best of British expertise, innovation and creativity to support the massive programmes of development under way.

We will remain engaged in Iraq. Iraq is a pivotal state in the middle east. A stable, prosperous, well governed and politically moderate Iraq is important for Iraqis, the wider region and the UK's strategic interests. All in this House are proud of the role that the United Kingdom armed forces have played to help bring about the progress seen so far in Iraq, and we are committed to ensuring that their efforts are built on.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Alistair Burt: I ask my hon. Friend to give me a moment.

In the long term, all those partnerships will flourish if we can overcome the social and economic hurdles that the region faces. In the face of the complex challenges, our shared aim for middle eastern and UK interests alike must be good governance by stable states with growing social, economic and political participation. The Government will champion that approach while upholding our belief in human rights.

There are also important opportunities to work more closely with partners in the region on shared interests. We are well placed to work in partnership with the countries of the middle east in a way that benefits their people and ours. For example, the countries of the middle east will continue to be essential suppliers of the world's energy needs. There is similarly mutual benefit in the flows of other trade and investments between Britain and the region. This Government will work closely to support and extend those links, facilitating trade missions and signing investment and promotion protection agreements. However, we will also work with the countries of north Africa to reduce the damage done to individuals and economies by illegal immigration, both here and there. By working with our partners against the threat from radical extremism, we are all stronger and more effective.

Now I want to cover a small series of significant issues, including Iraq.

Mr Ellwood *rose—*

Alistair Burt: I ask my hon. Friend to wait a moment.

By working with the key countries in the middle east and the international bodies based there we can together make more of an impact on conflicts and other challenges both within that region and beyond. Work to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict is a foreign policy priority for this Government. As I said earlier, the only long-term solution to the conflict is a secure Israel living alongside a sovereign and viable Palestinian state. We will continue to press for progress, working with the US and through the EU, while supporting Prime Minister Fayyad's work to build the institutions of a future Palestinian state.

The tragic events off the coast of Gaza last month were very serious and captured the world's attention—the House has already discussed the issue during a statement and will discuss it tomorrow in Westminster Hall—but they should not be viewed in isolation. They arise from the unacceptable and unsustainable situation in Gaza, which is a cause of public concern here in the UK and around the world. It has long been the view of the British Government, including the previous Government, that the restrictions on Gaza should be lifted. It is a tragedy that that has not happened, and we hope soon to see progress to change the situation.

We call on the Government of Israel to freeze all settlement activity. As the Foreign Secretary has said, the settlements are illegal and an obstacle to peace. It is also essential that there is unfettered access to meet the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza in order to enable the reconstruction of homes and livelihoods and to permit trade to take place. At the same time, the rocket attacks from Gaza must cease, and Hamas must release Gilad Shalit, who is now entering his fourth year in captivity.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his job. There is nothing in his speech so far that I would disagree with. In 2009, 96 humanitarian aid workers were gunned down in different conflict zones. Moreover, the death of the nine Turkish gentlemen is unacceptable. However, why does the United Nations not demand inquiries in every other country where humanitarian aid workers are slaughtered?

Alistair Burt: The right hon. Gentleman might reasonably submit that that is a question for the UN. In this particular case, though, I think that we responded entirely properly, in terms of the international concerns, by putting the primary responsibility on Israel to conduct its inquiry, as we are aware that it has in the past on issues such as Lebanon, and ensuring the international dimension for the security and the confidence of all. The important point is not to linger too much on the type of the inquiry but to consider more what it is about and how to move the process on so as to ease the situation in Gaza.

Richard Burden: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alistair Burt: No, I will not. I am conscious that there is one more intervention to come. If I am to stick to what I said earlier and give Back Benchers time, I am afraid that that means a restriction on interventions.

The proximity talks that are under way are now more important than ever. The Government will make it an urgent priority to give British diplomatic support to those efforts, as well as supporting the efforts of the Quartet and inspiring the European Union. The UK is a committed friend of Israel, and a friend to the region. We believe that, in this particular context, the approach that I have outlined is the best that a real friend can provide, for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Let me turn to Iran. There is grave concern among the international community about Iran's failure to address concerns about its nuclear programme and the role that it plays in creating instability in the middle east.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab) *rose—*

Alistair Burt: I will proceed, if I may.

We remain resolved to address these concerns through a twin-track process of preventing a nuclear-weapons-capable Iran while reaching out with an offer for constructive engagement. We cannot allow Iran to act with impunity. I welcome the action that the UN Security Council took last week. The new resolution is an important statement of international resolve to prevent Iranian nuclear proliferation. It intensifies peaceful and legitimate international pressure on Iran to change course and restore the trust in its intentions that is so badly lacking. However, it is a twin-track approach. The resolution also makes it clear that the E3 plus 3 remain ready to meet Iran at any time for substantive negotiations on the nuclear issue.

In addition, I should like to condemn the human rights situation in Iran, which is appalling. Amnesty International reports that more than 5,000 people were arrested following the June 2009 protests, and hundreds remain in detention. The courage shown by the protesters on Iran's streets over those months clearly demonstrates the strength of the desire for democracy, human rights and freedoms among the Iranian people. The Iranian Government have responded to that desire for democracy with violence, brutality and oppression. This weekend, the opposition were again refused permission to organise demonstrations on the anniversary of the elections. This House will not forget those ordinary Iranians who stood up for their rights last year. We will continue to work with our international partners to shine a light on Iran's deteriorating human rights record and hold the Iranian Government to account. On Thursday last week, I met members of the Baha'i faith ahead of the trial of seven of their leadership last Saturday. Iran's flagrant disregard of even its own laws on due process and respect for human rights should not be accepted by the international community, which should highlight and scrutinise that at every opportunity.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank the Under-Secretary for giving way and compliment him on his new position. I endorse his comments about the need for human rights in Iran, but may I take him back to his work at the non-proliferation treaty review conference, which rightly condemned the potential development of any nuclear weapons in the region, but, for the first time, mentioned the existence of Israel's nuclear weapons? Where exactly will the process go now to achieve the aim of a nuclear-free middle east, which must involve Israel's possession of nuclear weapons?

Alistair Burt: This country has consistently asked Israel to join the non-proliferation treaty as a non-weapons-holding state. Israel was mentioned in the non-proliferation treaty review conference in the context of the desire to move the resolution on a middle east free of nuclear weapons and, indeed, weapons of mass destruction. The resolution looked forward to a conference in 2012 on the subject. The conference was a success in reaching the agreement that it did. It is good to have moved the process on a little further, but much is to be done before the conference is held. We all support a middle east that is secure for all its countries, and an understanding of its weaponry is clearly a key part of that.

Mr Baron: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Alistair Burt: No, my hon. Friend intervened earlier. I repeat that I am pressed for time, and I need to get my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) in before finishing.

Let me mention Yemen briefly. We are continuing to work with other middle east nations such as Egypt and Jordan actively to promote increased stability in Yemen, because we know that al-Qaeda looks to exploit instability where it can. In Yemen, that instability is caused by wider social and economic problems. We welcome the fact that the United Arab Emirates and Jordan are co-chairing the two working groups of the Friends of Yemen. For our part, we will continue our direct, bilateral assistance to the Government of Yemen, which aims to reduce poverty and build the capacity and capability of the Yemeni state.

We will also remain engaged in Iraq. In many respects, Iraq is a nation changed for the better. There have been significant improvements in security, the economy and politics. Iraqis now have control over their own destiny and have embraced democracy, voting in their millions in March's national election. Now that the election result has been ratified, Iraq's leaders must work together to form an inclusive and effective Government.

I am sure that the House is proud of the extraordinary role that the United Kingdom's armed forces have played in making Iraq a better place. We are right to commit to building on their legacy by supporting the Iraqi Government and all the people of Iraq as they face the challenges of maintaining security and strengthening their new democracy. We will also work to deepen our close bilateral relationship to our mutual benefit.

Mr Ellwood: I welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It seems to fit you perfectly and I do not know why it has taken so long for you to get to that position, but it is great to see you there.

There seems to be a duality of approach to Iraq, with the Kurdistan area moving at a different speed from the rest of Iraq. As my hon. Friend knows, Kurdistan has advanced much quicker than the rest of Iraq because it was not so involved in the wars. There are no direct flights from the UK to Erbil in Kurdistan—or, indeed, to Baghdad. If any businesses operate in the north in Kurdistan, they are prevented, because of internal politics, from getting involved in business opportunities in Baghdad. I urge my hon. Friend to visit that area and try to resolve the problem that one either supports Kurdistan or greater Iraq.

Alistair Burt: My travel itinerary is already starting to look interesting, but I appreciate any new opportunities that come my way and any new suggestions from colleagues. I have noted my hon. Friend's with specific purpose, so I am grateful to him for raising it. He has been particularly involved and interested in those areas for many years and I know that I shall value his advice in due course.

Mr Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Alistair Burt: No, because I am now pushing the time limit that I set myself. To be fair to other hon. Members and to stick to what I said, I will wrap up.

It has necessarily been a whistlestop tour because of the constraints of time. I am sure that we will return to the subjects often. One of the Government's first foreign policy priorities will be to give new momentum to our relationship with the Gulf. We also want to build broader relationships with Europe's close neighbours in north Africa. We can do that by elevating our personal links, pursuing a deeper and more nuanced partnership with Islam and continuing our dialogue on commercial, cultural and education links—and, I would go so far as to say, parliamentary links. There is much to be gained from relationships between legislators in different countries. By doing all that, the UK will be able to provide constructive partnership on issues that are core to our national interest.

The Government have already made it clear that, in our pursuit of an enlightened national interest, we intend to be a force for good in the world to seek the best for our citizens and society, not only because it is good for the people but because it is the right thing to do. In pursuit of that policy, we will uphold our belief in human rights, championing democracy and the rule of law, and working tirelessly for peace. Nowhere will that be more important than in the middle east. I look forward to colleagues' support and assistance in taking on that particular role.

5.55 pm

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Lab): I welcome you to your new role, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I congratulate the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), on his appointment. As he said, we have known each other for more than 20 years—I know that I do not look old enough. We are both proud sons of Bury, the birthplace of Robert Peel, the home of the internationally acclaimed authentic Bury black pudding and a town that is immeasurably strengthened by its religious and cultural diversity.

The Under-Secretary is still remembered with great affection by his former constituents, irrespective of their political affiliations. However, it comes as little surprise that he was not given the Europe brief. His opposition to the views of the hon. Member for Stone (Mr Cash) is matched in intensity only by that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr MacShane). As the Under-Secretary survived a prolonged—some would say indecent—period as Minister with responsibility for the Child Support Agency in the 1990s, the Prime Minister clearly took the view that responsibility for the middle east would be a cakewalk in comparison. More seriously, I know that the Under-Secretary will carry out his responsibilities with commitment, integrity and sensitivity.

I also wanted to welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for North West Norfolk (Mr Bellingham), to his post. Now that he has returned to his place, I can do that.

I want to take the opportunity to place on record my appreciation of Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials, especially those in my former private office, for their dedication and professionalism. Being Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was a tremendous privilege and an awesome responsibility. Their support was crucial in enabling me to do my job effectively, and I owe them a great debt of gratitude.

I welcome the opportunity presented by this timely debate. The middle east ignites strong passion in hon. Members of all parties and in communities up and down the country. In my contribution, I want to reflect on those passions and deal with the issues that must be addressed urgently.

The middle east peace process, Iran's nuclear threat, the new Iraq and a fragile Yemen are all pieces in a jigsaw that will determine whether a positive future can ever dwarf the tragedies and conflicts of the past. As my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary often says:

"The most important word in politics is 'Future'."

Solutions will be found only through better leadership in the region, supported by co-ordinated and effective international action. However, for several reasons the middle east is also crucial to Britain's national interest. They include security and stability, energy supply, the attachments of many of our diaspora communities and historic links, which give us special responsibilities.

The central challenge remains the relationship between Israel, the Palestinians and the Arab world. I want to set my response to that challenge in the context of a question that I was asked several times in my ministerial capacity during interviews on al-Jazeera: how could I,

[Mr Ivan Lewis]

as a Jew, undertake my role as British Minister for the middle east independently and objectively? Putting aside the appropriateness or otherwise of the question, my answer was and is straightforward. I am proud to be a friend and supporter of Israel, as well as someone who believes passionately in the right of the Palestinians to dignity, freedom and statehood. Too often in the House and outside, people are required to make a choice, and it does not and should not have to be like that. I sometimes wonder whether there would be more light and less heat if friends of Israel and friends of Palestine came together to form friends of peace in the middle east. In that way, people would be forced to confront their prejudices and certainties and be challenged to build mutual respect, rather than replicate the division and bitterness that have characterised the region for far too long.

The Labour party—in government and opposition—has long championed a two-state solution: a viable, contiguous Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel. Such a solution will be possible only if we demonstrate a sensitivity to and understanding of the fears and insecurities of ordinary Palestinians and Israelis. I have witnessed for myself the anger and injustice felt by Palestinians on the west bank as their daily lives are interrupted by Israeli checkpoints and a security barrier that, in places, physically divides communities and therefore families. Occupation dehumanises both the occupied and the occupier. I also know families who have been traumatised by the impact of losing a loved one at the hands of suicide bombers who have wreaked carnage in towns and cities in Israel. I visited Sderot, where children live in fear of the next rocket attack from Gaza. Terrorism is no more legitimate in Tel Aviv and Haifa than it is in London and New York.

Palestinians yearn for freedom and statehood, Israelis for the certainty and guarantee of security. The political issues to be resolved are well known and frequently debated in this Chamber, but I want to spell them out clearly, with less ambiguity than in the past. What would a fair and just settlement actually mean? First, it would mean borders that ensured that the two states—Israel and Palestine—each had a volume and quality of land consistent with 1967. That would require land swaps, the principle of which has been accepted in previous negotiations.

Secondly, it would mean not a divided but a shared Jerusalem that can be the capital of both Israel and Palestine. The conventional wisdom is that in that scenario, the holy sites would have to come under some sort of international jurisdiction, but I disagree. An authentic, meaningful peace would mean that those sites should be the shared responsibility of the two states.

Thirdly, a settlement would mean justice for Palestinian refugees. They should have the right to return to a new, sovereign Palestinian state, and fair compensation should be paid to those who had homes and land within the borders of Israel.

Fourthly, as offered by the Arab League, a settlement would mean normalised relations between the Arab world and Israel. That cannot mean simply an exchange of ambassadors: it must also mean a commitment to end all support, financial and otherwise, for the military and terrorist activities of Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as a commitment to end the promotion of anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli propaganda via state-controlled media and education systems. An agreement to begin work on a framework for a middle east economic zone would be the strongest signal that the conflict is really over and that the focus has shifted to building a better future.

Fifthly, the settlement must be agreed as a full and final resolution of all contentious outstanding issues. Resolving those five issues in a comprehensive and just settlement would address positively the hopes and fears of the mainstream majority of both Palestinians and Israelis. It is true that the detail must be negotiated and agreed by the parties, but we should no longer be cautious when it comes to spelling out the parameters of such a settlement.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): How optimistic is my hon. Friend that the Fayyad plan to build a Palestinian state within two years will be successful?

Mr Lewis: I shall come to that, but I believe that this country and the international community should give that plan every support. Prime Minister Fayyad, and indeed President Abbas, have done a remarkable job in the west bank on security and economic development, so we should give as much support as we can to the Fayyad plan.

Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for the work he did as a Minister and for his clear statements this afternoon. Does he agree that it is vital that all parties understand that we need a secure middle east not just for Muslims and Jews, but for Christians and for people of other faiths and none across the region, and that the growing pressure for conflict prevention and resolution in the Parliaments and Assemblies of the middle east is one way forward? If we engage people on the ground on conflict prevention, we could do as much good as getting the world's superpowers to try to solve the problem from afar.

Mr Lewis: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. One lesson we should have learned from a long history of conflicts all over the world is that preventive work, both at a political and a people level, is far more effective than intervening when things go wrong.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon South) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that he would not achieve his fifth point unless he got a resolution on his first four points? There can be no overall settlement unless the aspirations on both sides of the argument can be met at the same time.

Mr Lewis: The hon. Gentleman has a perfectly common-sense perspective. As all hon. Members know, although setting out the parameters is important, in a negotiation of such complexity, when the stakes are so high and when public opinion on both sides matters, there must be the necessary compromise. If non-negotiable matters are not resolved, no lasting and just settlement will be accepted by the people on both sides.

Jeremy Corbyn: Does my hon. Friend agree that a good step forward would be if Israel released the substantial number of Palestinian parliamentarians who are still held in prison, several years after the election? Otherwise,

the message is that democracy does not work, and it is like saying to the Palestinians, "Your leaders get arrested and taken away, and therefore you have no representation." The anger at that in Gaza and the west bank is very serious indeed.

Mr Lewis: We need to take each case on its merit, and look at whether any of those individuals committed criminal offences. If not, those people should of course be released immediately, as a confidence-building measure towards progress in the peace process.

My right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary has welcomed the current proximity talks. As Foreign Secretary, he played a prominent role in supporting the efforts of President Obama, Secretary Clinton and George Mitchell to kick-start meaningful negotiations. However, the Opposition want to see direct negotiations begin without further delay. The success of such negotiations will be more likely if strong US leadership is supported by an enhanced role for the Quartet and a core group of Arab League states to provide political support to President Abbas.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that Hamas, with its view that eliminating the state of Israel is a religious imperative, is a real obstacle to peace?

Mr Lewis: I agree with my hon. Friend in the sense that as long as that remains Hamas's position, it is inconceivable that it will be drawn into any credible peace process. The criteria that the Quartet has laid down—recognition of Israel, a denunciation of violence and a respect for previous agreements—are clear. Of course, there is engagement with Hamas through, for example, the Arab League and Egypt, so there is an opportunity for countries and institutions to have discussions with it. However, the international community is clear about the criteria that need to apply for Hamas to join the political process.

As I said, we want to see direct negotiations begin as a matter of urgency. It is important that no preconditions should be imposed by either side in advance. However, it is also true that confidence-building measures would help to create a level of trust that, frankly, is currently in very short supply. I want to identify what those measures should be—they are not preconditions but ways to create the right environment for the rebuilding of some relationship of trust and mutual respect. As my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary has consistently made clear, Israel should freeze all settlement expansion. Not only are settlements illegal but their expansion changes the facts on the ground, jeopardising the prospect of a contiguous Palestinian state as well as provoking anger and mistrust. We should galvanise international support for Prime Minister Fayyad's 2-year economic plan towards Palestinian statehood. I am proud that in government we pledged £210 million in aid, and I hope that over the three-year period that commitment will be maintained by the new Government.

The blockade of Gaza must end so that all necessary humanitarian and reconstruction assistance can get through. However, in line with resolution 1860, this will happen only is there is tangible action to prevent the trafficking of weapons and weapons parts into Gaza. To that end, we welcome Tony Blair's efforts to secure progress, which—as I am sure all hon. Members accept—is now urgent. We want to see the Quartet and the Arab League working with all parties to come up with a credible plan that meets these two objectives within weeks, not months. Rocket attacks on Israel must stop. Gilad Shalit should be released by Hamas without precondition. His capture and continued detention are unacceptable.

With regard to recent events off the coast of Gaza, all sides have rightly condemned the tragic loss of life. We welcome today's inquiry announced by Israel and the involvement of David Trimble and Ken Watkin. However, we will be watching closely to ensure that the tests of independence and transparency that we have set are met in the way in which the inquiry is conducted.

The message that we should send from the House today is that the clock is ticking and time is running out for peace and stability in the middle east. A lack of political progress will not sustain an uneasy calm, but will lead to a resumption of violence and the strengthening of those whose purpose and interest are served by perpetual conflict. It is true that political leaders should be wary of getting too far ahead of their electorate, but it is equally true that history teaches us that great leaders are willing to deliver difficult messages to their own people.

The time has come for Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas to prove their critics wrong. Prime Minister Netanyahu needs to show that he truly understands and believes that there is no viable alternative to a just two-state solution and President Abbas needs to show the strength and credibility to deliver the Palestinian state which is long overdue.

Two states for two peoples will not bring to an end to al-Qaeda's fundamentalist terrorism or bring the Iranian regime from the margins to the mainstream. Al-Qaeda's support for the Palestinians is a tactic, not the pursuit of a just cause. But two states would undermine their selective narrative about the west's foreign policy goals, weaken their recruitment tools and strengthen the voice and hand of the mainstream majority in the Muslim world who deplore both violence and the politicisation of faith.

On Iran, we on this side of the House strongly support the new package of sanctions agreed by the United Nations Security Council last week. We reiterate our hope that Iran will chose the path of dialogue and diplomacy. Iran is a proud country which would have an important and influential role if it chose to rejoin the mainstream of the international community, but the regime must understand that the world will not stand by as it develops a nuclear weapons programme in clear contravention of its non-proliferation treaty obligations. That is not only because of the direct threat to Israel and the Arab states, but because a nuclear Iran would almost certainly trigger a new nuclear arms race, with some Arab states feeling an obligation to develop their own nuclear programme. That would be catastrophic at a time when the recent NPT review conference sought to take some tentative steps towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

As the Minister said, the people of Iran are courageous, as they demonstrated through their peaceful post-election protests. They should know that Britain seeks to be a friend of Iran and wants to resolve our differences though negotiation. Equally, the regime should know

[Mr Ivan Lewis]

that, with our international partners, we will remain unwavering in our determination to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons and in our revulsion at its President's holocaust denial.

Irrespective of different views on the war in Iraq, we should always remember the brave British servicemen and women who risked and in some cases sacrificed their lives freeing Iraq from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein. Just before Christmas last year, I was privileged to visit Iraq and see for myself the excellent work being done by our Royal Navy in training the Iraqi navy to protect its coastal waters. Significant progress has been made in Iraq but the new Iraqi Government must seek maximum consensus to consolidate security, improve the effectiveness of Government and push forward with economic and social reform. They should seek to improve human rights, including for minorities, women and trade unionists. Britain has a duty to play a positive role in the development of a new Iraq, and it is important that the British Government work with the Iraqis to identify how we can add the most value and make the most difference on a sustainable basis.

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman said that the world would not stand by and let Iran develop nuclear weapons. What would the world actually do? Would it pass a resolution of condemnation or what?

Mr Lewis: I do not think that it is responsible to enter into a running commentary on the situation in Iran. We moved from an historic offer of dialogue from President Obama, which received no positive response, to toughening our economic sanctions—ensuring that those sanctions are targeted at the regime. We must hope that the Iranian regime understands that there is significant international consensus and concern about the concept of Iran developing nuclear weapons. It is important that there is a unity of message and purpose throughout the international community so that Iran does not see any weakening or division in our determination to ensure that it does not breach its responsibilities under the NPT. We should remember that Iran is a signatory to that treaty but has continually failed to live up to its obligations.

Finally, on Yemen, it is important that the international community learns the lesson of Afghanistan. We must ensure that the commitments made at the London meeting in January are delivered. The President of Yemen should be expected to lead a programme of change that addresses security and political, economic and social reform, including authentic internal political reconciliation. However, that will be successful only if the aid promised primarily by Gulf states is delivered and spent effectively alongside a fast-tracked IMF programme that supports economic reform.

As I found on my visit earlier this year, Yemen feels a new sense of friendship and warmth towards Britain. I hope that the Minister, when he visits, will focus on how we can use our innovative joined-up approach—combining the best of the Department for International Development, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—to achieve tangible results.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) often rightly states, Yemen is not a failed state, but it is most definitely a fragile state and we must do everything that we can to tackle the poverty and social disorder that are the breeding ground for al-Qaeda. Effective action now will prevent the far more serious interventions that would be necessary in the future if the Government of Yemen were to fail.

I do not have time in this debate to do justice to all the challenges that face the middle east, which include the implications of a newly assertive Turkey, the serious threat to stability posed by a re-armed Hezbollah in contravention of UN resolutions, or our approach to engagement with Syria which, although very important, has not yet led to any serious move by Syria to take a step—let alone make the leap—from the margins to the mainstream of the international community.

Sceptical friends in the region often say, "But you must understand: this is the middle east," as they raise their eyebrows at talk of yet another peace initiative. My response is simple. In my lifetime, I have seen the Berlin wall fall and the Soviet Union crumble; Nelson Mandela released from prison and elected President of a democratic South Africa; peace come to Northern Ireland, with Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness serving in the same Government; an African-American elected President of the United States—events that are now facts of history, but which would once have been viewed as the naive dreams of romantic idealists.

The middle east needs a combination of realism and idealism. Most of all, it needs great leaders with the courage and vision to make the hard choices and take the difficult decisions. There will never be a shared narrative about the past, but there can be a shared determination to build a better future. I hope that the new Government will ensure that Britain remains at the heart of supporting a peaceful and just future for all the people of the middle east.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. This is an important debate, and a large number of right hon. and hon. Members have put their names down to speak. Mr Speaker has therefore imposed an eight-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches, although if colleagues take less than eight minutes, we can probably get further down the list.

6.21 pm

Sir Malcolm Rifkind (Kensington) (Con): I congratulate you on your appointment, Mr Deputy Speaker. I also commend my hon. Friend the Minister and the shadow Minister for what were two powerful and profound speeches on an important matter.

The subject of the debate is the middle east. One might therefore expect it to be concentrated on the views of the Arab world, as well as on those of Israel, yet one of the great ironies is that the three most important countries involved in the region—in the sense of being engaged in proactive action at this moment—are Israel, Iran and Turkey, none of which is an Arab state. Part of the difficulty that we face has been the inability, for various reasons, of most of the Arab world to take the kind of proactive role that might have been expected.

In the time available, I want to concentrate on Iran. I want to ask a number of questions, but I want also to offer possible answers to some of them, including to the point raised by the hon. Member for South Antrim (Dr McCrea) in an intervention a few moments ago. The first question is: are we right to single out Iran for its almost-certain nuclear arms programme? Often we are told, "Well, there are other nuclear weapons states. Why should Iran be singled out in this way?" I believe that the answer to my question is that we are right to do so, and we are right for two reasons. Compared with the existing nuclear weapons states, Iran—or, more particularly, its President—has gone out of the way to be bellicose in his language, to be threatening to at least one other country in the region and to have aspirations for the aggrandisement of his country, with a willingness to use weapons for that purpose.

However, linked to that is the undoubted fact that, unlike in the case of previous nuclear weapons developments, undesirable though they might have been, if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, it is painfully obvious not that it will use them directly, but that a consequence will be a destabilisation of the region and the almost near certainty of countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey feeling it necessary to go in the same direction. Therefore, the middle east as a whole would become a region with a significant number of nuclear weapons states, with all the awful consequences that that could imply.

That is the first question. The second question is, therefore: is current policy working? Manifestly it is not. We all know that it was meant to be based on carrot and stick. What better carrot could there have been than President Obama's offer of a grand dialogue with Iran and the normalisation of relations? Instead, that was thrown in his face. There were not even failed negotiations; the negotiations never began, because Iran rejected that possibility. We know also that sanctions—important though they are, and much as we welcome the latest decision by the United Nations Security Council—will not by themselves achieve a change of heart in Tehran.

I therefore come to the third question: is it possible that a policy of diplomacy and pressure could work? Is there a scenario in which it might work? The answer, I believe, is yes, if two conditions are satisfied. First, Russia and China are crucial, because although they supported the resolution last week, we know that their support is grudging. We also know that they have consistently taken on board their short-term considerations—in particular, their trade relationships with Iran and other aspects of their foreign policy—rather than standing four-square with the rest of the Security Council. Russia in particular, as a neighbour of the middle east and Iran, and with a large Muslim minority in its own territory, has as much to be concerned about by a nuclear-armed Iran as any country in the west, as does China, because of its particular position. Russia and China, therefore, if they look to their self-interest, ought to be able to share the position of the United Kingdom, the United States and others on the need for a total uniformity of view on the question of pressing Iran.

However, it is not just Russia and China; it is also the Arab states that I mentioned earlier. Anyone who goes to any of the countries of the region—and I have been to most of them—will find that, in private, people will say that they are as horrified as we are at the possibility of a nuclear-armed Iran. But try getting them to put their heads above the parapet—try getting them to support publicly what the United States and the Security Council are trying to do—and all sorts of reasons are given as to why it is too difficult, why it would be unpopular in their countries and why it all depends on what Israel does, along with various other excuses.

That would not worry me but for the consequence of that resistance to coming out and sharing people's real views, which is that Ahmadinejad is able to say to the world, "This isn't the international community versus Iran; this is simply the United States and its closest allies." What we need is not a coalition of the willing, but a coalition of the relevant. We need those countries of the region to join the west—and, I hope, Russia and China—to take a common position on the issue. That is what happened in the first Gulf war, when Kuwait was being liberated. Syria, Turkey and Saudi Arabia publicly supported—with troops, as well as through diplomacy—what the United States-led coalition was doing. Pressure could work, therefore, but until that change takes place, it is less likely to do so.

The main point that I want to concentrate on in the time left is if the methods that I have described do not work—I refer now to the intervention of a few minutes ago—what then do we do? Do we simply say, "Well, that's too bad. There's nothing we can do"? There is the question of the military option. People have rightly pointed out that the downside is a pretty dreadful downside. If military action is taken by either the United States or Israel, it will almost certainly lead to Iran enabling Hamas or Hezbollah to become even more proactive and attack Israel, as well as fomenting mischief in Iraq, with the price of oil going sky high and the straits of Hormuz perhaps being closed.

All that is true, and I cannot say that it would not be likely to happen. However—and this is an important "however"—all those things would be relatively short-term events, and I stress "relatively". They would last a few days or a few weeks, or perhaps two or three months. An Iran with a nuclear weapon, however, would be around for years to come—for ever. Therefore, it is not good enough simply to say, "There is a downside. Therefore, the military option cannot be considered at any stage." We have to come to a judgment on the balance of advantage. Is the balance of advantage to accept major problems if military action was taken, if—and this is an important "if"—it would remove the nuclear threat from Iran?

However, everything that I have said on this issue depends on whether the military option is a real option. Would it actually deliver? That is the fundamental question that Britain, America, Israel and the wider international community have to consider. I do not have time to go into the detail, but I make the point that the objective must be to come to an honest judgment. If diplomacy fails, if sanctions do not work and if there is no peaceful alternative, then we will have to come to an honest view on whether the military option—whether by the United States or Israel—would destroy Iran's nuclear capacity or, even if it did not, so degrade it as to make Iran unable to have nuclear weapons for a good few years to come.

[Sir Malcolm Rifkind]

I conclude by simply saying this. In this rather imperfect world in which we live, it is not good enough to ask, "What is the perfect solution to this dilemma?" The real question that we have to ask—or at least that Governments have to ask—is what is the least bad option? If the military advice was that we could either remove Iran's nuclear capacity or degrade it for a long period, Iran must realise that, at some stage, that might be what happens. It would not be an ideal solution, but it might still be better than the alternatives.

6.29 pm

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Although we are discussing a grave subject, may I say what a pleasure it is to speak in the House with you sitting in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker?

The Labour Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, once dismissed an opponent's speech as consisting of "clitch after clitch after clitch". I do not believe that there is any future in debating this subject by relying on clichés. If any other country had behaved as Israel is behaving towards the Palestinians in the occupied territories, international action would have been taken long ago. The international community is, as the right hon. and learned Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) pointed out, rightly concerned about Iran. Yes, Iran's regime is detestable and it is important to do all we can to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons, but it does not have them at present and it has never invaded another country. Israel does possess nuclear weapons; it is said to have 200 warheads. It has refused to sign the non-proliferation treaty and it recently refused to attend President Obama's conference on nuclear weapons divestment. Israel has invaded Lebanon three times. It facilitated the Sabra and Shatila massacres. It also conducted Operation Cast Lead, the Gaza blockade and the attack on the Gaza flotilla.

Let us also dispose of the distractions that impede action. It makes no difference whether the inquiry into the attack on the flotilla is conducted internally by Israel or internationally. Even an international inquiry would not change Israeli policy. The Goldstone inquiry into Operation Cast Lead had no influence at all, and Goldstone was vilified as a Jewish anti-Semite and a self-hating Jew. We have heard mention this afternoon of the dreadful situation involving Gilad Shalit, the young man who was taken into captivity four years ago this week. I feel great sorrow for his family, but he was a soldier on military duty. About 15 members of the Palestine National Council are being held without charge by the Israelis, and about 300 children are being held in prisons by the Israeli Government. It is a distraction to propose, as Tony Blair and Baroness Ashton have done, to change the terms of the Israeli blockade of Gaza. Neither of them has challenged the principle of the blockade, yet it is that principle that contravenes the Geneva convention.

Mrs Ellman: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Gerald Kaufman: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I will give way if I have time before I finish.

Israel ignores international opinion on the illegal wall that has turned towns such as Kalkilya and Bethlehem into prisons, and on the illegal checkpoints. It knows that, whatever it does, no action will follow. It has the most extremist Government it has ever had, under the most extremist Prime Minister it has ever had, and a Foreign Minister who is an avowed racist. Israel is allowed literally to get away with murder. Only punitive international action will make even the tiniest difference. That means an arms ban, and the kind of sanctions that were imposed by the senior President Bush on Yitzhak Shamir to force him to participate in international talks in Madrid.

This is a situation in which one country is holding 1.5 million people in an internal prison and 4 million other Palestinians in a form of detention, but let us be clear about this: no action will be taken against Israel. President Obama will take no action, partly because he has mid-term elections in five months' time, and partly because the odious pressure group, AIPAC—the American Israel Public Affairs Committee—can destroy any United States politician who makes the slightest criticism of Israel. When a Republican Congressman suggested that a tiny sliver of the billions of dollars that the United States gives to Israel should be transferred to alleviate a certain amount of poverty in Africa, AIPAC labelled him an anti-Semite. That is what American politicians, including Obama, have to put up with. We could take action, however. The European Union could take action over trade agreements, for example. Let us be clear that we cannot appeal to the conscience and good will of a country that has not demonstrated that it has either quality.

The situation is now unsustainable. The more the Israelis repress, suppress and oppress the Palestinians, the more precarious the future of their state will be. I saw, as did other hon. Members when we went to Iraq this year, that the Israelis are breeding children who hate them because of their hunger and their lack of schooling, and because of the way in which they are being treated. The Israelis seem to believe that treating the people of Gaza like that is a way of weaning them away from Hamas, but it only makes them support Hamas even more. Nobody is excusing Hamas; it has done dreadful things, as I pointed out to its representatives when I was in Gaza earlier this year. The fact is, however, that the Israelis are creating a generation of children who will grow up hungry and hating them.

This Israel does not want a two-state solution, but the only alternative is a one-state solution, and the existential fact is that, before long, there will be more Palestinians than Israeli Jews. It took the Jews 2,000 years to get their homeland in what is now Israel. After 60 years in that homeland, they now risk throwing it all away.

6.36 pm

Stephen Williams (Bristol West) (LD): May I begin by saying that it is nice to see you in your new place, Mr Deputy Speaker?

The Minister and his Labour shadow made wide-ranging speeches about the nature of the various problems in the middle east. I want to confine my remarks to the situation in Palestine, and particularly in Gaza, as did the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman). That is not just because of the events that we all witnessed on our TV screens a couple of weekends ago, and which were discussed by colleagues at a Liberal

International meeting in Berlin this weekend. My speech has also been informed by my visit to Gaza in March as part of a cross-party delegation led by my noble Friend, Lord David Steel. The hon. Members for Hammersmith (Mr Slaughter) and for Westminster North (Ms Buck) were also part of the delegation. For me, that visit to Gaza was one of those life-transforming experiences that crystallised the issues in my head and made me see them more clearly than I had done before.

In Gaza, 1.5 million people are being held under siege conditions. First, they are blockaded on land. We saw the wall and, more pertinently, we had to be careful not to get too close to it because of the snipers who patrol it. The people are also blockaded by air, as well as by sea, the tragic result of which we saw a couple of weekends ago. To set this in the context of my own constituency, that is the equivalent of the whole of greater Bristol, Bath and all of Wiltshire being blockaded off from the rest of the United Kingdom and denied access to the most basic goods. This is a humanitarian violation on a quite staggering scale.

There are limited crossing points along the well-policed border. The Rafah crossing from Egypt, which we had to use, is only for foot passengers. No goods are allowed to pass through it. All the crossing points through which goods may be transmitted are controlled by the Israeli army. As we saw, only a limited variety of items are allowed to be transferred across, and the list, which seems quite arbitrary, changes from week to week. When we were there in early March, only 70 items were allowed across the border. If we go into our local corner shop—never mind the supermarket—we can see the thousands of products, including hundreds of different kinds of biscuits and confectionery alone, that are available to us. Imagine being limited to only 70 items in total out of the full range of goods and services that we, as 21st-century citizens, expect to have access to. However, only 70 items were allowed into Gaza in that particular week. This is not just the denial of humanitarian aid; it is the denial, and complete obstruction and destruction, of a fully functioning market economy.

Desperately needed reconstruction materials are not allowed to be transferred across the border either, and in Gaza we saw, of course, the bombed-out schools, the bombed university and hospital, and the housing shortages. It is absurd and outrageous that cement and other construction materials are not allowed across the border.

All of that leads to those 1.5 million people effectively being utterly dependent on a shadow, black-market economy supplied with goods through tunnels dug through the sand from Egypt and controlled by local criminals and Hamas. People with sufficient money and wherewithal can access those goods, whereas the rest are dependent on local patronage or the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

What we saw in Gaza is effectively a parallel society. Ironically, people who can prove their status as a descendant of a 1948 refugee are in a slightly better position than those who have lived in the Gaza strip for generations, because they might get access to UNRWA food parcels. We saw that at a food distribution centre, where families came from all over the Gaza strip and took away their very limited supplies of cooking oil and other cooking materials by donkey cart. It was a mediaeval scene, and what is happening in Gaza is mediaeval, too: mediaeval siege tactics are being used that would have been appropriate at the time of Richard the Lionheart or Saladin but are completely outrageous and unacceptable in the second decade of the 21st century.

My remarks so far have provided an outline of the problem as I saw it for myself just a few months ago, but what can we do about it? The UK Government should use our membership of the European Union to be more active in putting pressure on the state of Israel, and also on Egypt. The objective should be to lift the siege, and not only for humanitarian aid; indeed, I am a little worried about the frequent references to humanitarian aid. The full range of goods and services that we take for granted in our society should be allowed in. That is needed in Gaza to allow people to rebuild a fully functioning market economy.

The EU is in a good position to apply leverage on the state of Israel through our trade agreements with it. The EU can also potentially play an important role in enabling access to goods and services for Gaza. While travelling into Westminster on the train today, I was intrigued by an article in *The Times* by the EU's foreign affairs High Representative, Cathy Ashton, whom I believe is at this very moment chairing a meeting of all EU Foreign Ministers. The article said that the EU could perhaps be the agency that facilitates and polices the transfer of goods and services into the Gaza strip, and that instead of Israel banning all goods and services, we should have a list that prohibits only those few of them that would be prejudicial to Israel's security, and that the presumption should be that all other goods should be allowed in.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and may I also say what a pleasure it is to see an alumnus of Dynevor grammar school, Swansea, occupying the Speaker's Chair today?

Why does the hon. Gentleman think that Israel is imposing such an extreme blockade if the solution is, in fact, as simple as he sets out?

Stephen Williams: I am certainly not going to deny that part of what is taking place is self-inflicted. Obviously, the rocket attacks on villages in the south of Israel are outrageous, and we made it clear in the meetings we had with various political representatives in Gaza that there had been wrong on both sides, but the state of Israel has an army at its disposal, whereas the inhabitants of Gaza are 1.5 million people who are at the mercy of a superpower on their doorstep, and those superpowers, whether Israel or Egypt—or the states that, perhaps, control and influence their foreign policy from much further afield—are, effectively, playing with the destinies of men, women and children, as the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton mentioned. That is not the way to build peace and understanding for the future, and I think we have a right to expect rather more from the democratic state of Israel than it has shown so far. That leads me to my final point.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Williams: I have fewer than 40 seconds left, so I am not going to give way again.

My final point is about political engagement. One of the touching scenes we saw while in Gaza city was at an UNRWA school, where children were conducting a

[Stephen Williams]

mock election. That shows hope for the future, but I do not think there can be any hope for the future if we do not talk to the people whom their parents have elected. We must have engagement with all the political representatives of Gaza and the west bank. We must lift the siege. We must have constructive engagement, and from that point we might have a chance of building lasting peace into the future.

6.46 pm

Sandra Osborne (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): I also welcome you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to your new position and wish you the best of luck.

The hon. Member for Bristol West (Stephen Williams) spoke with great passion about the situation in Gaza and, based on my experience of visiting there, I completely concur with his analysis. I, too, will concentrate on the situation in Israel and the occupied territories.

Just over a week ago in the town of Ayr, I joined other local people in seeking signatures to a petition about the attack on the flotilla taking aid to Gaza and the resulting loss of life. I was joined by local people from Amnesty International and various other groups, including Sheena Boyle, who is involved in a Scottish charity, Children of Amal. She spends half her year in Nablus, where she provides therapeutic support and training to children who have been traumatised by violence. She also trains psychologists and social workers to provide group therapy through music as an art.

I was taken aback by what I witnessed in Ayr. The people who had volunteered have a long-standing commitment to seeking peace in the middle east, but I do not think those who were lining up to support the petition follow events in the middle east particularly closely. I was struck by the level of anger at what had happened.

All Members must take note that there is widespread concern in our constituencies about the entire situation and the continuing disproportionate actions of the Israeli Government. All too often, the Israeli Government act in an affronted and defensive manner when their actions are questioned and there are calls for independent reports. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) referred to the Goldstone report and the fact that the Israelis' response was to blame the messenger.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) said, we should welcome an inquiry and input from independent people, including the Houses of Parliament. I understand that Turkey is not happy with the set-up and what is being proposed, and as it is the country that has been most affected by the action, we have to take note of that. In particular, we must make sure that there is transparency in the inquiry.

Over the years, there have been many false dawns interspersed with violence from both sides, although not in equal measure. My hon. Friend was very optimistic, based on his experience of various different situations in his lifetime where peace has been achieved. I am not so optimistic, as I am aware from trying to put myself in the shoes of the Palestinians—and, indeed, the Israeli people—that it is very hard to see any likelihood of progress.

We have heard plenty of words, but they have been interspersed with violence. There have been conferences, accords, mutual recognitions, declarations of principles, assassinations, memorandums, elections, permanent status negotiations, unilateral withdrawals, intifadas, reports, ceasefires, peace initiatives, curfews, a so-called "security barrier" that separates families from their livelihoods and nomadic people from their land, rocket attacks, road maps, air strikes, incursions, prisoner exchanges—we have seen all that and more since 1991. We have heard many words, but we have seen many negative consequences and very little positive impact. UN resolutions have been ineffective and Israel has not been held accountable to international standards of conduct and law.

In the previous Parliament, the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs visited Gaza following Operation Cast Lead, whose impact was a humanitarian and counter-productive disaster. We could see the resentment being fed by that operation and we could see that it was shoring up the position of Hamas. This Government and the previous one are against holding talks with Hamas, because to do so would apparently make it seem more legitimate. However, we must consider the suffering of the people in Gaza, who live in one big prison, subjected to collective punishment and deprived, as the hon. Member for Bristol West said, of everyday necessities and the means to rebuild their infrastructure and economy. That has made people turn to Hamas in the face of an ongoing failure to find a peaceful solution.

The Committee also visited Sderot and a local college, which are often subjected to rocket attacks. The people there, too, want peace, because they are in the same spiral of despair and distrust as the Palestinian people. The longer the blockade continues, the lower expectations become. Recently, it seems that the US even reached the stage of outlining its own plan, with a view to imposing it on both sides—such is the frustration at the ongoing situation, which does not appear to have a real solution.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Will the hon. Lady visit Egypt in order to understand from the Egyptians why they have not fully opened the Rafah crossing? Does she understand why they have been conspicuous in their absence from the chorus of disapproval for the flotilla? Does it not have something to do with the fact that they are very much aware of the danger of having Hamas right on their border?

Sandra Osborne: I do not underestimate the danger of Hamas, but the reality is that Hamas is part of the equation, whether we like it or not. Hamas was elected by the people of Palestine and will not go away simply because we ignore it. Some of the actions, far from advancing the cause of the Palestinian Authority, actually undermine it.

I would welcome news today of a breakthrough in the easing of the blockade, whereby fewer goods will be restricted, and commercial goods and civilians will be allowed entry and exit. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South, I would also welcome the involvement of the European Union, because that would encourage greater transparency and would leave no excuse for the smuggling of goods through the illegal tunnels. However, that is not a substitute for the lifting of the blockade. It will not achieve a two-state solution. We have heard plenty of words, but turning them into action is what will bring credibility to the Palestinian Authority.

The previous UK Government played their part in the Quartet and some benefits are being reaped from that involvement. I get the impression from the Minister that the new Government will follow a similar policy, and we hope that they will do so with similar determination. The main thing is to ensure that the US does not lose impetus in promoting a peaceful solution, as has happened so often in the past. A two-state solution in the middle east involving the occupied territories and Israel is long overdue, because what is happening in the meantime is a disgrace to humanity.

6.54 pm

Mr James Arbuthnot (North East Hampshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. I declare my interest: I am interested in Israel, I am the parliamentary chairman of the Conservative Friends of Israel and proud to be so. Everyone in this House should have an interest in Israel, because it is a country that embodies the values that we should stand for. It was created in the 1940s, partly as a reaction to the way in which the Jews were treated during the holocaust. Israel was created by the international community and it became a bastion of the rule of law, democracy, free speech, business enterprise and family values. If that is not what this country also stands for, I am disappointed.

Israel is a country that makes mistakes. Its political system of proportional representation taken to a ludicrous degree is a mistake. Because of its political system, it finds it very difficult to change. In my view, the continued existence of the settlements is another of those mistakes—when President Peres was here a year or so ago, he suggested that most Israelis share that view. Again, however, because of the political system that is, unfortunately, extremely hard to change. But what is definitely not a mistake, and what we ought to applaud, is Israel's determination to stand up for its continued right to exist in peace and security.

When that peace is destroyed by Hamas kidnapping Gilad Shalit and continuing to hold him prisoner for years, nobody should expect Israel just to accept it. When that peace is destroyed by rocketing from Gaza, nobody should expect Israel to say, "Yes, flotillas can be allowed to import whatever they like into Gaza, including perhaps explosives and rockets." On one ship, the Karine A, which was not involved in this convoy, the Israelis found tons of weapons for Hamas. Were they simply to assume that this particular flotilla contained no such weapons to be used by Hamas against both Israel and the population of Gaza, whom Hamas treats so cruelly? Surely not. So obviously the flotilla was going to be stopped and boarded.

The fact that five out of the six ships were boarded without incident establishes, to my mind, that those who carried out the operation were well trained and well disciplined, and did not invite trouble. The trouble came from the sixth boarding operation. It seems strange to me, for the following reason, that the Israelis were apparently unprepared for a reaction to that boarding. The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Sandra Osborne) talked about aid, but this flotilla was not about aid for Gaza. Had it been about that, the Israeli and Egyptian offers to allow the aid through at the land crossings would have been accepted, but they were refused, both before the flotilla sailed and after it had docked in Ashdod. The purpose of the flotilla was simply to create publicity. Therefore, as Israel should have predicted, the flotilla would have been a waste of time and resource unless there was a violent incident that would create that publicity. Given that the flotilla was designed to be provocative and to end in violence, we should not blame Israel for the violence against which it failed to guard itself; the blame lies with those who went on to the flotilla expressly seeking martyrdom.

Jeremy Corbyn: Does the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the incident took place in international waters, that most of the ships were boarded and that most of the people who were taken were held, handcuffed and illegally taken into Israel from international waters? Surely he should acknowledge that Israel is guilty of a breach of maritime law, never mind humanitarian attitudes.

Mr Arbuthnot: No; as a lawyer, I have, in my time, done international law, and I do not consider that any of this was illegal. If one is trying to prevent people from going into a blockaded area, the only place where one can board the ships is in international waters. I do not accept the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, although I accept that he strongly believes it.

It is against that background that Israel somehow manages to lose the propaganda battle, and I find that completely baffling. What I do not understand—I hope that someone in this debate can enlighten me—is why Israel is so good at fighting wars, but is absolutely atrocious at managing its public relations. Why does Israel—a country the size of Cornwall that was created out of nothing and that is surrounded by oil-rich countries, at least one of which would like to see it wiped off the face of the map—always allow itself to be portrayed as the aggressor? What is it about the right to exist in peace that is so difficult to get across?

I should like to finish by quoting from an excellent article, last week, by Charles Moore. He asked:

> "What has gone wrong? Experts tell me that there is no proper co-ordination, that no one person is in charge of shaping and communicating Israel's message to the world, and that no one is sacked...Somewhere down the years, Israel allowed itself to forget that its greatest weapon is the story it can tell about itself...What it wants is a clear, calm, repeated case. It is a case—aimed more at public opinion than at foreign ministries—about freedom, democracy, a Western way of life and the need for the whole of the free world to fight terrorism."

7.2 pm

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I, too, congratulate you on your very well deserved position, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The death of nine people on the Mavi Marmara on 31 May has brought widespread outrage. It is the latest incident to highlight the tragic conflict between Jewish and Palestinian nationalism, which will be resolved only by a negotiated, comprehensive peace settlement that establishes two states—Israel and Palestine—living side by side in peace and security. I am very pleased that inquiries into the incident have now been set up. We will have to await the results of those inquiries to get the full picture, but this afternoon I want to refer to some of the facts that are already known—indeed, they are clearly evident.

[Mrs Louise Ellman]

The blockade of Gaza came about because Gaza has been run by the Islamist Hamas after Israel dismantled its settlements, ended the occupation of Gaza and withdrew 8,000 settlers and its soldiers. Instead of that being followed by an attempt to build a peaceful society, it was followed by Hamas overthrowing Fatah and establishing a regime set on eliminating Israel. Hamas's ideology is very clear—it is set out in its charter and by the continuing statements of its leaders. Hamas sees it as a religious duty to destroy the state of Israel and it promotes the death cult. It says:

"The Day of Judgement will not come about until Muslims fight the Jews (killing the Jews)".

That is in article 7 of its charter. It also invokes the protocols of the elders of Zion—the false allegations that there is a Jewish conspiracy to run the world.

Hamas's position is not just to do with ideology and rhetoric; it is to do with action as well. It has fired about 11,000 rockets and missiles—directed at Israeli civilians—and now it is receiving weapons from Iran that Israelis fear could reach Tel Aviv. It was only last November that a shipment of more than 500 tonnes of Iranian weapons coming to Gaza was intercepted off the coast of Cyprus. So Israel has every reason to be concerned about the Hamas regime continuing to attack Israeli civilians and working continually with Iran, its backer, which is dedicated to the absolute destruction and annihilation of the state of Israel and its people. Israel has every reason to be concerned about that.

There is also every reason to be concerned about what is happening to civilians and citizens in Gaza, many of whom are not involved with Hamas. That can and has to be addressed in the long term by a proper peace agreement, but in the short term it could and should be addressed by the European Union, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority taking their part in ensuring that goods that do and should come into Gaza do not include weapons of destruction. That responsibility had been taken up in the past, but has now ceased to be exercised. It should be resumed, and I hope that today's announcement will facilitate the easing of that blockade and will allow the needs of the people of Gaza to be met without threatening the citizens of Israel.

I want to ask several questions about the incident with the flotilla to Gaza. Six vessels set out to take humanitarian aid to Gaza, from five of which aid was landed at Ashdod as the Israelis requested. Most unfortunately, Hamas then refused to allow that aid to be taken into Gaza. The incident and the regrettable deaths happened on the sixth vessel, so what was different about it? Who was on it? Were the peace activists who most certainly were on the other vessels infiltrated by others with sinister motives? What was the role of the IHH—the Turkish-Islamic organisation that is linked, through the Union of Good, to Hamas and jihadists and even to al-Qaeda—which was involved in promoting the flotilla? When the Israelis asked that No. 6 vessel dock in Ashdod to unload its humanitarian load, a reply came back, which was recorded, "Go back to Auschwitz." What was going on on that specific vessel?

The Turkish press have been making a number of interesting reports in the past few days, including interviews with the families of some of the people in the flotilla who died. Those families have spoken about their partners wanting to be martyrs. We saw Hamas flags draped over the coffins of the dead and we have seen videos of the Israeli paratroopers on those ships being attacked with metal pipes and knives and being dragged downstairs in attempts to lynch them. Reuters has issued an apology for clipping from photographs scenes showing weapons being held by activists on that ship. Were they all peace activists? I have no doubt that most of the people who set out for Gaza genuinely want peace, but there was something else going on on that No. 6 vessel—something that we need to know a lot more about.

Simon Hughes: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs Ellman: I am sorry, but there is very little time left.

Ismail Haniya, the leader of Hamas in Gaza, said on 4 June that the

"Zionist project on our land is reaching its final stage. The incident marks the beginning of the delegitimisation of the Zionist project in our country."

Clearly, there is something more to this than the giving of humanitarian aid. I hope that those inquiries will show just exactly what that is.

There is something to be hopeful for in the middle east, and that is the resumed negotiations, although they are only indirect, with Fatah in a genuine attempt to find a two-state solution to this very tragic conflict. I hope the work of Senator Mitchell and his team is successful. The only solution to the conflict is mutual recognition by two peoples, justifiably seeking to retain or achieve national statehood and living in peace. The ideology of Hamas, followed by its actions to deny Jewish statehood, is absolutely unacceptable and is the obstacle to peace.

7.10 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Mr Deputy Speaker, I share the pleasure of the House at seeing you in the Chair, loss though you will be to the UK branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

In the few minutes available to me, I shall devote my remarks to policy on the blockade. I start by making it unequivocally clear that I consider that Israel has a totally indisputable right to self-defence as a sovereign national state. Last year, I was able to visit Sderot with the Foreign Affairs Committee. One is left in absolutely no doubt whatever about the intolerable state in which those living in that community and others near the Gaza border are placed by the Hamas rocket attacks.

The reality is that in Sderot the warning time between the siren sounding and the rocket exploding is between 15 and 17 seconds, which means that there has to be a shelter within a few metres of where people are living. Shelters have even had to be dug underneath bus stops so that people queuing for the bus can go to them quickly. We were told by the Israelis there that, since the rocket attacks started in 2001, more than 800 Israelis had been wounded and 15 had lost their lives. That is 15 too many, but it is fair to point out that the number of those who lost their lives during the last Israeli incursion into Gaza was approximately 1,400—overwhelmingly non-combatants, including hundreds of women and children.

I shall focus on the critical issue of getting building supplies into Gaza to rebuild the area. One needs to go to Gaza to see at first hand the scale of the destruction that has taken place. We saw huge numbers of homes that had been shattered. We saw the hospital in Gaza City that had been burnt out with incendiary phosphorus Israeli tank shells. We went to a large industrial estate spreading over many acres where not just an isolated factory or warehouse had been destroyed, but every building had been razed to the ground and flattened—a scorched earth policy. I am at a loss to know why the Israelis believe that depriving hundreds, if not thousands, of Palestinians of viable employment and driving them into the hands of Hamas can be in Israel's interest, but that was the policy that was followed.

The policy is justified on the grounds of security, but that argument simply does not hold water, for the simple reason that Hamas has all the building materials it wants. Hamas controls the tunnels through which come all the cement and steel reinforcing rods it wants. Hamas can build bunkers to its heart's content, so the security grounds do not hold up. However, a huge rebuilding programme is needed for the civilian population of Gaza.

This morning, on the "Today" programme, I heard what was said by the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair. If we are to reach a position where the Israelis agree that a limited amount of building supplies linked to UN projects can go into Gaza, it will certainly be a step in the right direction, but that does not go far enough. Among the 1.5 million population of Gaza, large numbers of people need building supplies, but they are not part of a UN project. People want to rebuild their homes. People need to rebuild their farm buildings, their businesses, factories or warehouses, to create a viable economy. I point out to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that, if the proposal is to allow in building supplies only for UN projects, I hope the Government will say that we should go wider than that. There is no security risk in increasing the amount of building supplies going into Gaza to private individuals and private companies, provided that all those supplies are subject to the right of search by the Israelis.

I fully accept that the Israelis have every right to ensure that no weapons go into Gaza. We insisted on the same right in Northern Ireland. We did our utmost, with varying degrees of success, to prevent the IRA from getting weapons by sea from countries such as Libya. The Israelis have every right to interdict weapons and explosives, but I hope the Government will take a robust attitude and make every possible case for allowing the free flow of building supplies to Gaza. Hamas has all the building supplies it wants. There is no security case for stopping building supplies, which are critical in allowing the people of Gaza to rebuild their lives and their businesses.

7.17 pm

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I add my welcome to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to your new position. Just as the right hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot) declared his interest as chair of the Conservative Friends of Israel, I declare my chairmanship of the all-party Britain-Palestine group. In that capacity I offer my thanks to the 133 Members from all parties who have signed the early-day motion on the Gaza flotilla, which underlines the widespread concern across the UK about what happened on 31 May.

Today, we have heard that Israel has set up what has been described as an internal inquiry into that incident. I hope that Members will forgive me for being a little sceptical, because Israel's record on inquiries has not been a good one; we have only to ask the British mother Jocelyn Hurndall about the hoops she had to jump through to get to the truth about the shooting of her son Tom by an Israeli sniper in Gaza in 2003.

Israeli Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, said that his inquiry meets the standards of

"prompt, impartial, credible and transparent investigation."

We shall see whether that is the case. There are worries about the evidence to which the inquiry will have access. It is described as an internal inquiry, but the incident was not internal. The interception of the Gaza flotilla took place in international waters, so why is there not an international inquiry? The approach of the Government of Israel to Gaza, and to Israel's occupation of the west bank, appears to be that the international community can advise—even the Palestinians can advise—about what should happen, but Israel decides what happens, not only within its borders but beyond them. If we are to have peace, that mindset has to change.

Will the Government confirm whether they still support the concept of an international inquiry? The Under-Secretary referred to an international dimension of the Israeli inquiry, but the Secretary-General of the United Nations described it as an inquiry to international standards, which is not necessarily the same thing. I would say to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) and the right hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot) that, to get to the bottom of what happened on the Gaza flotilla, why can we not have an inquiry to international standards, run by the international community? What is the problem with that if we are to get to the truth?

Today, we have also heard that the middle east envoy, Tony Blair, expects a significant easing of the Gaza blockade in the coming period. In particular, he has predicted a change in Israeli policy from allowing into Gaza only items that are on a list of permitted items to letting in items if they are not on a list of prohibited items. As we know, Israel has prohibited things such as cement and steel—things that are vital to the reconstruction of schools, hospitals and homes. I refer hon. Members to the two reports of the all-party Palestine group that are based on eyewitness reports in 2009 and 2010 about the importance of such things going through.

It will be a step forward if Israel allows those materials to enter for UN projects, but it is not just UN projects that are important, even though their work is absolutely vital. Israel has said, for example, that medicines have no problems getting into Gaza. Well, actually, they do have some problems, but most medicines slowly and intermittently will get through eventually. They are not the same as medical equipment. We know from those two all-party group reports—when I was there, I witnessed this—that tubes needed for diagnostic equipment could not get in because they were seen as goods that could be used for terrorism. The last all-party group visit found the same experience with X-ray equipment.

[Richard Burden]

Let us assume that those things get through. People can get food and medical treatment in a prison, but that does not alter the fact that it is still a prison. That is the issue, because the blockade is a collective punishment of the people of Gaza. Not only is it unlawful, but it condemns the people of Gaza to living in a prison. It is not enough for the people of Gaza to get by on more food parcels. It is not just an international humanitarian charity case. The people of Gaza need to be able to travel. They need to be able to rebuild a functioning economy.

It is interesting that the United Nations Office of the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Assistance reported just last week that more items were going into Gaza by category but that imports had declined by 26% compared with the week before, and there is still a ban on exports from the territory. That is not only wrong, but it undermines the cause of peace. As many hon. Members have already said, it is also madness: goods can get into Gaza through the tunnels illegally, but most of the people of Gaza cannot afford them, because poverty has risen exponentially. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency estimates that the number of people in abject poverty has tripled since 2007.

It is not Hamas that is saying these things. John Ging, the UNRWA co-ordinator, is saying them. I pay tribute to him, because he is one of those who are trying to give the children of Gaza some glimpse of a normal childhood by running summer camps. He has received threats from extremist groups for doing so, and they have also set fire to equipment. As a friend of Palestine, I say very clearly that those threats and attacks must stop, but that does not alter the fact that, for that to happen and for trust to be rebuilt, the blockade of Gaza must not be eased; it must be ended.

In the minute that I have left, I want to say one other thing. There has been a lot of focus on Gaza today—rightly so; it is understandable in the circumstances—but let us not forget the west bank. Although there has been a partial easing of checkpoints and movement restrictions, it is still under occupation. Since the start of this year, there has been an escalation of attacks by settlers on Palestinians—up to 132. Land confiscations continue. Demolitions of homes continue. There has been a particularly pernicious systematic eviction of Palestinians who live in East Jerusalem from their homes—often virtually in sight of the United Kingdom consulate general.

If we are to bring such things to an end, we must do more than talk. It is time to say what action can begin to be effective. The European Union has an association agreement with Israel that carries not only rights but responsibilities. It carries the right to trade preferences and various other preferences, but it carries the responsibility of Israel abiding by standards of international humanitarian law. Israel is simply not abiding by those standards. The terms of the EU-Israel association agreement are not being carried out. Therefore, until Israel changes its attitude, that agreement needs to be suspended.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. In calling the next Member, I remind colleagues that the convention of the maiden speech applies.

7.25 pm

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am, of course, grateful to you for the opportunity that you give me, terrifying as it is, to make my first contribution to a debate in the House. I confess to hesitating before doing so in a debate that touches so many people so seriously and that is of such a serious nature.

I am naturally sensible of the very great privilege that I enjoy in addressing the House on this occasion—and, no doubt, for the last time—without interruption. Members on both sides of the House will recall their own maiden speeches, and many of them have been kind enough to give their advice about what I should say, whether or not it has been asked for. The principal injunction of course has throughout been to be short. Well, as those who are in the Chamber will observe, that is an injunction with which it will not be difficult for me to comply. Indeed, the entire purpose of my having delayed my speech for this long was to try to avoid the incongruous spectre of appearing in the Chamber at the same time as my new neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), but I see that I have singularly failed to achieve that.

As I rise to address the House, I am conscious of a number of advantages that I enjoy. First and foremost among them is, of course, that I have the honour and privilege to follow in this place a very distinguished parliamentarian indeed. Mr Douglas Hogg, as he was known in the House, was, as Members on both sides of the House will know, respected and beloved throughout his constituency of Sleaford and North Hykeham and before that of Grantham. He was generous with his time for those who sent him here to represent their interests, thoughtful in his contributions to the business of the House and unstinting in his support for the rights of this place against any interference from the Executive—something that he addressed in his own maiden speech. All that will be sorely missed. They are big shoes to fill, as Members on both sides of the House have made very clear.

That brings me perhaps to the second advantage that I enjoy as I make my maiden speech—namely, that the electors of Sleaford and North Hykeham, who chose me as a candidate at an open primary even before they had the opportunity to put their crosses in the boxes in May, were evidently satisfied with the make and model that they had returned to the House for the past 30 years, for they have chosen as their new MP another silk—another dinosaur—and another Member with a wife cleverer and more successful than he is. As Douglas himself has put it,

"the old banger must have been pretty sound for them to have chosen the same make and model again."

I caution, though, and certainly add at this juncture that the unoriginal question that has occurred to wags on both sides of the House receives the answer no. I leave that as a puzzle perhaps for my successors, but given that I represent Sleaford and North Hykeham and follow Mr Hogg, many Members will know what question has arisen in their minds.

Before I come to the matter on the Order Paper, let me say that there is, finally, this advantage that I also enjoy: I have the very considerable honour to represent one of the most beautiful constituencies in the country,

with some of the very best people one could hope for. From my village of Thorpe on the Hill in the north to Barrowby in the south, Long Bennington in the west to Metheringham in the east, hon. Members on both sides would do well to pay us a visit. It is a great shame that my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Richard Harrington) is no longer in his place. He would particularly enjoy some of the real ale and some of the best pub food in the country, but I shall look forward to welcoming him and as many others as possible to the constituency.

The House can expect contributions from me perhaps on the middle east, and I hope to speak in future debates at somewhat greater length than I have time to do today. I hope also to speak about special educational needs. As many in the House will know, I was the chairman of governors at one of the last remaining signed bilingual schools for deaf children in this country. Close to my heart are issues about the education of deaf and autistic children and those who are less able.

I come to the matter that is on the Order Paper, conscious of the fact that I have heard contributions of great weight, not merely from Front Benchers but from Back Benchers, and that many Members on both sides of the House know a great deal more about this than I do. As is evident from those contributions, Members on both sides of the House well know the physical suffering that the continued blockade of Gaza is causing to a civilian population already laid low by the effective destruction of its infrastructure. Members obviously recognise the unsustainable policies that have been pursued in the past by the Government of Israel, of which I count myself a considerable friend, but which have, whether we like it or not, had the effect of entrenching a de facto Government with a vested financial interest in the maintenance of the tunnel economy that has been created by the blockade.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) spoke about building materials. There is no shortage of building materials available to Hamas. The leaders of Hamas, should they wish to, construct villas, as they do, and have no problem getting cement through the tunnels. It is even possible to get a 4x4 through them. The argument that the blockade is based on the security of Israel is, I am afraid, fallacious, and I join other Members in saying that it should quickly be abandoned. Israel should concentrate on its strengths and on the values that it offers and demonstrates to the world.

Members on all sides have also been appalled, as have I, by the inability of the Palestinian Government, of whatever colour, to offer security to Israel. There is only one way forward—the two-state solution. Change has to come to Gaza and to the entirety of Israel and the Palestinian territories established under the Oslo accords. Change is something that we all talked about during the election, but this is a change that is desired by the vast majority of the civilian population throughout the middle east, and indeed in Palestine and in Israel, and is supported by the Government here as well as by our allies, as resolution 1860 demonstrates. It is that resolution with which Israel would do well to comply, as long as, of course, its security is guaranteed, and for that reason I hope that in this Parliament we will have the opportunity of seeing some form of lasting peace—the lasting peace that has for so long evaded previous Administrations in this House and indeed across the world.

7.32 pm

Mr Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I, too, congratulate you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and welcome you to the Chair. Before making my brief remarks, I mention, by way of declaration and pending the publication of the register, that my constituency party has received donations from individuals and organisations supporting the rights of Palestinians, and I made several visits to Palestine, Gaza and the west bank in the last Parliament.

I wish that there were more time to debate this issue today. There is a debate in Westminster Hall tomorrow, secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), which may give more opportunity to address the issue of Gaza. We have heard very powerful speeches about that from my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) and the hon. Member for Bristol West (Stephen Williams) which will help me to confine my remarks. I wish that I had more time to deal with some other issues. I would like to comment on Yemen, Syria and Iraq, but the time simply does not allow that, save for one point, which is topical and relevant to my constituents.

In opening the debate the Minister mentioned in an impassioned way the contribution that this country had made to security in Iraq. I do not in any way denigrate the efforts that have been made by our forces there, but Iraq remains very insecure. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has commented on the forcible removal of people from this country to central and southern Iraq in conditions that put their safety at risk, and I ask the Government to look at that matter. A longer, all-day debate on the issue in the Chamber would be helpful in order to test the Government's emerging policies on the middle east. I am lucky enough to have in my new constituency the Iraqi Association UK, which I know is particularly concerned about deportations that continue from this and other European countries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) said that he wished there could be more of a meeting of minds between interests representing the Palestinian and Israeli sides. I echo that. It does occur, but perhaps not frequently enough. I am afraid that in the debate today we have seen people taking entrenched positions again, and I will try not to do that in my remarks. I have noticed an unprecedented co-operation between the groups representing the interests of Palestinians and in the three main parties, which now meet on a relatively regular basis. That is to be welcomed, but I think it is a response to the appalling situation that the attack on the Gaza flotilla has brought to light.

Following my several trips to Gaza, I would highlight three points that have come home to me and, I think, other hon. Members who have also made that journey in the last two to three years. First, there is a desire for justice. Yes, there is a desire for cement and security, but there is an overwhelming desire for justice among the Palestinian people. They believe that they are not getting that and that the balance of force is set very much against them, whether in the region or in the world. The hope given by the Goldstone report has so far been dashed, and now the prospect of an independent inquiry into the attack on the Gaza flotilla appears also to have receded.

[Mr Andy Slaughter]

Why is an independent inquiry important? The Prime Minister of Israel, in announcing the inquiry, said that it is to investigate

"whether Israel's Gaza blockade and the flotilla's interception conformed with international law".

With respect to the right hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot), he may need to brush up on his international law a little if he is going to practise again, because every opinion that I have read from respected international lawyers is very clear that there is no right to attack a ship bearing the flag of another country in the high seas to enforce a blockade, even were it a legal blockade. On that and many other grounds, this is an action of little more than piracy, and it will not much trouble the inquiry, if it is an impartial inquiry, to investigate that.

The other reason for the inquiry, according to Mr Netanyahu, is to

"investigate the actions taken by the convoy's organisers and participants."

In other words the victims—those who were killed and the many who were injured—are to be put on trial. Thanks to the way the Israeli media typically manipulate publicity—we have heard some examples repeated verbatim in the House tonight—there is very little chance of the inquiry being impartial and of the world being presented with what actually happened.

I took the opportunity to attend press conferences held by British citizens from the flotilla immediately on their return from Istanbul, where they were flown from Tel Aviv, and to hear their first-hand accounts. I may be able to say a little more about that in the debate tomorrow. Suffice it to say that it gives a totally different picture from most of what has been reported even in the British media and certainly in the international media about what happened during that unprecedented attack, in the middle of the night, in international waters, by armed troops, in a way that was deliberately provocative and ended with the entirely predictable result that many people were killed.

Simon Hughes: I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that although we understand the careful wording of what our Government said today, people such as his constituents and mine, who have come back with their stories, having been on the flotilla, particularly if they are of Palestinian origin, as the person whom I saw was, would be reassured only by an independent inquiry, rather than a partial one. We cannot expect people to trust an inquiry carried out by one of the parties to the event. It has to have international credibility.

Mr Slaughter: I am grateful for that intervention. Those who heard the response of the Israeli Prime Minister's official spokesman, both during the Gaza invasion and more recently, will realise the deep cynicism that underlies most of what Israel says and does to justify what has happened.

We have heard a lot said about Hamas today, and I have again heard the same points trotted out. I do not in any way defend what Hamas has done or said in the past, but let us look at the inequality in arms, and at the violence done and the deaths caused in the region over the past few years. There have been 1,400 people killed—mainly civilians, including many children—in the invasion, and nine people on the flotilla were killed. Just this year, six Palestinians have been killed, and 18 injured, on the west bank; 31 were killed and 116 injured in Gaza. Of course we must condemn rocket attacks, and the now relatively isolated attacks on Israeli civilians and on the Israeli military, but the question of proportionality must enter into the matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton mentioned the lockdown on the west bank and the repression that, every day, in a thousand ways, crushes the spirit of the Palestinian people there.

I end by putting a further question to those on the Government Benches: does an end to the blockade mean an end to the blockade? In *The Guardian* last Thursday, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), was quoted as saying that that was not necessarily the case, and that we could not expect an end to the blockade immediately. I believe that we need an end to the blockade, and I would like to hear the Government say today that that is what they intend. I echo what was said by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley): there should be entry of supplies not only for UN purposes, but for general purposes so that the population of Gaza, who simply wish to live ordinary lives, can succeed and thrive—to trade, to eat, and to behave in a way that we in this country would think normal. The blockade is a form of collective punishment, not a way of controlling terrorism. It would be helpful to hear the Government say that in terms today.

7.41 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Many congratulations to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on your elevation to your current position, some 30 years after we first met in a Committee Room elsewhere in this noble House.

The first, fundamental duty of any Government is to safeguard their citizens and borders, and to look after their people at home and abroad. As we come up to the 70th anniversary of the battle of Britain, we may ask, who would have denied our nation the right and duty to safeguard ourselves against the Nazis? Who would condemn Britain's historical roles, both in the middle east and blockading the African coast to enforce the abolition of slavery back in the 19th century?

Many of our noted justifications for invading sovereign countries have been based on safeguarding our safety and security. Our reason for invading Iraq was that weapons of mass destruction could be implemented on our sovereign soil within 45 minutes. We are still searching for those weapons of mass destruction, but that was the reason that we were given. Our justification for occupying Afghanistan is, of course, to prevent al-Qaeda and other forces from setting up camps, planting bombs and damaging British sovereign territory. We must say to the Government of the day that as we win that fight, we must ensure that al-Qaeda and other such dark forces do not set themselves up in other countries, such as Yemen. We must remember that that is a big danger that we face.

Israel has fought a number of wars over the years since it was set up in 1948. Its recent experience of rockets and bombings, including suicide bombings, has

been traumatic for all residents. The people of Israel have witnessed frequent suicide bombings, and suffered as a result of them. When the Israeli Government set up the wall, the incidence of suicide bombings dramatically reduced. If one were an Israeli citizen, one would say that the Israeli Government had done a wondrous thing. However, if one were a Palestinian, one would say, "You have done terrible things to us."

Equally, what is Israel's justification of the blockade? It is quite clear that since the blockade was implemented, the incidence of bombings and rockets coming into Israel has reduced, although such incidents have not ceased. The reality is that given the state of war between Israel and Hamas, Israel has the absolute right to enforce the position that rockets, bombs, missiles and ammunition must not enter Palestine or any area that can then attack the state of Israel.

We are challenged on the position of humanitarian aid, yet the state of Israel allows some 15,000 tonnes per week of humanitarian aid to enter Gaza. However, there is the role of Hamas: it holds up the aid. It uses it as an incentive to control the people of Palestine, and as a means of repression. Until it ceases its repression, the people of Palestine will not see the benefit of having a properly, democratically elected Government who truly represent them.

As has been said in many speeches today, Hamas says in its founding statement that it wants to destroy the state of Israel and wipe it off the face of the planet. It is very difficult to negotiate with people whose fundamental aim is to destroy one's Government and one's very being.

We must challenge the position taken on the flotilla and ask what its purpose was. Was it to deliver humanitarian aid? Absolutely; most of the people on those ships wanted to make sure that the citizens of Palestine and Gaza received humanitarian aid. However, behind it was IHH, an organisation with fundamental links to Hamas and al-Qaeda. The reality is that it sponsors terrorism, and it wanted to breach the blockade so that subsequently, once the blockade was removed, guns, rockets and other ammunition could be brought in, so that bombs could rain once again on Israel. It is understandable that the Israeli defence forces sought to prevent that from happening. On five of the six ships, they did so in a perfectly reasonable way, and people went about their business properly.

Let us look at what happened on 31 May, particularly on the Mavi Marmara. Many of the individuals concerned appeared to wish to be martyrs to the great cause. They attacked Israeli soldiers—remember, Israeli soldiers were injured during the boarding, and the reality is that they were attacked with weapons. There are two sides to the issue. Is it any surprise that Israel is concerned about inquiries? The Goldstone inquiry was almost certainly perceived in Israel as being biased against that state. When the inquiry came before the United Nations, the Labour Government's representative refused even to vote on the issue.

Mr David Ward (Bradford East) (LD): My understanding is that the Goldstone inquiry was independent, and that it was rejected by Israel because it did not like the findings.

Bob Blackman: The state of Israel rejected the inquiry as being biased and unfair. The reality is that the British Government refused even to vote on the issue; they did not vote for or against it. They did not even abstain. They just refused to vote. It is perceived as being not a fair and reasonable inquiry. On that basis, the state of Israel will most certainly say, "If we are to have another such inquiry, that can hardly be perceived to be fair or reasonable." That is one reason why there is a difficulty with the whole approach.

There is, of course, a way forward on the situation. First, Hamas and Hezbollah must renounce violence, stop bombing Israel and recognise Israel's right to exist. Israel must then lift the blockade, allow humanitarian aid in and ensure that a two-state solution can prosper and grow in an atmosphere of negotiation, peace and tranquillity. That will be hard on both sides, but that is what is required in the region to ensure that we move forward to two independent states able to exist side by side. Until all the nations that surround the state of Israel can accept Israel's right to exist, and Iran retreats from its stated position of trying to destroy the state of Israel, potentially with nuclear weapons, the situation in the middle east will remain fragile.

7.50 pm

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I congratulate you on your new position.

Like many colleagues on both sides of the House, I shall concentrate my remarks on the situation in Israel. I visited Israel and the west bank last year and met politicians from both sides. The best and most hopeful meetings were those with politicians with moderate views, who were willing to make compromises and could see the conflict from the perspective of the other side. In that vein, I welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis), who said that there is no contradiction between being a friend of Israel and a friend of the Palestinians, supporting a viable two-state solution.

During my visit, I was struck by the range and depth of those agreements, and I ask the Government how they will strengthen the voices of those moderates. Recent events filled me with great pessimism. The horrific incident on the Mavi Marmara sent a shock wave around the world, with widespread condemnation of the deaths of the nine civilians. The inquiry into the incident—I believe there should be an inquiry—must be judged by the international community as comprehensive, impartial and independent. Anything that falls short of those criteria will not be credible. I do not want to prejudge the conclusions of the inquiry, but questions about the conduct of soldiers aboard the ship must be complemented by searching questions about the planning of the military operation.

There must also be a wider understanding by the Israeli Government and the Israeli defence forces that they cannot use the justification of self-defence for any action that they choose to take. They must understand that there are severe doubts about the proportionality of their response in this case and others, and that the blockade of Gaza, in the wise words of my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary, is self-defeating—a policy that has long been discredited and continues to push power into the hands of Hamas.

The people of Gaza are, in effect, faced with collective punishment, which in turn produces bitterness and resentment and pushes them further into the arms of

[Emma Reynolds]

Hamas, thereby frustrating the efforts of the more moderate voices that I mentioned. Allowing Hamas to control supplies of many of the goods that are smuggled illegally has strengthened its hand, not weakened it. The basic human rights of the people of Gaza have been denied for too long. The economy of Gaza is in ruins, with an unemployment rate of nearly 40%. Any hope of sustaining economic growth through exports is strangled at birth by the blockade. Not being able to export from Gaza has given more power and control to Hamas.

The restrictions and the poverty that they engender leave the people of Gaza without hope and drive them into the waiting arms of Hamas, whose only counsel is a path of confrontation and an endless cycle of violence and revenge. I welcome the work that the middle east envoy, Tony Blair, is doing to ensure that supplies will, we hope, go into Gaza, that the security concerns of the Israelis are respected and that weapons are not allowed into Gaza.

The proactive stance of the Obama Administration and their insistence that the Israeli Government should halt settlement construction is welcome. For too long the Bush Administration inflamed rather than helped the situation. Israel needs critical, not uncritical, friends. I urge the Government to do everything they can to strengthen the voices of moderation on both sides of this tragic conflict. Despite all that has happened, there are such voices, and our Government should put pressure on the Israeli Government, through the Quartet or bilaterally, to extend the freeze on settlement building beyond September.

The talks going on are, unfortunately, indirect talks. If the confidence-building measures of which my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South spoke are adopted, I hope they will lead to direct talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Does the hon. Lady recognise that equally the Government should apply pressure to Hamas to ensure that the force that it uses is not successful, that the repressive approach that it takes is counter-productive, and that the authoritative way in which it goes forward is self-defeating?

Emma Reynolds: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. I regret the fact that there have not been elections in Gaza, as there should have been, last year. They were also put off this year. The lack of democracy in Gaza reinforces the position of Hamas. We in the international community should do all we can to fight against the increase of its power.

Only if the indirect talks become direct talks will there be a chance of a lasting and viable two-state solution in the middle east. I look forward to all that the Government can do. We on the Opposition Benches will help them, where we agree with them, to bring that about.

7.57 pm

Nick Boles (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. May I, too, welcome you to the Chair? You look very fine in it.

I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister to his post, which I know he will undertake as well as he has undertaken every other post in which I have worked with him in the past. I congratulate my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips), on his excellent maiden speech. The whole House knows that the finest things come in small packages.

In this first debate of the new Parliament on the middle east, and the first debate in which I have had a chance to take part, I did not want to get lost in the thicket of the detail of the current negotiation and the rights and wrongs of every issue. I wanted to take a little time to step back and tell the House why, ultimately, I count myself a friend of Israel, first and foremost, in the middle east. That is because I think of some fundamental truths.

In my maiden speech last week, I talked of the achievements of the Labour Government in establishing full equality for all people in the United Kingdom. Let us look at the middle east and ask ourselves, where in the middle east is it best to be a woman, or where in the middle east is it best to be gay? In Egypt, personal status laws discriminate harshly against women on marriage, custody of children and inheritance. In Jordan, a country which I consider to be a positive force and one where the current ruler is trying to take it forward, more than 20 women per annum, according to Amnesty International, are killed for breaking social taboos. Israel had a female Prime Minister before any party in Britain had even thought of it, and it nearly had another one last year—I rather wish it had—in Tzipi Livni.

Think about a gay person in the middle east. In Syria, it is not so bad—three years in prison. In Iran, a gay person would get the death penalty. In Israel, a gay person can rise to be a general in the armed forces, and just last Friday 100,000 people marched in Tel Aviv to celebrate the equality of gay people in Israel.

So then I ask myself, where in the middle east is it best to criticise the Government in public? In Syria, it is simply not possible, because the state controls every single aspect of the media. Reporters Without Borders calls Iran,

"the Middle East's biggest prison for journalists",

but it ranks Israel higher than the United States as a place for press freedom—44th in the world and first in the middle east.

Finally, I ask myself, where is it best in the middle east to belong to a religious or ethnic minority? In Syria, Kurds and Jews are not allowed to take any part at all in political life. In Iran, one cannot even go to university without passing an exam on Islamic ideology, and one cannot get a senior post in any organisation unless one belongs to the majority Shi'a group. In Israel, Israeli Arabs have always had all rights—the same as Israeli Jews—except for one: they do not have to serve in the armed forces, because the state of Israel recognises that it would be unfair to set them against their Arab brothers. However, they can vote and be elected, and many have been. There is even an Arab-Israeli serving on the supreme court in Israel.

So let us be clear: for all its errors and excesses, which I and the whole House see, Israel is an oasis in a desert—an oasis of freedom, democracy and human rights in the middle east. We therefore have to ask

ourselves, why does Israel do those things that shock, pain and worry us all? Why does it feel driven to inflict on the people of Gaza what we all recognise, whether in law or not, as seemingly like collective punishment? The answer is very simple: it is not just faced but encircled by an enemy that wishes to destroy it.

So before the House pulls on its breeches and starts saddling up the high horse, let us remind ourselves of how we—this place, this ancient democracy, this ancient birthplace of freedom—reacted when we faced an existential threat. We interned or deported long-time residents of German and Italian origin and refugees from Nazi Germany—to our everlasting shame. However, we did it, and with the approval of this House. The Americans did the same with Japanese Americans and German Americans, so we should be very careful before we start lecturing a nation that was built by the survivors of a genocide, which took less than five years to kill more than the current population of Jews in Israel.

Rather than lecturing and sitting on that high horse, we should ask ourselves, what practical things can we do instead of the huffing, the puffing and the futile outrage? I, too, welcome the role of Tony Blair in the middle east and in Palestine at the moment, so, first, we should do everything that we can to support the Palestinian Authority in the west bank and, in particular, Prime Minister Fayyad, so that Palestinian people can see an alternative to Hamas which delivers security, jobs and a normal life. That is all that they want. Secondly, we must do everything we can to encourage Turkey to remain aligned with Europe and the west, and not to feel that we do not want it in the European Union or as part of the western alliance. Turkey is key to us and to Israel, and we must ensure that Turkey knows it.

Finally, we must confront Iran. I am very glad that the Government played such a pivotal role in achieving the sanctions that the UN agreed last week. The middle east is a terrible area of the world, with so many problems, but in ending I share the optimism that some Members have expressed. Yes, the situation seems full of despair, but let us look at the progress that has been made. There is a peace treaty with Egypt, and I should point out that Israel has never attacked a nation with which it has a full peace treaty. There is a peace treaty also with Jordan, and across the Israeli political system it is commonly accepted that a two-state solution with an independent state for Palestinians is the right solution. I feel that progress is being made, and further progress can be made if we quit the lectures and just get down to supporting our friends and helping them to come to an agreement.

8.5 pm

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): I was going to say something very different when I started listening to the debate, but after hearing the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) talk about different countries' rules, regulations and societies, I must say that that is no basis for invading, for killing or for destroying other people. One cannot say, "I'm a friend of Israel because it is a democracy." We can be friends with Israel; I have no problem with the state of Israel. I welcome what my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) said about the way to deal with the situation in the middle east. He said that the Palestinian people should receive land in proportion to their population. There should be an end to illegal settlements, and we should end the war, which has created so much misery for the Palestinian people.

We have to go back in history. In the 19th century, only 5% of the population in Palestine were Jewish; 95% were Muslims and Christians. In 1931, 18% of the people in Palestine were Jewish, resulting from the persecution of the Jewish people in Europe. Between 1947 and 1948, 78% of Palestinians were expelled from their homeland, and now Jewish people hold 75% of the land, whereas the Palestinians, who are larger in number, have only 25%. That is the dispute under discussion; that is the issue that the House must not forget. People have been expelled from their homes and blockaded, but some Members say, "We can't see why people are being critical of the Israelis and why people feel that they should fight for the rights of the Palestinians." I agree that there should be two states, but they should be created on the basis of equality—on the basis that 20% of the population own 75% of the land. When does that become fair? When is that right? Until we put those wrongs right, we will never have peace in Palestine.

I am surprised that people seem to have forgotten the history. Jewish people were massacred and genocide was committed against them, but it was carried out by western democratic countries—Germany, Austria and Poland; nobody in the middle east carried out genocide against the Jewish people. If the Palestinians are given their proper rights, I do not think that the state of Israel will have any problem with any of its neighbours. It would certainly finish Hamas, because Hamas exists only because such inequities exist. If we gave the Palestinian people their rightful homeland, if we gave them a proper share of the land and if we gave them security, Hamas would disappear just like that.

8.8 pm

Alistair Burt: It is a pleasure to welcome you to your seat, Madam Deputy Speaker, on this, my first opportunity to do so. I thank all Members for participating in the debate. Time necessitates that I cannot deal with each submission. Suffice it to say that tomorrow in Westminster Hall there is a debate on Gaza, which will provide me with a longer opportunity to put forward the Government's position and to respond to a few other issues.

Before I make some general remarks, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) for his contribution, which we all much enjoyed. He takes on a seat that Douglas Hogg held with that combination of mischief and brilliance of which he was such a unique exponent. Douglas will be sadly missed, but the gap is clearly going to be very ably filled, indeed. My hon. Friend spoke about a difficult subject with a lightness and self-deprecation that clearly masks a keen intellect. We sensed that when he touched on the seriousness of the issue. I am sure that we all enjoyed his contribution. We will certainly hear from him again, and we will welcome that.

On the debate itself, the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) began with some thoughtful and reflective comments that illustrate why as a Minister he was so well regarded in both the House and his private office, which I have been fortunate enough to inherit. Freedom has allowed an even richer seam of belief and rhetoric to emerge. His sensitivity, through his faith, to those on

[Alistair Burt]

all sides of the conflict caught up in incidents of death and misery, reflected the concerns of so many of us who agonise over the steps needed to achieve the realisation of a peace the architecture of which is seemingly so well known to so many people and has been for so long.

The later contributions of many colleagues on both sides of the House illustrated the complexities of the politics of the region and how easily the confidence-building measures of one run the risk of being a threat to another. It was inevitable that the House would concentrate on Gaza. With due deference to balance in many contributions, a number of colleagues examined the events of the other week from a deeply held conviction on one or other side of the divide.

I shall deal with some of the issues in more detail tomorrow, but I welcome the contributions made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley), the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman), my hon. Friends the Members for Sleaford and North Hykeham, for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) and for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) and the hon. Members for Bristol West (Stephen Williams), for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Sandra Osborne), for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), for Hammersmith (Mr Slaughter), for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds), for Bolton North East (Mr Crausby) and for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman).

The remarks made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) were more about Iran than anything else, but in general the debate concentrated on Gaza. Hon. Members anxious about Gaza and angry at the activities and actions of Israel demonstrate why the Government urge a credible inquiry and change in Gaza to relieve the humanitarian situation while recognising Israel's need for security. We need to create the environment so necessary for a viable, non-dependent economy and a people with reason to hope.

Jeremy Corbyn: Will the Minister give way?

Alistair Burt: No.

Friends of Israel, in the House and beyond, will no doubt reflect on the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot), a long-standing friend and colleague. As much from experience and deep conviction as from his unquestioned support for the state of Israel, he posed a series of questions that will make uncomfortable but necessary reading in Israel.

At the beginning of the debate, I said that the middle east was a realm of culture, diverse history, faith and heritage. Despite that, we concentrated on places and circumstances that illustrate the other side of the middle east and show that history can be a burden as well as a blessing. If I have anything to offer in this context, it will be my determination to work with the House and the expertise of so many Members who care about this issue, to reflect the House's passions and above all to champion its eternal determination to bring hope into the most difficult of situations.

The hon. Member for Bury South was not wrong to list the series of events that he and I have experienced and witnessed throughout our time in this House, a number of which have been personally shared by colleagues here. They range from standing amid the tear gas in apartheid South Africa in the ruins of Crossroads to opening ballot boxes in a free East Germany and cheering home President Obama—not so much for his party, but for what he represented in respect of change for the world and his country. How the House longs to add the middle east to that list.

The way will be long, tough, tortuous and unromantic. The House can and will play its part in offering balance and sharp inquiry—and, I hope, encouragement—to the many partners who will be playing key roles in securing the peace and stability that we long for in the middle east. We will return to these issues many times. I trust that in darker times to come, the light of hope, which the best of history can provide, will remain unextinguished by events, no matter how frail that flame may be from time to time.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the matter of UK policy on the middle east.

Emerging Economies

8.15 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Jeremy Browne): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of emerging economies.

I am delighted to have this first opportunity to speak from the Government Benches, and even more delighted to serve for the first time under your chairmanship, Madam Deputy Speaker. I trust that the high-preference vote that I gave you in the ballot will mean that you will look favourably on me if I go astray.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): The hon. Gentleman joins a long line of Members who have said exactly the same; I will, of course, be even-handed with everyone.

Mr Browne: I did not doubt that for one moment.

I welcome this opportunity to debate the new Government's policy on the emerging economies. Strengthening the UK's relations with the fastest-growing areas of the world economy is one of the key foreign policy objectives of the coalition programme for the next five years. That was explicitly stated by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary when he opened the foreign affairs debate on the Queen's Speech and observed that

"we live in a world where economic might is shifting to the emerging economies"—[*Official Report*, 26 May 2010; Vol. 510, c. 174.]

In the House, we all recognise the ongoing importance of Europe and north America to our foreign policy goals, but we must also be clear about where new opportunities increasingly lie. That means elevating our links with the emerging economies and expanding powers in other parts of the world as part of a distinctive British foreign policy. That is why, only a few days after the Government were formed, the Foreign Secretary and I were meeting counterparts from Mexico, Chile and several other emerging powers at the EU-Latin America-Caribbean summit in Madrid. The following week I also held talks with Foreign Ministers from Vietnam and Singapore, among others, at the EU-south-east Asia summit, which was also held in Madrid. I give an undertaking that I will be making our relations with emerging economies my biggest priority, with visits to several key partners, in the coming months.

Why is the issue so important? We live in a time of fundamental change, both economic and political. The last decade of the previous century saw a shift from the bipolar, cold war world that we had all become familiar with. The first decade of this century has seen another shift, just as dramatic, from a G8 world to a G20 world. Global economic decisions were once made by a grouping of European and north American nations in conjunction with Japan, but today such decisions are increasingly taking place within the G20—not only a much bigger group, but one that represents a much broader range of countries from every continent of the world. The UK strongly supports the G20, which reflects the economic realities of the 21st century and recognises the rise in the strength of powers such as China, India and Brazil. The next meeting of the G20, in Toronto a few days from now, will be an important opportunity to take this work forward.

It is impossible to get through one of these discussions without a barrage of fascinating statistics that people can take home, and I have a few to run past colleagues on both sides of the House. It is important to remind ourselves of how dramatic the change that we have lived through in recent years has been. In the past decade, China's economic growth has averaged 9.9% a year, while the UK's has averaged just 1.7% over the same period. India's growth over the same period has averaged 7%. In 1980, China's proportion of world GDP was just 2.6%; by last year, that had risen to 8.5%. According to some predictions, China's economy may well equal that of the US as early as 2027, and by 2050 the Indian economy may well be bigger than the five largest European economies added together.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): My hon. Friend talks about the statistics for China. It is important to realise how much of that growth is needed just for its economy to stand still. If growth falls below about 8%, then unemployment starts to rise. When we look at the Chinese economy from outside, we have to understand what a challenge it faces.

Mr Browne: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Huge levels of growth, by European standards, are necessary to take the Chinese economy forward and to realise the aspirations of an enormous population, hundreds of millions of whom still live in absolute, as well as relative, poverty.

It is easy to characterise these debates as being about China, India, Brazil and other countries with large populations, but there are also regions, particularly in Asia, that are developing at a fast rate. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations countries—the south-east Asian bloc—have, between them, a larger population than that of the European Union. Over the past decade, they have had an annual growth rate of 5.7%— not as high that of as China, but still very high by European standards, albeit having started from a much lower base. If we think of groups of countries that are increasingly willing and enthusiastic about the prospect of working together as single blocs in that way, their relevance will be obviously apparent to everyone in this House.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): My hon. Friend mentions China and the huge steps forward that it has taken in its growing economy. Its gross domestic product now stands at about 9.5% or 9.6%— growth that compares quite favourably with ours. Is it therefore right that we continue to provide that country with Department for International Development funds to the tune of—I may stand corrected—about £30 million a year?

Mr Browne: An interesting evolution in the power balance in the world is taking place, with these huge emerging countries. Although China's GDP is slightly greater than ours, it is worth reminding ourselves that their population is 25 times higher, so their GDP per capita is very much smaller than ours. Hundreds of millions of people in China have yet to benefit from the huge advances that that country has made over the past decade or two. At the moment, we have this slightly strange situation whereby many of the emerging economies are the new powerhouses and yet still have millions of people living in absolute poverty. I think that there will

[Mr Jeremy Browne]

be an evolutionary period in which they are apparently two slightly contradictory things simultaneously: they will require aid and assistance while becoming increasingly significant economic and political players. Over time, that balance needs to be reflected in the contributions that we make in aid.

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his post; I think that he will make a very fine Minister.

Developing the argument somewhat, in the next 20 years or so we will see growth in the middle classes across the emerging economies the like of which we have never seen before, with huge untapped potential that British companies can access in selling goods and services to them. What steps will the Government take to ensure that British companies can access those future market opportunities?

Mr Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman not only for his flattering comments but for his intervention. I will deal with that point as I proceed through my speech.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): What attitude does the hon. Gentleman take to emerging economies in what the European Union calls its near abroad? It seems to be keen to devote a portion of its aid—to which, of course, we donate royally—to those countries, whereas Britain's philosophy, through DFID, has been that our aid should go to countries that are impoverished.

Mr Browne: I do not want this debate to be just about aid, because the emerging economies are important in many different ways, not only as recipients of our largesse. Let me proceed with some of the points I was going to make, not least those relevant to the comments of the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright). If I do not cover them to the satisfaction of the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) and others, perhaps we can return to them later.

There has been a truly transformational shift in economic and political power. That is a change that will have enormous consequences for Britain and about which we cannot be complacent. Although it is a challenge that may, in some ways, pose difficulties for us, it is also a great opportunity. It is worth saying—this is relevant to the point about aid—that about half a billion more people have been taken out of poverty as a result of these changes taking place around the globe: a figure that could not possibly ever have been achieved through international aid and generous donations from our country. It is a phenomenon that has transformed the life chances and opportunities of millions of people who previously lived in a state of destitution.

The World Bank has estimated that the global middle class is likely to grow from 430 million people in 1999 to more than 1 billion people in 2030, and most of that growth will be in the emerging market countries. That increase in middle class consumers is equal to the total population of the European Union, in the course of just three decades. If we are to see Britain's economy growing strongly again, which must happen if we are to tackle the UK's deficit and raise the prosperity of our own citizens, we must tap into these vast new markets.

We have huge economic advantages in this country. Britain is home to many of the leading global companies in the energy, retail, financial and communications spheres. We are an outward-looking and open country ranked by *The Economist* as the best place in Europe to do business. London is a global city and Britain is increasingly a global hub. Ours is a multicultural nation with connections across the world. We will use those connections to build and intensify our commercial, cultural and educational links. The English language is the most widely spoken in the world. It is the common language not only of international business but of science, academic research and the digital world. There are today more English language students in China than there are people in the United Kingdom, and English is the common tongue for business in India. This can only be good news for British businesses wanting to tap into these giant markets.

Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): Following the intervention by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), will the Minister join me in paying tribute to people from these countries—not only those from India, who have historically been very proactive, but those from the Chinese public and private sector, and from Brazil and elsewhere—who are working hard in this country to ensure that we understand not only the opportunities for them, but the opportunities for us in their countries, in a way that they were not even beginning to do 10 years ago?

Mr Browne: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. It is notable that, in many international companies and other organisations in which the management and the work force are drawn from right around the world, talent has become a global phenomenon. Many talented Chinese, Indian, Brazilian and other people work in London and throughout the United Kingdom and contribute to companies with British leadership and to the prosperity of our country.

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend mentions the importance of the movement of people with regard to China. Does he know that France and Germany attract around 500,000 visitors every year? I am afraid that we compare badly, attracting only 100,000. That is because it is far simpler for the Chinese to apply for the Schengen visa, which gives them much greater access to Europe. They are deterred from coming here because of the complexities and the distance that they must travel to get a visa. Would my hon. Friend consider Schengen plus, which would allow a bolt-on to the Schengen visa system to allow Chinese visitors to come to the UK?

Mr Browne: That is a matter that I may wish to bring to the attention of Home Office colleagues. I am sure that they will take my hon. Friend's wider point seriously, and I want to deal with it in the remainder of my speech. It relates to the importance of not just Government-to-Government or even business-to-business relations, but of engaging on a person-to-person basis with many countries.

The economic shifts that we are witnessing are no less significant politically. I have already said that after the second world war we had a political settlement, which was essentially the cold war settlement based on Europe and north America. That is emphatically no longer the case. Of course, we must be careful about getting ahead

of ourselves. The United States is still the dominant power in the world and likely to remain so for a considerable time. Gross domestic product per capita in the EU is still vastly higher than in China or India. However, the direction of travel is obvious.

Britain can and should be confident in our ability to succeed in the new order. We remain a respected global player. We are at the core of international decision making: we are a major player in the EU, the Commonwealth, the United Nations and NATO. We have a network of diplomatic and other missions that reaches into every corner of the globe, while maintaining the ability to exercise hard power when necessary.

Along with Britain's economic and political assets, our so-called soft power can also play an important role in ensuring that we retain our influence and prosperity in future. We are globally influential in subjects ranging from architecture to science and popular culture. We have global sporting connections, including the world's most followed football league. The UK will be at the centre of world sport when the Olympics come to London in 2012 and the Commonwealth games to Glasgow in 2014. We have a unique asset in the BBC World Service, while the British Council connects millions across the globe to Britain's culture and education.

The changing world order should not be seen just in terms of a GDP league table. As important, if we are to win the debate on important matters such as climate change and human rights, is our ability to lead on ideas. Just as we must lead in that competition of ideas, we must likewise provide leadership in the debate on fundamental values.

I have spoken in meetings with Foreign Ministers from around the world about not only our economic interests but the balance between the role of the state and the individual, and argued that economic growth was not the only measure of human well-being, but that civil rights were central, too.

Mr Iain Wright *rose—*

Mr Browne: I will take the hon. Gentleman's intervention, but I may be less generous afterwards.

Mr Wright: I thank the Minister for giving way; he is being most generous. Before he moves from economic power to soft power, let me say that resource constraints are an inherent risk in the movement eastwards of the world's economy. I am concerned that the 21st-century equivalent of the scramble for Africa, in which emerging economies lock in trade deals with African nations to get commodities such as iron ore and oil, will compromise our ability to compete as a nation. What steps will the British Government take to ensure that British companies have access to hard-pressed resources and commodities in future?

Mr Browne: The hon. Gentleman makes another excellent point, about how we ensure that there is a global architecture of decision making and responsibility, which means that resource allocation and other political decisions are made in a framework of law and consensus. That is our foreign policy objective and why our foreign policy has to evolve to match reality. We cannot sit, King Canute-like, and try to cling on to the G8 and European-north American-centric architecture. We need a decision-making framework, which reflects the change in the status of different countries and allows us to make decisions in concert with them as we proceed with economic growth and political decision making in the decades ahead.

Much of the analysis that I have shared with the House is widely accepted if under-appreciated by some in our national discussion. We must now ask how we respond to that and what the consequences are for our policy making. Let me suggest three overlapping subjects as a framework for our debate in the next hour and a half or so. First and perhaps most important, we must make the case—and win the argument—for keeping global markets open to foreign trade and investment. A resurgence of protectionism in any of the markets about which I have spoken would be a far greater risk to the UK economy than the rise of those markets. We must also have a dynamic, outward-looking economy—this point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southward (Simon Hughes)—that is not burdened by unsustainable levels of Government debt.

Secondly, we will significantly increase our cross-Whitehall effort to engage not only with the obvious, big emerging economies, but with the medium-sized emerging economies. We must also build on our solid co-operation with Japan, which remains the second-largest economy in the world. All of that will mean working with business to reap the opportunities in countries and regions whose cultures and languages may be less familiar to many of us, and getting the official dialogue right, including through more structured relationships at Government level with many such countries.

Thirdly, we must continue to invest in our political as well as our economic effort. The rise of emerging economies will make the world a more prosperous place, but it will also make it more complicated. A more multilateral world will require us to engage on key security issues with a wider cast of global actors, which will put an even higher premium on ensuring that we are all bound by the same international rules-based system. Upholding that will be the key task of our diplomacy in its widest sense in the years ahead.

That places a heavy burden of responsibility on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. One FCO priority will therefore be to look at how we can best use our diplomatic network and shape our resources to ensure that we have the capability to make the most of the new world that is being brought about by the emerging economies. We are already being innovative in our representation overseas. I do not claim that such innovation started magically a month ago—it has been undertaken for a period of time—but I hope that we will accelerate it and give it extra momentum. We are using regional networks of experts and so-called laptop diplomats, among other innovative measures. In a difficult resource climate, we must ensure that our language training, including in Mandarin, Spanish and Arabic, is focused where we need it most. We will look at how to resource stronger UK engagement with the Governments, peoples and societies of emerging economies in the forthcoming spending round.

If we are to retain our influence in the new global, economic and political world, we will need to change and adapt. Our diplomatic effort will be focused where it is needed and adapted to the new realities, but our efforts must go beyond discussions between diplomats in capital cities. We must inspire business and community

[Mr Jeremy Browne]

leaders throughout Britain to build relationships with their counterparts in the emerging powers. That task is not only for the FCO and the Government: I am emphatic in my view that that task is for our country as a whole and all the people who live in it. Everybody in our country needs to step back for a moment and ask themselves, "Are we able to think and act globally in a way that reflects the new realities of the world? Are we seeking better to understand and engage with the emerging global players? How does the UK media cover the rest of the world? How does our educational curriculum meet our global needs? How well can our major businesses reach out beyond our borders to the markets of the future?" The Government should and will provide leadership, but our national outlook needs to adjust to the rapidly changing global landscape.

Dr Murrison: That is all very well, but what do the Government plan to do to combine Government offices abroad? In particular, does the Minister agree that it makes absolutely no sense to have Department for International Development offices and FCO offices in the same capital? Surely to goodness if we are to have the joint working to which he refers, we need co-location.

Mr Browne: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point that echoes one made by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and others. How can we best concentrate our resource in countries and avoid duplicating Government functions or Departments in the same location? There is a wider point: although it is important for the FCO to give intellectual leadership and momentum to our policy making overseas, our policy is not simply about relationships between the FCO and other Foreign Ministries. Rather, it is about Britain as a whole visiting China, India or Brazil, which includes the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Department of Energy and Climate Change and right across the board. We should not see emerging markets policy as a bolt-on, extra function of the Government that is divorced from our other deliberations in the House. Rather, it is a key function of the Government. It is led by the FCO, but it involves many Departments.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): To take up the point that my hon. Friend has just made, in some countries our engagement is a development relationship, but we have both a high commissioner and a head of DFID. Are the Government prepared to consider whether those roles could usefully be combined? In some cases high commissioners or ambassadors have told me that they are only there to wave the flag because the only people that the host nation wants to talk to are those from DFID. Would it not be sensible to combine the two?

Mr Browne: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's expertise as the Chairman of the Select Committee. It is important that when we engage with countries, especially those that are substantial recipients of British aid, we have a joined-up approach in which the aid is not divorced from the wider discussions that we have with them. I do not mean that the aid should come with strings attached, but it is bizarre—when resources are stretched—for us to have competing Government offices in one capital, potentially with competing agendas, when there is scope for the money to be spent more efficiently and effectively.

It is possible to overstate the existing scale of the change. Britain's GDP per capita remains high, our absolute prosperity—rather than our relative prosperity—remains high, and our economic, political and cultural leadership in the world remains very strong. But as a country and even as a continent—not just as a Government or Parliament—we cannot afford to be complacent. The world is changing rapidly. We need to engage constructively and energetically in that process of change so that we can shape it to ensure that Britain benefits as much as the new emerging economies from the opportunities that their rise undoubtedly offers. This task will be central to our future prosperity in the decades to come. We are already embarking on turning that goal into action.

8.42 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a great delight to see you in the Chair. I shall not reveal how I voted, but I did nominate you. This is the dawn of a new parliamentary era. [Hon. Members: "Oh!"] I apologise to the House for the quality of that remark.

I also welcome the Minister to his new responsibilities. He will be backed by a fine team of people, some of whom used to work to me. The quality of the advice provided in the Foreign Office is second to none, not only in relation to other Departments in this country but in relation to other foreign departments in other countries. I hope that the Minister lives up to them.

I have been looking at the Minister's campaign website, which includes an interesting list of endorsements. Indeed, they have something of a theme. There is one from Janet, who lives in Taunton. She says:

"Jeremy is clearly the best candidate. He will be supported by former Conservative voters."

Jez, also from Taunton, says:

"I'm afraid the idea of Mark Formosa",

who sounds more like a plant than an animal—I mean, candidate—

"as an MP terrifies me! He is worryingly extreme."

And Lavinia, from Wiveliscombe, says:

"Why is Mark Formosa so negative and nasty? I'm a natural Tory but I'm not supporting him!"

It is clear that throughout the election campaign the Minister had his eye on a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. It was seated in his mind. It is little wonder that, with him in his new job, the Tory Back Benches have as many noses out of joint as the England rugby team—

Mr Browne: And the Welsh team.

Chris Bryant: No, we tend to specialise in ears.

The Minister is the first Liberal in the Foreign Office for some 60 years, so I did a little research into previous Liberal Ministers there. Captain Neil Primrose, who was one of the last four, lasted less than five months—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's points are very interesting, but he needs to ensure that he stays in order and relates his remarks to the subject of emerging economies.

Chris Bryant: Captain Neil Primrose, who took a strong interest in emerging economies at the time, and particularly Turkey, which we shall come to, unfortunately

lasted only five months in government, because the Government collapsed, and his daughter ended up marrying a Tory. Cecil Harmsworth, who also took a strong interest in emerging economies, is someone whose family gave us the *Daily Mail*—we often forget that it was the Liberals who did that. The Marquis of Reading had to resign for insider dealing after just three months in the job, while John Simon ended up virtually a Tory, so I look forward to observing the Minister's career.

There can be little doubt that the shape of the world's economy is changing, as the Minister said, and it is changing at a pace that few would have anticipated just a decade ago. Over the past 10 years, the BRIC countries, as they are often referred to—Brazil, Russia, India and China—have alone contributed more than a third of world GDP growth, growing from one sixth of the world economy to almost a quarter. There is also a growing confidence in many of those countries about their economic and cultural future, and they want a far greater impact on the world stage. Indeed, they are often impatient with progress at the United Nations and elsewhere. Thus, in April, Brazil saw its lowest unemployment figures since 2001, and it confidently expects growth to reach 6% this year, and this from a country that in 2002 had to secure an IMF loan—the largest IMF loan ever at the time—of $30.4 billion. India's growth rate is expected to be 8.6%, while China has been averaging at 10% not just for the 10 years to which the Minister referred, but for the past 30 years.

Nothing, however, is certain—we only have to look at a little bit of history to see that. In 1913, Argentina was the 10th largest economy in the world and enjoyed significant advantages over many others: great natural resources, a well-educated population and strong international ties to the United States of America, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom. Today, however, Argentina languishes. Why? In part, I believe, because of the self-inflicted political turbulence that it has experienced; in part, because of—*[Interruption.]* I do not think that it was socialism—if anything, it was national socialism, which was rather closer to Tory philosophy in those days. In part, the reason was that Argentina failed to deal with inequality, but it was also—and primarily—an economic nationalism that created unnecessary barriers to trade. I would say to Argentina today that economic nationalism will do it no favours at all in the years to come either.

Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the reasons why Argentina had all those problems was that when it defaulted on its debt a few years ago, it had both the largest budget deficit and the largest debt per capita on its continent? Does he see any parallels between that situation and the one that his Government left behind after 13 years of power?

Chris Bryant: Nice try, but we will come a little later to the problems that I see with the Conservative-Lib Dem Government's approach to growth and why I think this debate points to some of the problems that we will see over the coming years. But no, I think that the problems in Argentina stretch back across 100 years. The Argentines failed to take advantage of their many strengths and they played their politics extremely badly. My fear is that they are doing exactly the same thing today.

The task for all those countries is to ensure their growth, while the task for us is to ensure that we match their performance pound for pound, real for real. It is worth bearing in mind how significant those economies are to the UK. To all intents and purposes, we are Russia's banker, while we are Brazil's seventh trading partner in terms of exports and India's fourth. The emerging economies have become increasingly dependent on each other in recent years; thus China has now overtaken the USA as Brazil's major partner. Our position in relation to the emerging economies should be to seek to do three things: first, build UK growth; secondly, fight bilaterally and on an international level for free and fair trade, rather than protectionist measures, which is something to which the Minister referred; and thirdly, constantly underline the importance of the rule of law and human rights.

Let me start with growth. I simply do not believe that it is possible for the UK to achieve a greater share of the markets, or a stronger role in the world, without a strategy for UK economic growth. The Foreign Secretary can huff and puff as much as he wants, but if the Chancellor is focusing only on cutting the deficit—whether through cutting expenditure or increasing taxes—and has no strategy for growth, we will have nothing to sell abroad, we shall lose out economically, and the Foreign Secretary will simply be left to manage the decline of our reputation abroad.

Gordon Birtwistle (Burnley) (LD) *rose—*

Malcolm Bruce *rose—*

Chris Bryant: I shall give way first to the newer Member, then to the old lag.

Gordon Birtwistle: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, over the past 13 years—and probably even over the past 25—the products that we sell abroad have diminished because of Government policy? We now have very little to sell, apart from in the financial markets, because most of our manufacturing has moved to the emerging economies.

Chris Bryant: Strictly speaking, that is not statistically right. Yes, when Burberry tried to close its factory in my constituency, I fought hard to ensure that the business would not be taken to India or China. I do not think that most people would want to buy a high-quality Burberry product that purported to be British if it had not been made in the UK. Unfortunately, we lost that battle. However, we export a lot more than just financial services. For example, a lot of our exports relate to extractive mineral industries, which I shall come to in a moment—*[Interruption.]* I sense that Hartlepool is springing to its feet.

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): I welcome my hon. Friend to the Opposition Benches, and I hope that he will apologise for the appalling nature of the gags. May I first take up the point made by the hon. Member for Burnley (Gordon Birtwistle)? I disagree with him, because the UK is still the sixth largest manufacturing nation on earth. We have moved along the value chain, in that we now provide high value-added manufacturing, such as that produced in Hartlepool by Heerema and by JDR Cable Systems. May I also press my hon. Friend

[Mr Iain Wright]

on a point that he was starting to make? A UK growth strategy is sadly lacking in the new Government. The prospects for growth in relation to supporting and nurturing higher education and to higher value-added manufacturing are lacking. What does he think the Government could do to remedy that?

Chris Bryant: I am a bit distressed that my hon. Friend has just welcomed me to the Opposition Benches, but there it is. We came into the House at roughly the same time, and I will take that matter up with him later. He also made a good point about a growth strategy, which I will come to in a moment. First, I will give way to the slightly older Member.

Malcolm Bruce: Just refer to me as the old lag. On a detailed point, the Crombie overcoat company in my constituency went out of business—or at least contracted its business—because it had a major contract with the KGB, not because it had been successful in the free market. The point that the hon. Gentleman is making about a growth strategy is all very well—yes, we should have one—but can he divorce that from spending even more Government money and getting ourselves further into debt? Can he explain how we can have a growth strategy that does not involve spending more taxpayers' money that we cannot afford?

Chris Bryant: I was about to do precisely that, so I am grateful to the old lag—

Mr Ivan Lewis: The honourable old lag.

Chris Bryant: Sorry—the honourable old lag. He is probably extremely right honourable, learned and gallant as well, for all I know.

We need to focus on three elements of a growth strategy in relation to the emerging economies. First, we need active investment in the industries of the future. We have only to take a cursory look at our exports to many of those countries to see that a large part of our engagement relates to old, extremely well established industries, notwithstanding the significant advances that have taken place in some others. For example, it is a simple fact that petrocarbons form the backbone of our world trade with many of the emerging economies. In India, pearls and rough diamonds are key exports, and, in many places, extractive industries dominate our balance of trade. In recent years, we have added telecoms to the list, as well as the pharmaceutical and IT industries, but the UK's future has to spread further, especially into the low-carbon, green industries. I do not believe that that will happen without some degree of Government investment, however, and if we are too slow, others will gain first player advantage.

I presume that a Minister will be winding up the debate?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Henry Bellingham) *indicated assent.*

Chris Bryant: I am grateful for that. The Minister who does so may not be able to answer all my questions, but I hope that he will write to me about any that he cannot.

What support will the Government give to British industry to compete in these green markets? The budget for UK Trade & Investment in 2008-09 was £316 million, with which it assisted 21,800 businesses that recorded an additional £3.6 billion of profit, which is equivalent to a £16 benefit for every £1 spent by UKTI. Will that budget rise or fall next year, and by how much?

Mr Ellwood: May I also welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Opposition Benches, and may I welcome, too, the many Labour Back Benchers who are present for this debate?

Malcolm Bruce: All one of them.

Mr Ellwood: Absolutely right.

The hon. Gentleman talks about the importance of green technology, but I am reminded of a fantastic company on the Isle of Wight—not far from my Bournemouth constituency—that made blades for wind turbines. For some reason, they could not be used in the UK, but they were manufactured to be used in the United States. That company closed down because it did not receive the support it needed from the previous Government. Does he now regret that decision?

Chris Bryant: Yes, of course I do—and I am looking forward to welcoming the hon. Gentleman to the Opposition Benches as well. Whether he will have to transfer his allegiance or we will have to change the Government in order to achieve that is another matter, but he makes a very fair point. I would, however, gently say to him that of course I accept that there will have to be cuts in the coming months and years, but I also believe that we must prioritise those industries where we can make the most dramatic difference and where we can maximise our chances of succeeding in the emerging economies.

The second thing we need to do is to learn some lessons about modern foreign languages. The Minister of State was rather complacent about the facts that India now uses English as its business language and many people in China learn English, rather than French as in the past. Unless we have a cadre of young people, and not only those working in the Foreign Office—*[Interruption.]* I think "cadre" is now a sufficiently anglicised word to be allowed in a debate and not to be out of order. Unless we have a sufficient number of people who speak modern foreign languages, and not just the useless modern foreign languages such as French, but the—*[Interruption.]* I have said that to the French; I think they realise there are problems.

Dr Murrison: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that not only has he just insulted the French, but he has also insulted a large swathe of the Maghreb, which has not been mentioned at all in the debate so far? That is a bit of a pity, in particular because one of our major trading partners in north Africa is, of course, Morocco, where the diplomatic language is French.

Chris Bryant: Yes, but I think that one of the things that has changed over the past 30 or 40 years is that whereas French used to be the most useful language because it was, for the most part, the diplomatic language around the world, that is certainly no longer the case. The most useful languages to speak at present are Mandarin, and Spanish and Portuguese because of Latin America, and we need to focus on Arabic as well.

My biggest concern is that the effortless British superiority with which we stride around the economic world means that all too often we are the only country that presents business people in other countries who do not speak even the rudiments of a foreign language. That is a big problem. *[Interruption.]* The Minister of State refers to the Deputy Prime Minister, and it is a delight that he speaks so many foreign languages, but I just gently say that it is important that the Government focus on this.

We did not get it right, and ever fewer people in the UK are learning foreign languages. My experience in the Foreign Office was that the number of people who spoke foreign languages has diminished, and the number who can confidently speak them is pretty low.

Mr Jeremy Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way as I wish to find a point of consensus with him. It is important not only that the Foreign Office trains to a high standard a sufficient number of diplomats who can engage with the emerging economies in the language spoken in each of those countries, but that we appreciate the wider challenge to our country, which I posed, of the educational curriculum and how well suited we are, not only within the Foreign Office or the Government, but as a nation, to deal with the emerging changes in the world.

Chris Bryant: Well, indeed.

The third thing that we need to do to enhance UK growth relates to students from emerging economies. In all, some 48,000 overseas students study in the UK and they are vital to the UK's universities, as they bring in fees, ideas and an international perspective. Ever since Wong Fun graduated as a doctor from Edinburgh in 1855 there has been a large number of Chinese students in the UK. Their number has grown significantly in recent years, with nearly 5,000 starting new courses in 2008, along with 1,581 students from India.

The Conservatives were direct about this issue during the general election campaign, saying that

"our student visa system has become the biggest weakness in our border controls."

They said that they would

"insist foreign students...pay a bond in order to study in this country, to be repaid after the student has left the country at the end of their studies"

and

"ensure foreign students can prove that they have the financial means to support themselves in the UK".

By contrast, I note that the coalition agreement simply says that the Government will introduce new measures

"to minimise abuse of the immigration system, for example via student routes".

I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us precisely what the Government's intentions are. Will a bond be payable? Does he expect that this will cut or increase the number of students coming to the UK from emerging economies? Has the Foreign Office been consulted on this process? In particular, what plans does he have for the Chevening scholarships? The Chevening website already says that this year's places cannot yet be confirmed, which means that people who have been offered places do not know whether they will be coming. When will the review be completed? How many students will be studying this year and for the next three years, and from which countries will they come?

Mr Ellwood: The point about visas is important. Bournemouth has a number of English language schools, which attract people from places such as China. The Labour Government introduced new guidelines so that people had to have a certain standard of English before they could even come to this country, thus defeating the purpose of their coming here to learn English in the first place.

Chris Bryant: I am only asking what the Government's policy is—that is the job of the Opposition. The Labour Government did some things to ensure that significant loopholes that were being used to circumvent the proper immigration process were tackled. In particular, we decided to restrict the number of places available in northern India because there had been a sudden spike in the number of applications. Of course one has to be rational about this. I just want to know what conciliation has taken place between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat positions on this issue since the election.

In each of the countries that we are talking about there remain significant barriers to free and fair trade. In some instances we need to be sensitive to the political and cultural realities of those nations. For example, Mexico's constitution forbids the ownership of that which lies under the earth by anyone other than Mexico. I hope that the Minister will press the Mexican Government for further reform of the energy law, so that British companies can help Mexico to realise its resources—I hope that he will write to me on that point. Likewise, we need to restart the Doha round with an enhanced offer from the European Union on the common agricultural policy, especially now that the EU-Latin America banana war is over.

In that regard, an additional issue needs to be tackled: the casual approach in several countries towards intellectual property. Every report on intellectual property has suggested that those countries that most carefully delineate and protect the fruits of human intelligence are those that stand the best chance of prosperity. That becomes a virtuous circle, because people invest in ideas, commercialise them and then reinvest the profits in education and research. I hope that the Government will use the international institutions to push through a stronger global understanding of intellectual property issues—particularly in relation to China—be it in respect of the work of a musician or a playwright, an engineer or a scientist.

One other barrier to free and fair trade is corruption. Many of these emerging economies still languish a long way down the list of openness and transparency, with South Africa 55th, Turkey 61st, Brazil 75th, China 79th, India 84th, Mexico 89th and Russia a shocking 146th on Transparency International's corruption perceptions index, which I think is much respected by all.

As I have said, we need to use bilateral and multilateral levers to try to change all that. The most important of those is the European Union. For too long, Europe has allowed itself to be run ragged by the likes of Russia, China and India. If European countries are to flourish economically, we have to realise that we need greater unity based on self-discipline in our approach to those growing economies. Likewise, we need a common approach to Turkey—a country that is all too often left off the list of emerging economies, despite already

[Chris Bryant]

being the 16th-largest economy in the world, and on the up. It must be in the UK's interest for the Bosphorus tiger eventually to join the European Union.

On human rights and the rule of law, it is always tempting for a British company or Government to sideline human rights abuses when trying to secure an important new contract. However, that is always a mistake, as tacit acceptance of the status quo in terms of unscrupulous business practices all too often rebounds on the careless investor. In many of the countries that we are talking about, the human rights record is truly appalling. Russia, for example, is, economically, virtually a monogorod, or a town built on a single industry—petrocarbons. As the petrocarbons industry involves massive investment projects with potentially high returns and equally high risks, the Russian Government take a very direct interest in every aspect of it, but anxiety about excessive state intervention, about state appropriation of private assets and about corruption at the highest level has made it difficult for British companies to make the long-term investment needed to keep pipes running. When one adds to that the scandalous oppression of the media, the murder of journalists, the imprisonment of dissidents and the regular use of torture by the police and in prisons, it is a pretty heavy indictment of the Russian leadership. I am delighted that President Medvedev has made some excellent comments about tackling corruption, but so far that is just rhetoric, and very similar rhetoric to that used by Mr Putin when he was President.

I could make similar comments about China, which executes more people than the whole of the rest of the world and where there is the ongoing disgrace that is the treatment of the people of Tibet. In Brazil and Mexico, notwithstanding the efforts of Presidents Lula and Calderon, drug-related violence is endemic, especially in Mexico, torture is commonplace, and the rights of indigenous people are not fully recognised. In India, too, there have been unprovoked attacks on minorities—in Orissa state against Christians, and in Assam and Andhra Pradesh against Muslims. In that context, I ask the Minister which human rights projects in each of the emerging economies he proposes to continue and which he will cut. Will the project on the rights of children in the legal system in Brazil survive? Will the training of judges aimed at reducing the use of the death penalty in China survive? Will the civil society project in Chechnya continue? Or will all the human rights work in India, Russia, China and Brazil that is sponsored by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office be cut?

There is a tendency for Foreign Office Ministers—I confess that I did this myself—to declare whenever they arrive anywhere that they want to improve relations with that country. After all, it is only polite, and that is normally the aim of the visit. I am sure that we all want to improve trade with the emerging economies, but that requires a consistent approach to free and fair trade, a determination to assist British businesses abroad and a commitment to the British values of the rule of law and human rights. Above all, it requires a strategy for UK growth, but through all the hype, spin and glorious guff that we have heard from the new Government, the one thing we have not yet had is any sign of a strategy for growth.

9.8 pm

Laura Sandys (South Thanet) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to this debate and to make my maiden speech.

I have worked in many parts of the world, including in many emerging economies, and I have seen the growing asymmetry in how business is done in parts of the world that are growing at a faster rate than ours and with whom we will need to do business if we are to maintain our global economic position. That is a real challenge for us all and I will be keen to contribute to further debates on the need for stronger relationships between the United Kingdom and those emerging economies, particularly those in the area of central Asia that I think is not well understood and with which our relationships are not as deep as they should be. However, my priority in the House, for as long as the people of South Thanet so choose, is to serve them and to ensure that the House and this Government support their needs and address their concerns.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Dr Ladyman. He was an exceptionally committed Member of Parliament for South Thanet for 13 years, and held two distinguished posts in Transport and Health. On a personal note, he was extremely courteous and generous throughout our four-year campaigning trail together. I wish him great good luck in his new job as chief executive of a retirement home company. I know that in that role he will show the same commitment with which he served the people of South Thanet.

I live in and represent one of the best-kept secrets in the country—a series of towns and villages that demonstrate what is best about this country. I know how beautiful, how surprising and how unique each of the towns is that I represent, but over the last four years it has been particularly rewarding to see the number of supporters who came to South Thanet—some of them are here tonight—and who gasped with excitement when they saw the beauty of Ramsgate harbour, who saw that Broadstairs is one of the most perfect seaside towns, and who were staggered by Sandwich, which is considered nationally the most perfect medieval town. Even in Cliftonville, the poorest ward in the south-east, people recognised its architecture and its potential.

South Thanet has a particular relationship with the House. I live about a quarter of a mile from where Pugin built a church and his house. Ramsgate has many of the same architectural icons as the House, so there is a part of this place in South Thanet and a part of South Thanet here.

It is not just the place itself. The people of east Kent and South Thanet have attitude. We are independent. We have stood up against many wars and we have been on the front line against many invasions. I was privileged to be at the 70th anniversary of the Dunkirk little ships. Many people from my area, whether fishermen or small boat owners, went in their boats to save 300,000 of our soldiers who were on the beaches of Dunkirk. I am proud to represent such courageous and independent people in the House.

We have come into government at one of the most difficult times for many generations and what we achieve in the next five years will define our future for the next generation. I am sure that none of us on the Government Benches are under the illusion that we will not have to

do things that will make us unpopular. What we must be judged on is whether we are being fair and whether we are rewarding those who take responsibility.

It is on fairness and responsibility that I want to contribute to the debate. This week is the start of carers week. In South Thanet, we have one of the largest numbers of carers in the country. Coastal towns have a high percentage of carers. Young, old, frail, healthy—carers are selfless family members whose lives become dominated by the responsibilities they voluntarily take on. Being a carer is not subject to any working time directive; carers are full-time, on call 24 hours. Their lives are dominated by the needs of others. When helping those with chronic illnesses, they often forfeit their own life, and certainly their livelihood. Having watched my mother look after my father for five years before he died, I have seen at first hand the toll that can be taken on the carer.

We need to ensure that we put carers at the heart of our review of care for the elderly. It is crucial that we look at the role they play. In many ways, they will be one of the front lines in public services in the future. I urge the Government to ensure that we support those who support their loved ones. We need to look again at providing respite for carers. We need to review the cut-off of carer's allowance when people reach pensionable age—just when they need it most—and we need to place the carer's role at the heart of our review of care for the elderly.

When we leave the House—not for many years, we hope—we might all need carers, or we might all need to care for others. I would prefer that to be done by a loving relative—someone who will be there for me in my time of need—and I am certain that many other Members would, too. As the Prime Minister says, we need to reward those who take responsibility, and never can that be better said than about 6 million carers who give up their lives and selflessly give their time to their loved ones.

9.15 pm

Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden speech. I start by congratulating my hon. Friends the Members for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) and for South Thanet (Laura Sandys) on their excellent and moving maiden speeches.

My constituency of Reading West was created in 1983 and was served from then until 1997 by a Conservative Member, Sir Anthony Durant, who previously represented the Reading North seat between 1974 and 1983. Sir Anthony was an excellent constituency MP, who served the people of Reading with great distinction. In recent months, Sir Anthony has not been in the best of health, and I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will join me in wishing him a speedy recovery. [Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."]

My immediate predecessor was the Labour Member, Martin Salter, who represented Reading West for 13 years. No one who knows him could ever describe Martin as a shy and retiring individual. He always had and continues to have firm opinions on every political subject. Indeed, during his time as an MP, he sometimes held two opposing firm opinions on the same subject, both delivered with great conviction. A constituent of mine once compared Martin Salter to Marmite by saying, "You either loved him, or you wished that you had never opened the jar to let him out." Despite our many political rows and differences during the four years that I was a candidate and he was the Member of Parliament, I grew to rather like Martin, but then I must also confess to liking Marmite.

Martin Salter announced last year that he would not be seeking re-election because he wanted to

"move on and do something else with my life while I've still got some energy left."

Martin Salter certainly brought energy to his work on behalf of the people of Reading during his 25 years of public service—first, as a local councillor and then as the Member of Parliament for Reading West. Like Sir Anthony before him, he was a champion of local causes, a dedicated constituency MP, and he stood up for all the people of Reading West. I very much hope to continue in that fine tradition and serve each and every one my constituents to the best of my abilities.

I turn now to my wonderful constituency of Reading West, which stretches from the villages of Theale, Tidmarsh and Pangbourne in the west, to the more urban areas of Coley and Whitley towards the east. I grew up and went to school in Reading, and for me Reading is, quite simply, home. It is a confident and vibrant town full of aspirational and hard-working people. As a settlement, Reading was founded in the 8th century and was listed in the Domesday Book as a growing population centre—much as it is today. Reading abbey was built by Henry I in 1121, where he is also buried.

Although Reading has a long and honourable history, it is now very much a modern place. Originally famous for producing beer, biscuits and bulbs, Reading is now a high-tech and service industry hub and is home to many locally grown businesses, as well as international companies, such as Microsoft, Oracle and Cisco.

Reading also offers culture, with the internationally renowned Reading music festival being held every August. Hon. Members with a liking for contemporary music should know that a few tickets are still available for this year's festival. The very fine Madejski football stadium is located in my constituency, and I am sure that, before too long, we will see Reading football club return to its rightful place in the premiership.

In their maiden speeches many Members have mentioned great historical figures who are connected with their constituency, but, as I said, Reading is a modern place, so I would like to mention just two of the recent renowned sons and daughters of our great town. Kate Winslet was born and grew up in Reading. Her parents are constituents of mine. We are very proud of Miss Winslet's Oscar-winning achievements. Locally, Miss Winslet's mother is also a winner. Last year she was awarded first prize in a local pub's pickled onion-making competition. Who says Reading cannot match Hollywood's glamour?

The comedian and actor Mr Ricky Gervais grew up in Whitley, not far from where my parents lived when they first moved to Reading. I do not know Mr Gervais personally, but it is entirely possible that we loitered in the same shopping precinct when we were youngsters. Of course, one of us has now gone on to great things—and the other has become a Member of Parliament.

I am very pleased to be making my maiden speech during this debate on emerging economies, one of the largest of which is India. I know a little of the country. My family hails from India originally; I have advised European companies on doing business there; and some

[Alok Sharma]

months ago I visited India on a research project and interviewed a range of corporate leaders, civil servants and opinion formers to hear their views on India's development and economic ambitions. What is absolutely clear is that over the past decade the relationship between emerging economies such as India and China on the one hand, and the industrialised nations in the west on the other, has developed from one of the emerging economies being junior partners to a relationship of equals, with real potential for the likes of China and India to emerge as first among economic equals.

The emerging economies present challenges for us. We have seen some British jobs offshored to low-cost locations. With increasing globalisation and cost pressures on corporates, a certain level of offshoring is here to stay, whether we like it or not. But emerging economies also present a huge opportunity for British companies and jobs in this country. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Mr Browne), talked about statistics. Let me give the House a few on India. We have heard about annual growth rates of 7 to 9%. There is a middle class of around 400 million people and growing. Well over 60% of the population is aged below 35. India is looking to make significant investments in its infrastructure, in pharmaceuticals and health care, IT, green technologies, and food and agriculture, to name just a few sectors ripe for investment and growth. We in Britain have leading companies with significant expertise and know-how in many of these and other sectors.

In Reading, I have met home-grown technology companies that are exporting value-added products across the world. As a Government, we should be doing everything we can to help and encourage our companies to take advantage of the growth markets in the emerging economies. That will in turn help to create value-added and long-term jobs in the United Kingdom.

I was very pleased that the Gracious Speech made mention of developing an enhanced partnership with India. Because of our shared history and the mutual good will and affection between Britain and India, we already have a special relationship on an emotional level. We now need to make sure that we translate that good will and understanding into a special relationship based on trade and commerce to our mutual benefit. If we can do that in a timely manner, it will be to the advantage of British companies and will help safeguard and create jobs in our country which will be vital as we aim to grow and expand the British economy.

9.23 pm

Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for letting me catch your eye, and welcome to the Chair. I also welcome Ministers to the Dispatch Box and congratulate the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on his position on the Opposition Front Bench.

I have a huge personal interest in the emerging economies, and it is a great joy to be able to speak here tonight. Many years ago, I ran an educational charity giving away new medical textbooks throughout eastern Europe during and after the communist period, and it has been a particular delight to hear the expertise displayed by my hon. Friends the Members for South Thanet (Laura Sandys) and for Reading West (Alok Sharma) in their excellent maiden speeches.

I was in eastern Europe at a time when civil society was the subject of constant political oppression. Economic activity was shackled by commissars and petty regulation, and industry was funded by an open chequebook from Government. The result was colossal debt and economic stagnation. How very different from the situation that faces the UK today.

I know that every Member of this House will join me in saying that it is the greatest honour of all to be chosen to sit in this august Chamber; to have a share, however small, in the supreme sovereign authority in this country; and to walk in these hallowed halls and corridors, as so many extraordinary men and women have done before us. First impressions are not always so favourable; one thinks of Mark Twain, who said—I hope that the House will forgive my accent—"When I first came to Memphis, I found men drinking and gambling, and open prostitution in the streets. It was no place for a Presbyterian—and I did not long remain one." As for me, I enter this House as I hope I will remain—filled with a sense of due reverence and due responsibility.

I feel doubly privileged, in that I stand here as one of two tribunes for the people of Herefordshire. Truly, Herefordshire is a glorious county, known throughout the world for the quality of its cider, its beef and its soldiers. Such is its beauty that it has been only slightly disfigured by a recent association with the noble Lord Mandelson, who has added "of Foy in the county of Herefordshire" to an already rather extensive title. I alert the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) to that unfortunate precedent. Alas, we still look in vain for the tidal wave of public subsidy that usually accompanies Lord Mandelson wherever he goes.

My constituency stretches from the Black mountains in the west to the Forest of Dean. It encompasses the aptly named Golden valley; the gorgeous Monnow and Wye valleys; and Hereford itself, with its magnificent cathedral and Mappa Mundi. It has apple orchards, lovely churchyards, fine, rolling arable land, wildlife and pasture, stretching all the way down to Ross-on-Wye and the spectacular rock of Symonds Yat.

I am not, in fact, the first Norman to be returned to Parliament from Herefordshire; that honour goes to its very earliest representatives, Rogerus le Rus and Ricardus le Brut, who were summoned to meet at Westminster on 15 July 1290, in the reign of Edward I, barely 200 years after the Norman conquest—the first Norman conquest, that is. At the time, Herefordshire was regarded as the farthest outpost of western civilisation—a status which, some Herefordians would argue, it retains to this day.

South Herefordshire has always been well served by its MPs, and I would like to pay particular tribute to my predecessor Paul Keetch, a Herefordian born and bred, who built up a reputation over 13 years as a fine constituency MP. Hereford city reputedly has the largest container of alcoholic beverage in the world—I should say, outside the Palace of Westminster—at Bulmers, and Paul has worked very hard over many years to protect and support the cider industry, most recently against the ill-advised depredations of the cider duty. I should also like to pay tribute to Sir Colin Shepherd before him, whom many hon. Members will recall for

his 23 years of dedicated service to this House. He and his wife, Lady Lou, have been tireless in their support of the county and of its newest MP.

But Herefordshire is not, or not yet, a garden of Eden. On the contrary, it has many social and economic problems that demand vigorous public action. Like other rural areas, it has not been at the top of the Government's agenda in recent years, to say the least. On the contrary, our schools are the third worst-funded in the UK. Local wages are very low. Farmers struggle with the many inadequacies of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Young people lack decent leisure facilities. The very idea of a functional broadband connection, or even of a decent mobile telephone signal, has yet to be entertained in many parts of my county, and Hereford, a lovely medieval city that received its royal charter in 1189, is being strangled by traffic. Those, and greater support for higher education in the county, will be among my personal priorities as the new MP.

However, we are not sent to this House only to represent our constituents; we are also sent here to play a role in the wider governance of this country. The new Government have made a superb early start in opening up sources of data about spending across the public sector. But what matters is not merely what we think about, but how we think about it. Our task is to remedy not just a colossal failure of governance over the past 13 years, but a colossal failure of thought. Politicians are generally nervous about talking about abstract ideas. In the words of the late great Ernie Bevin—here I will not attempt an accent—"Open up that there Pandora's Box, and who knows what Trojan 'orses won't jump out of it." But of course to dismiss ideas is itself to be ruled by an idea. Ideas are always in charge. So it is important—nay, vital—to choose the right ones.

Now, the idea of revolution is never dear to a conservative, but even Edmund Burke would agree that we need a revolution in how we think about economics in Government. Over the past two decades the British Government have become steeped in a 1970s textbook caricature—a view in which markets are always efficient, prices reflect perfect information, and institutions are nowhere to be found. One would be tempted to call such a view neo-liberal, were we not in a time of coalition government.

Worse than that, the deep assumption remains that human beings are purely economic, rather than social, animals. This dismal gospel regards the human world as static, not dynamic—as a world of fixed social engineering, not one of creation, discovery and competition. In policy terms, this textbook economics takes power away from local people. It encourages centralisation and top-down meddling. It pushes us towards an inefficient, inhumane and factory-style view of public services. It is absurdly risk averse. In its apparent inevitability, it stifles public debate about other, more thoughtful approaches. Above all, it actively undermines the ideas of public service, public vocation and public duty—ideas which, I know, lie close to the heart of every Member of this House.

Now is the moment to re-examine these assumptions. Politics is not a subset of economics, and economics is not a subset of the financial sector. GDP growth is important—goodness knows that is true now—but so are flexibility, resilience and, above all, entrepreneurship in our economy. We need a new economics in our Government, not the desiccated economic atomism of the old textbooks, and we need to see people for what they really are, as bundles of human capability, creative, dynamic and fizzing with imagination and potential.

If we do this, and only if we do this, we can revive our economy on a huge billow of human energy, one that is barely conceivable within our current conventional economic models, and we can help to restore the trust and the mutual respect that our society so badly requires. It was that great—and rather conservative—economist, John Maynard Keynes, who once warned politicians not to be the slaves of some defunct economist. So let us all cry freedom and move on.

9.32 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Let me start by thanking all the hon. Members who made maiden speeches tonight. I suspect that when I came into the House after a by-election colleagues breathed a sigh of relief at the fact that they had only one maiden speech to concentrate on. Tonight we have had three, but they have been three excellent speeches. I particularly welcome a fellow central and east European cold warrior to the Conservative Benches, particularly in the context of this debate.

It is nice, too, to return to a subject that I left professionally almost a decade ago, when I was the author of the Ernst and Young emerging markets reports. It was a monthly attempt to score key markets for attractiveness, principally from the point of view of foreign direct investment. The big emerging markets of the day were in eastern Europe, which seem still to be the big emerging markets of today, as if nothing had happened. Many are still on the list, despite being members of the European Union. Then, as now, the big enigma was the role of Russia.

In the intervening decade there seems to have been in the field a long march of taxonomists, who have sought to subdivide emerging markets almost ad infinitum. The *Financial Times* divides them into advanced and secondary emerging markets, based on national income. Morgan Stanley divides them into developed, emerging and what it calls frontier markets. There is a core group of markets on which everyone agrees, with a few others, such as Saudi Arabia, around the edges.

I am not sure that such taxonomy is of any use. What we are still dealing with are industrialising countries with large growth and large potential, accompanied by equally large risk and insecurity. Most of that taxonomy, anyway, is capital markets-driven, but a very different picture often emerges if one looks at those economies not as capital markets, but as markets for foreign direct investment or for export. Indeed, when for a brief while I presented business programmes for BBC World Service television, I visited more emerging countries' stock exchanges than I care to remember. Undoubtedly the smallest but one of the most enthusiastic was that in Mongolia, but we should remember that the Mongolian stock exchange is not there to generate capital for its companies; it is there as a social device for the equitable distribution of newly privatised assets, most of those by means of mass or voucher privatisation, which the UK has sponsored. Inevitably, those are high-risk procedures, but experienced capital-market players can largely cope with such risks.

[John Howell]

A good question is how we define the difference between emerging economies and emerging markets. We are talking about the attractiveness of such economies in business terms, with their export-led focus, use of agents, joint ventures and, indeed, direct investments. In my time as a partner at Ernst and Young, I helped many small and medium-sized enterprises into emerging markets, but we have to be realistic, because one of the biggest constraints on them is the amount of time involved in entering such markets.

Sadly, the majority of SMEs that came to me for advice came when they were on their last legs in the UK—their markets having disappeared for one reason or another—and they wanted an emerging market and an emerging economy as a means of getting them out of their problems. I am not saying that that cannot be done; it can. The company that I set up with a business partner did so, but it meant that one of us was always on the road, particularly as our first major project was to produce what I can only describe as a pop video of Manmohan Singh, to be shown at an international conference. It was incredibly difficult, because the essential humility of the man meant that his character did not fit into the pop video class. The business meant having to be away for quite a long time and, in a business with two principals, one can imagine the difficulties that arose.

We need to take a balanced view of individual countries, and to make an assessment that some will need more help than others and more encouragement from Government if they are to export. There is a lot of talk about the emerging economies that are in fashion today and out of fashion tomorrow, but not all of that is based on the objective, analytical criteria of companies such as Morgan Stanley; much of it is based on gut feeling.

We spoke earlier about one barrier being the difficulty of language, but one that is frequently overlooked is the difficulty of culture. I remember how, at an INSEAD seminar, the most distinguished cultural scientist on the matter, Fons Trompenaars, put forward his view on cultures and how that can help people assess them and do business. His view is based on a number of individual dilemmas that he put to about 15,000 people throughout the world.

The most famous is known as the dilemma of the car and the pedestrian. Essentially, we are in a car driven by a friend who exceeds the speed limit and knocks down a pedestrian. On the question of the driver's expectation that we will lie for him, the worst place in the world, according to Fons Trompenaars, is Canada, where 96% of people would shop their friends to the police. Emerging markets, however, are some of the best places to have friends: in South Korea, 26% would shop their friends; in Russia, 42% would; and in China, the figure is 48%.

Those responses should not be taken literally, but they are indicative of how much obligations to the state outweigh obligations to individuals. *[Interruption.]* The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Mr Browne) laughs, but Britons figure at 90% on that scale, so the UK is not too good for friendship. Interestingly, however, those questioned in the UK asked how seriously the pedestrian was hurt. If they were more seriously hurt, there was more of an obligation to the state than to the individual. One has only to cross the channel to obtain completely the opposite result, where the more the pedestrian is hurt, the more the driver obtains our assistance in lying, because their punishment would be more severe. That may seem academic, but I recommend the work of Fons Trompenaars to hon. Members; it provides a useful, pragmatic framework for considering emerging markets. For example, it draws out the frequency with which developed countries depend on legal agreements and big contracts.

Gordon Birtwistle: My concern, which the hon. Gentleman may well be able to answer, is about the fact that the emerging markets have now taken away our heavy industry—shipbuilding, steel and things of that nature. How do you see this country fighting back against the emerging markets, with jobs of the future? I accept that we have advanced engineering in aerospace and other such sectors, but many residents of the country do not have the skills to be involved in that type of industry. How do you see the UK fighting back against the emerging markets in respect of less skilled jobs?

Mr Speaker: Order. I gently point out to the hon. Gentleman that I do not see anything, although I think that the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) will.

John Howell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. Clearly, British industry still has a big role to play in emerging markets, but we need to be realistic about in which markets it can play that role, what assistance is needed and what size companies can play in which markets.

The dilemma that I was discussing draws out the frequency with which developed countries depend on legal agreements, big contracts and lawyers, and how relationships tend to get ignored. Emerging markets, however, depend more on the relationships that are built up; the handshake comes first, rather than the contract—hence the amount of time required to develop business in them. That is important not only for foreign direct investment or the export trade but for capital markets and understanding the role of supervisory regimes—the structure of those market institutions and how the regimes are approached. The point is also a crucial piece of understanding about how such countries will perform in international forums. One thinks immediately of the expectation of honouring OECD template agreements, which are the lowest common denominator but often do not fit within the cultures of the countries that we are talking about.

I respectfully suggest to Ministers that the issue also appears in diplomacy. When I was leading a delegation of British business to a G7 meeting, I remember being able, because I had the benefit of such an understanding of cultures, to get the Hungarians and French on side with us Brits to overturn an American proposal for Russia to simplify bureaucracy by introducing a new ministry. The proposal was quickly defeated; the Hungarians got on board and the French commented that they had never previously recognised that a Brit could understand la psychologie.

That provides a link to another issue as well. Part of the reason why some emerging markets never fully emerge is their lack of understanding of the fact that economics and politics cannot be separated. It is difficult

to find an emerging economy that is not also an emerging or problematic political system. Russia is the principal example of that—bedevilled by an incomplete set of reforms that left politics behind economics.

The know-how fund was one of the institutions set up by the previous Conservative Government, who appreciated that market economics needed to go hand in hand with democracy. Their well placed £100 million or so laid the ground for much of eastern Europe to come into the European Union. The know-how fund was aimed not at Governments but at providing assistance to NGOs to build capacity on the ground. That is still a good approach. Sadly, however, the know-how fund was not allowed to finish its work in Russia.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), took the biscuit when he complained about the position in which Russia was left, given that it was his Government who abandoned the know-how fund, turning it over to the European Union as part of a multilateral package. They also abandoned the east European trade council and the British Association for Central and Eastern Europe. In a debate in 2008, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) pointed out that since 1991 BACEE, a small organisation with a minuscule grant in aid from the Foreign Office, had had more than 5,000 politicians, civil servants, judges, journalists and business people from countries of central and eastern Europe participating in its programmes as alumni. That is the way to build up understanding of the politics in emerging market countries.

Unfortunately, when the know-how fund was delivered to the European Union, chaos resulted, with companies turning up in countries to be told that the same contract had been let twice. We also had the ridiculous situation of trying to bring into emerging markets in central and eastern Europe an Italian system of accounting, a French system of law, and an English system of stock exchange. It is no wonder that some of these emerging markets failed to emerge fully during the course of their transition.

Over the years, the role of UK Trade & Investment in this field has swung between a focus on geography and a focus on sectors. During that time, I have had a role in swinging it towards sectors, but I appreciate that it swings back again. An emphasis on sectors is fine provided that one recognises that some markets require more hand-holding than others. I praise UKTI for its services, which have been excellent.

As regards the transition in future, we will need to see markets as separate countries. The acronym, BRIC—Brazil, Russia, India and China—makes no sense in terms of relationships, just as a massive grouping. The transition should be acknowledged both in business and in aid. As regards aid, we must recognise that while there is a move away from providing aid to countries such as India, China and Russia, which I welcome, there is a difference between providing aid and technical assistance. Even after one has moved beyond the trade part, there is still a need to recognise that many of those countries still do not have fully developed local democratic institutions, civil society groups, media or, indeed, enterprise that is fully reflective of a market economy and democracy. I urge Ministers to look carefully at that to ensure that we do not throw the baby out with the bathwater but continue the process, looking back at the mistake that was made in relation to Russia, where, if we had continued our focus, we could have done a lot more to ensure that there was the continuity needed to bring that economy fully out of its emerging status to play its full role in the world.

9.48 pm

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): I have been privileged to hear maiden speeches by my hon. Friends the Member for South Thanet (Laura Sandys) and for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), who illustrated very well the nature of the threats that we face. My hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet talked about carers, and about the particular character and fortitude of the people of her constituency.

The House could have a no more important debate than this, and it is disappointing to see it so poorly attended by Labour Members. The nature of this country's relationship with the wider world and how we can hold our own position in it, not only in terms of economics and culture, is the fundamental issue that will determine the next 10 or 20 years—a long time in which I hope that many Members present will sit in this House, obviously provided that their constituencies return them. It was revealing to hear the shadow Minister speaking on the subject. He said that Argentina was the 10th richest country in the world in 1913, but seemed to suggest that it had then fallen back because of its politics. He failed to analyse the political position and consider what sort of political regime operated in Argentina. He will remember that Juan Perón ruled for a long time after the second world war and was perhaps that country's most disastrous ruler. He openly espoused a socialist programme. There was vast confiscation of wealth and manipulation of the unions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid) pointed out, Argentina defaulted in 1999 because of its huge debt. Yet the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) elided all those facts.

Chris Bryant: Juan Domingo Perón was more of a syndicalist, closer to Mussolini than to the socialism of the Labour party.

Kwasi Kwarteng: May I retort that Mussolini was originally a socialist? He was a left-wing journalist. It is no accident that those people had many shared ideas. However, whether Perón was a socialist or a syndicalist is neither here nor there.

The hon. Member for Rhondda alluded to our problem as a country. He suggested that we had problems with education. He rightly mentioned that many people in this country are not learning foreign languages. Indeed, the number has declined since 2001. However, who was in government at the time when, as he pointed out, the figures were declining?

We must also confront a decline in educational standards. It is an open secret that we have had grade inflation. In China or other parts of the world, the education systems are highly competitive and rigorous. If we are seriously to compete with the emerging nations, we must sort out our education system and return some rigour to the process.

Thomas Docherty (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the number of pupils passing GCSEs and A-levels reached a record high under the previous Labour Government?

Kwasi Kwarteng: That is the whole point—that happened because of grade inflation. The results reached a high every year for 13 years. One must conclude that either students are getting much cleverer or exams are getting easier. You take your choice. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Ellwood: I feel an intervention coming on.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am happy to take them.

Mr Iain Wright: The hon. Gentleman is right about ensuring that more people take foreign languages such as Mandarin and Spanish. However, does he not think it is counter-productive to end the fourth phase of the diploma programme, particularly for languages, which would encourage enthusiasm for modern languages in emerging markets?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I was making a broad point about 13 years of Labour failure, which is central to the debate. If we are serious about competing with China and India, we must have much more rigour and a little more discipline and focus in our education system. Those are obvious facts, but Labour Members seem to ignore them completely.

Chris Bryant: Answer the question!

Kwasi Kwarteng: With respect, I am talking about the emerging economies, and the point about education is central to the debate. If the country is to improve and compete with other countries, we need much more rigour and discipline. That was palpably lacking in the Labour Government's actions in the past 13 years.

We must approach the problem much more broadly. Britain was so successful in the past because we had a thriving economy. The industrial revolution powered Britain's ascent to world dominance in many ways. Leaving a country economically crippled is the worst thing that we can do to our standing abroad. We must tackle our domestic economic situation before we can even begin to try to compete with emerging economies. I just wanted to put those broad points on the record, and to say that Labour failure has once again damaged—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are grateful to the hon. Gentleman. With the leave of the House, I call the Minister, Mr Henry Bellingham.

9.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Henry Bellingham): I thank all hon. Members for their contributions to this excellent, albeit very short, debate. As the Foreign Office Minister responsible not only for Africa but for relations with business, I am keen to meet as many parliamentarians as possible who have an interest in emerging markets, and the debate has revealed a lot expertise.

We have heard a number of superb maiden speeches, and I turn first of all to my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Laura Sandys), who made a charming, eloquent and very personal speech. She comes from a line of distinguished parliamentarians. Her father, to whom she referred in her moving remarks on carers, would have been incredibly proud of her this evening. I wish her well for the future and I am sure she will go a very long way indeed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma) gave us another splendid tour de force. He spoke with passion about his constituency and made a number of good points about emerging markets, saying that we should treat them as equals and not be afraid of offshoring. He talked about the great opportunities that such markets present to us, and I agree with him 100%. The business world's loss is the House's gain, and I wish him well for the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) produced one of the best Mark Twain quotes I have ever heard. One of the great treats of listening to maiden speeches is that one learns a lot about our beautiful and interesting kingdom. He spoke with a great deal of passion about his constituency, but his speech was also erudite and intellectual. He spoke of flexibility, resilience and entrepreneurship, which need to be applied to our drive to create and generate export-led growth. I congratulate him on his excellent speech.

The Foreign Secretary made it clear that he will pursue a dynamic foreign policy that will be ingenious and energetic. As my hon. Friend the Minister—my coalition partner—made clear, the Foreign Secretary's plan is to intensify bilateral relations, particularly with many of the emerging economies. With our economy in crisis, we are facing a mammoth challenge to reduce the deficit. I congratulate the former Minister, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), on his work at the Foreign Office—he obviously relied heavily this evening on the expert knowledge he gained in his time there—but it is complete nonsense to say that the Government have no strategy for growth. My hon. Friend the Minister talked about an export-led growth strategy. Furthermore, not tackling the deficit would be the biggest barrier of all to growth, because that would drive inflation and interest rates. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that he was talking total and complete nonsense. If we do not improve our economy and reduce the deficit, our standing in the world will be diminished, as my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) pointed out so eloquently, and we will not be able to improve those bilateral relations or drive that export-led growth.

UK Trade & Investment operates in 17 key, high-growth markets. Of course, the Foreign Office must consider efficiencies in all its operations, but the Foreign Secretary has made it clear that our national interest and our international role in the world will not be undermined or put at risk in any way. The Foreign Office places a lot of emphasis on low-carbon, green technologies. Its low-carbon, high-growth strategic programme fund—£17 million in total—will not, as I understand it, come under any financial pressure.

We treasure students who come to this country from around the world and rely on them to a very great extent when it comes to building our influence in the world. Obviously, we will look at a number of aspects of the budget, but Chevening scholarships, which the former Minister mentioned, are currently frozen as part of the Government's review of all programme spending. We expect to make decisions in July, but of course there is uncertainty. The coalition Government have taken over an appalling economic crisis. It is a little rich for the shadow Minister to complain about various matters that were entirely the fault of the Government of whom he was a member.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of human rights, among others. If I have not answered his questions, I will write to him. This has been an important debate—

10 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Business without Debate

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 15 June, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Sir George Young relating to Backbench Business Committee, Election of Backbench Business Committee, Backbench Business (Amendment of Standing Orders), Westminster Hall (Amendment of Standing Orders), Topical Debates (Amendments of Standing Orders), Pay for Chairs of Select Committees, Backbench Business Committee (Review), September Sittings, Business of the House (Private Members' Bills), Deferred Divisions (Timing), Select Committees (Membership), Select Committees (Machinery of Government Change) and Sittings of the House not later than 9.30 pm; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—*(James Duddridge.)*

Hon. Members: Object.

Water Bills (South-West)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(James Duddridge.)*

10 pm

Alison Seabeck (Plymouth, Moor View) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to be the first to raise this issue in the new Parliament on behalf of water bill payers in Plymouth and the wider south-west. The problem we face is simple: water rates in the south-west are 25% higher than the UK average, placing an unfair burden on the budgets of my constituents and all residents across the south-west of England. This is an issue that dates back to the botched privatisation of water utility companies in the late 1980s, and it is to the shame of all parties that the problem remains unresolved after so many years, despite the constant efforts of right hon. and hon. Members from the south-west to keep the matter high on the agenda of the Minister's Department.

I am pleased to welcome the new Minister, and I am pleased to see so many Members from other parties in their places tonight, including the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George), who is the new joint chair of the all-party water group, and the hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris), who is carrying on the active interest in water pricing shown by her predecessor. I hope that by the end of this debate we will have been able to put on record some of the options for consideration, including a levy proposal.

It would be remiss of me not to place on record the thanks due for the unstinting efforts and enthusiasm of my former colleague, Linda Gilroy, who not only chaired a very active all-party water group, but individually campaigned for many years on behalf of water bill payers.

Mr Adrian Sanders (Torbay) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. She is right to pay tribute to Linda Gilroy, but other former colleagues from Devon and Cornwall played their part, including the former Members for Truro, for Falmouth and Camborne and for Teignbridge. I may have forgotten others, but they all stood up for the south-west on this issue.

Alison Seabeck: The hon. Gentleman is right and the valuable contributions of those former Members will be missed.

Linda Gilroy was instrumental in organising the many meetings and briefings that we had with Ministers and others, and with the all-party group she produced a very thorough paper on the pressures felt by customers and water companies—and not just South West Water—which in turn fed into Anna Walker's considerations in her review. In 1989, the privatised utilities were given responsibility not only for the provision of water and the disposal of waste but also for the maintenance of the coastline. The Minister will be well aware that in the south-west we are blessed with some of the most beautiful coastline in the country. Our beaches, bays and coves are famed, and rightly so, but they are an expensive luxury and one that is enjoyed not only by the people of the south-west, but by people from across the country and around the world. They are a common good and to the benefit of the whole public.

[Alison Seabeck]

South West Water deserves credit for the work it has done to clean up the beaches. It has invested more than £1.5 billion through its clean sweep programme, which has modernised sewage treatment all around the peninsula, removing almost 250 crude outfalls and transforming the bathing waters of the region.

Those improvements are not paid for by the whole public. When the water utilities were privatised, the public in each area became responsible for paying for the maintenance of the coastline in their region. For the people of the west midlands, that was not a problem because they do not have a coastline, but in the south-west we have 30% of England's coast, and the burden of cost is placed on just 3% of the population. The Prime Minister himself acknowledged the problem when he said, while holidaying in the region:

"I understand the unfairness that people feel in the South West that they are paying a lot of money so that there are clean beaches for people like me from Oxfordshire to come and play on."

Indeed, the number of tourists to the region continues to grow, with the latest figures showing 21 million visits, the vast majority of which are by people coming from outside the south-west.

The water industry faces many challenges in the years ahead, and none of the solutions comes without a cost. It will have to deal with pollution concerns; better manage surface water and flooding; continue to try to provide an affordable supply of water; reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and adapt the service to make it more resilient to climate change.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for what she is saying, all of which I endorse. When she refers to cleaning up the coastline, she is talking about a national asset being paid for by local water rate payers—a point that the Anna Walker review made clear. That is clearly not the case with national galleries or national museums, which are paid for by all taxpayers. We should all reflect on that.

Alison Seabeck: Yes, indeed, and I shall return to that point.

It is welcome that all water companies are now expected to produce water resources plans for the Environment Agency and strategic direction statements for Ofwat, both of which are useful indicators to assist in the long-term planning for the sector, but also help in assessing the likely impact of such works on bill payers.

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I very much support this debate. I would like to reinforce the point that although many people feel that we in the south-west live in a land of plenty—a land of flowing milk and honey—there are areas of great deprivation. For many people in our constituencies, the cost of living is high compared with the national income, and they are therefore hit particularly hard.

Alison Seabeck: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, and I concur with that view. Again, however, I will deal with that issue in more depth a little later.

Bills in the south-west are 25% higher than the national average, which over the course of a year equates to £100 more, while for unmetered customers the figure is considerably higher, at almost £300. For people on low or fixed incomes, that can mean a substantial amount of their income. Indeed, for those on the lowest incomes, water bills can take 10% of their incomes. For elderly individuals living alone on a basic pension—we in the south-west have a larger-than-average older demographic—or for lone parents with young children or single people in rented accommodation, water bills present a struggle.

The Minister will know that the area covered by South West Water is large and diverse, ranging from Cornwall in the far west through to Devon, and taking in parts of Dorset and Somerset. We also have some of the poorest areas of the country. Cornwall is the only area of the country to be in receipt of EU convergence funding—previously known as objective 1 funding—and poverty remains an issue, despite big moves in the right direction over the past 13 years. The Consumer Council for Water has actively campaigned to try to influence price levels in the south-west, and has carried out further, detailed research to try to discover what the bill payers themselves feel should be done to remedy the problem.

The bill payers whom I have spoken to—I am sure that other hon. Members have had similar conversations—feel that it is unfair and indefensible to expect some of the nation's least well-off families to shoulder the burden of the cost of a system that requires them to pay for the upkeep of beaches that are largely used by wealthier holidaymakers from outside the region who do not pay for the coastline in the south-west. A solution to that long-standing injustice must be found. Many of my constituents have already lost patience with the process. A recent letter from one elderly constituent from St Budeaux expressed utter exasperation at the lack of transparency in how the costs are apportioned.

In acknowledgement of the problem, the previous Government set up the Walker review to examine the case surrounding water charges. Anna Walker was asked, among other things, to examine the current system of charging households for water and sewerage, and to assess both the effectiveness and fairness of the current and alternative methods of charging, and the link to affordability. Anna Walker delivered her extremely thorough report last year, having toured the country and visited the south-west and Plymouth on more than one occasion. The report acknowledged for the first time what most of us knew: that the long-standing high charges in the south-west were a direct result of the privatisation in 1989.

Anna Walker also suggested that the options for tackling the root causes should include a specific one-off adjustment, estimated at around £650 million, to pay off South West Water's debt, or annual transfers either from the Government—I suspect that this is unlikely in the current economic climate—or from other water customers around England and Wales. That would not be popular either, because Thames Water customers are financing the Thames tideway project around the city, and water shortage issues have a significant future cost in a number of other areas.

A further alternative would be to rely on a package of proposals targeting specific groups of South West Water customers, perhaps through a series of measures such as the use of a seasonal tariff charged for additional summer use. That would pick up second-home users, but also businesses. It could help some residents to

achieve a saving of between £40 and £50, but it is not a popular option. It is seen as a tourist tax, and would require compulsory metering, which would also have a cost. I know that the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) is concerned about second-home owners and their potential for benefiting significantly from having meters. He sees that as unfair. Indeed, in a debate on 2 June 2008, he said that metering was

"a way of rewarding people who should be paying more".—[*Official Report*, 2 June 2008; Vol. 476, c. 619.]

Another option would be the wider use of affordability measures, and South West Water has been quite proactive in trying to identify and assist vulnerable customers in that regard. Such measures could be more widely applied and could deliver around £80 per annum for low-income households. That would have to be linked to water efficiency, however. It is essential to encourage that, not only for economic reasons but because water is becoming an increasingly scarce resource at certain times and in certain areas.

As a result of this debate, I have received some useful briefings from people on related matters, especially on the re-use of rain water and on building regulations. I suspect that there is a whole new debate to be had on those matters, but I want to put on record my gratitude to the businesses and organisations that have e-mailed me. This flags up just how useful these debates in an often rather empty Chamber can be—it is actually quite full tonight, so thank you to everyone who has stayed.

Low-income customers with medical conditions could benefit significantly if changes to the current WaterSure scheme, as recommended in the review, were adopted. That would result in it being capped, either at a national average or on a regional basis, whichever is the lower, and would have a redistributive effect within the region, but that in turn would mean that other South West Water customers would pay more, which would probably not have broad support. This is not a straightforward issue, which is partly why I am back here tonight, five years after I secured my first debate on the subject.

A national levy is another idea that has been put forward. That would have the effect of supporting South West Water bill payers now, but they could well find themselves having to pay for similar schemes in the future, such as additional reservoirs in the Thames Water area or elsewhere in the south of England, for example. The Consumer Council for Water's research suggests that water bill payers would consider that option, and we local MPs certainly need to explore it with our constituents. I appreciate that many of the options would have consequences for bill payers elsewhere, but we must resolve to produce a fairer system that does not penalise low-income families merely for living on a peninsula surrounded by the sea.

Stephen Gilbert (St Austell and Newquay) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing a debate on this topic so early in this Parliament. Does she share my concern that the modelling work to support the policy implementation of any of the options in the Walker review is not happening fast enough, and that we need to go further and faster towards reaching a solution to a problem that has bedevilled my constituency and many others for many years?

Alison Seabeck: I agree, and I hope that the Minister listened to the hon. Gentleman's genuine concern. His comment is well timed, as I was about to say that the current Government have, in the work carried out by Anna Walker and by their own officials, a basis for going forward without further delay. The previous Government had already asked Ofwat to consider the Walker report, but no Government can compel the regulator to act. Before the election, MPs asked Ofwat to consider how the Walker review could be implemented. Ofwat was clearly willing to do that work, and its position has not changed. Serendipitously, Ofwat asked for a meeting with south-west MPs today. That has usefully coincided with this debate, and, I am sure, helped to inform those hon. Members present of Ofwat's position and of its thoughts on the subject of affordability.

Action on water charges, particularly on behalf of vulnerable customers, is long overdue. The public have seen improvements to the quality of the water around our coasts, and this has without doubt benefited other businesses, including those linked to the tourism industry, but it has come at a huge cost and left many people struggling to pay their bills. In this difficult economic climate, people are worried about such pressure on their income. Will the Minister therefore confirm that he will meet Ofwat urgently, to ask it to continue with its assessment of Walker and to give it a timetable for bringing forward its advice to the Government? South West Water bill payers will not be pleased to hear tonight that that has been pushed further back into the long grass. I hope that the Minister can be positive, especially as we were tantalisingly close to getting an announcement prior to the last election.

Does the Minister intend to publish a water White Paper and take forward both the Cave and Walker proposals? If so, when will that be and is it likely to look at the future of Ofwat and its role? Will the Minister also confirm that work is continuing to ensure the widest possible data sharing, so that people receive the help and entitlements they are due? That work was in train between a range of Departments and other organisations prior to the general election.

Will the Minister also acknowledge that there is an ongoing need for all the bodies involved in environmental improvements in water supply and removal both to inform customers on work planned and to ask their views? On affordability, may I make the following plea, which came out of today's meeting with Ofwat? The Minister must not rely solely on the Government office for the south-west figures, which include Wessex Water and skew the figures slightly. If we drill down and look at Devon and Cornwall separately, we will see that the situation there is much more serious. I hope that the Minister will press his officials to look at the minutiae.

Finally, will the Minister confirm whether he accepts the Walker review principle that it was right for environmental improvements to be funded regionally except where there is an exceptional expenditure, as was the case in the south-west? If he does, does he not feel duty bound to right the historic wrong that the south-west has suffered?

10.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Richard Benyon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Alison Seabeck) on securing this debate on an issue about which she has shown a clear commitment

[Richard Benyon]

during her time in the House. The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr Sanders) made the point that it has also been a very important issue for a great many former and current Members on both sides of the House. I know that the all-party group on water is well attended and is very passionate on this issue, and I certainly intend to address as many of the points the hon. Lady raised as possible in the few minutes available for my response.

The hon. Lady asked about White Papers. The new Government are very eager to introduce a White Paper on water, but we are determined to get it right. Our priority is to introduce a White Paper on the natural environment, which will involve a lot of issues that affect water—water will be fundamental to that White Paper—and then to introduce a White Paper on water, which will address many of the issues raised in the Cave and Walker reports. I can therefore assure the hon. Lady that this issue is a priority for the Government.

As I have said, I am aware that the hon. Lady and several other Members on both sides of the House have campaigned tirelessly on this issue for many years. I also understand that it is an issue that arises frequently in Adjournment debates, so I suppose I should not be too surprised that my first Adjournment debate as a new Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Minister is on this topic.

I would like to say at the outset that the Government recognise that water affordability is a problem for some households, particularly in the south-west. We recognised that in our coalition statement, which pledged:

"We will examine the conclusions of the Cave and Walker Reviews and reform the water industry to ensure more efficient use of water and"—

crucially—

"the protection of poorer households."

I also want to acknowledge that there is an important distinction between water affordability for low-income households and the more general sense of unfairness felt by households in the south-west at having to pay the highest bills in the country.

Alison Seabeck: I wish to reinforce the point that we have both unaffordability for households and a huge sense of a lack of fairness; both apply to the south-west.

Richard Benyon: I absolutely accept what the hon. Lady says. This year, the average bill for households in the region is almost £490, which is about £150 higher than the national average bill and—to refer to a particular point that she made—about £80 higher than Wessex Water bills, which is the next highest bill area. Affordability is very important. Although we often examine the average water prices across the country, we must also recognise that certain areas contain pockets of poverty where people may pay less in water bills, but utility bills may have a marked effect on their quality of life because they account for a high percentage of people's net income.

Clearly, bills vary between water companies. That reflects the cost of providing water and sewerage services in an environmentally sustainable way. Ofwat, as the independent economic regulator of the water industry, ensures that bills are no higher than they need to be. The reasons for the relatively high bills—my use of "relative" is, of course, a relative use of the word—in the south-west were looked at by Anna Walker in her independent review of charging for household water and sewerage services. As has been said, she published her final report and recommendations last December, and I should like to take this opportunity to put on the record this Government's recognition of the thorough and collaborative way in which she undertook her review.

As the hon. Lady said, the Walker report found that at the time of water privatisation, in 1989, South West Water had the lowest regulated asset base per property of any water and sewerage company. Since then, the company has invested about £2 billion, much of which has been spent on sewerage infrastructure and on improving sewerage services. That has brought sewerage standards in the area up to the same level as those elsewhere in England and Wales, and the cost has been met by local customers.

The cost per household has also been compounded by the relatively low number of households in the south-west, together with the relatively high proportion who live in rural areas. Those factors make it comparatively expensive to provide these households with water and sewerage services. Anna Walker recommended that Ofwat should advise the Government on options that could tackle the issue of high water bills in the south-west. The hon. Lady and those who attended a meeting with Ofwat representatives today will know that Ofwat is already working on that.

Some of the options suggested by Anna Walker could benefit all households in the region. In particular, a one-off or other financial adjustment funded by the Government, or an annual adjustment of bills financed by the Government or water customers nationally, could bring average household bills down by about £50 a year. Another option suggested by Anna Walker that would benefit all households in the south-west is a seasonal tariff, which would have the advantage of pricing water in a way that reflects the additional costs that tourists place on the water and sewerage system when they visit the region.

Anne Marie Morris: The Minister makes a good point, but when we examine the issue of affordability I want us to ensure that the WaterSure proyision does help those who are particularly in need. I have looked at the detail of this and it is clear that it is not simply a matter of someone's health need, the amount of money they have and the benefits that they are on. The way in which the system works means that it does not help those who really need that support, and I want the Government to consider that when we examine affordability.

Richard Benyon: As my hon. Friend did in her earlier intervention, she points out the important and urgent need to represent the needs of the most deprived and poorest households in the south-west. I shall discuss WaterSure in a moment and I am conscious of the amount of time available to me, but I must say that she rightly points out that when we address the urgent needs of the poorer families in the south-west we may have to examine the WaterSure provision.

Anna Walker estimated that, if water charges in the summer were four times higher than they are for the rest of the year, the average bill for all households in the

region would be reduced by £60 a year. The other options identified in the review focused on providing additional support for vulnerable or low-income households, both in the south-west and elsewhere. My hon. Friend will be interested to learn that that includes a proposal to revise the national WaterSure tariff and to discount the bills of all low-income households or of low-income households with children.

Let me add that the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 enables water companies to offer social tariffs to households that struggle with their bills. However—this will be of concern to hon. Members from the south-west—the cross-subsidy under WaterSure or under social tariffs would have to be met by other customers in each company's operating area.

As Anna Walker's report made clear, the options are complex and, contrary to what I believed before I came to this side of the House, there certainly are no easy answers.

Stephen Gilbert: We have heard a lot tonight about the options, but Members in the south-west are keen to know when the Government might present an option that we can decide on for addressing the problem. Can the Minister help me with a time frame?

Richard Benyon: Certainly; the hon. Gentleman raised this earlier, and I am loth to give him a specific date, but I assure him and all Members of the House that I do not intend to be standing at the Dispatch Box in Adjournment debates in the dim and distant future because I have been unable to give a resolution, as best I can, to this matter. It is clear that I will not be able to satisfy every Member of the House or every one of the hon. Gentleman's constituents, but I will do my best and the Government will do their best to get a speedy resolution to this.

I see the issue very much in two parts. First—this is the point I was making to my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris)—there is an urgency. People are coming to hon. Members' surgeries in real difficulties and there is work to be done to address their concerns. As we take Walker through the legislative process, following those options, I hope that we will be able to find other solutions on a more medium-term basis. I can only assure hon. Members on both sides of the House that I will meet them to try to resolve these matters and that I will keep them informed as best I can.

I understand that hon. Members who received the briefing from Ofwat earlier today will have heard about the merits and otherwise of the options that have been put forward. There is a fundamental question about who should pay for any new affordability measures. The options are the Government, which means the taxpayer, as the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View has said, and which brings difficulties at this time, or water customers, either at company-specific level or nationally. The hon. Lady will appreciate the need to reduce Government spending to tackle the budget deficit, and she will also be aware of the very strong resistance identified in the Walker review to any suggestion that water customers nationally should subsidise special measures for those in the south-west. The Government will need to take those factors into account when deciding which of the Walker recommendations to take forward.

Alison Seabeck: Could not the concern that customers nationally might not want to subsidise the south-west be offset by the fairness argument, in that south-west customers might well find themselves subsidising other areas of the country in future?

Richard Benyon: The hon. Lady points to a difficulty. She has mentioned the Thames tideway. What we decide to do now to help the south-west might legitimately be raised by customers in other areas in relation to concerns about a multi-billion pound project to improve the national asset that is the capital city. That is a difficult conundrum that I have to face, but I see her point.

Let me take this opportunity to remind the House of the support that is available for low-income households both in the south-west and elsewhere in England and Wales. Under the national WaterSure tariff, the bills of qualifying households are capped at the average bill for their company's operating area. To qualify for WaterSure, households must be metered, in receipt of means-tested benefits and either have three or more dependent children aged under 19 and living at home—I have five children, so it is possible—or have someone in the household with a medical condition that necessitates a high, essential use of water.

WaterSure ensures that vulnerable and low-income households do not have to cut back on essential use of water because of worries about the potential size of their bills. Anna Walker made several recommendations about changing WaterSure and providing greater support for low-income households, which we will consider as part of our wider examination of the Walker review. In conclusion, I assure the hon. Lady and all hon. Members from the south-west that I will carefully examine the Walker recommendations, including those on water affordability, and Ofwat's advice on the options for addressing high water bills in the south-west.

Question put and agreed to.

10.30 pm

House adjourned.

House of Commons

Tuesday 15 June 2010

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL [*LORDS*]

Motion made,

That so much of the Lords Message [10 June] as relates to the City of Westminster Bill [*Lords*] be now considered.—(*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Thursday 24 June.

BLOODY SUNDAY INQUIRY

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of the Report, dated 15 June 2010, of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, and of the Principal Conclusions and Overall Assessment, dated 15 June 2010, of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry.—(*Jeremy Wright.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

JUSTICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Probation Service

1. **Hugh Bayley** (York Central) (Lab): What his plans are for the budget for the probation service in (a) 2010-11 and (b) 2011-12. [2215]

7. **Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): What plans he has for the funding of the probation service in 2010-11. [2222]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Crispin Blunt): For 2010-11, the budget for the probation trusts will be £850 million. Budgets for 2011-12 are not yet set, and will be done through the spending review process to take place later this year.

Hugh Bayley: Last Sunday, on Sky News, the Justice Secretary said:

"let's have fewer people in prison",

and that there are

"some things we can do to stop people re-offending when they come out".

Did he have the probation service in mind? Will the Minister give me a categorical assurance that there will be no cut in funding for the probation service, because it will be impossible to carry out that policy if there is?

Mr Blunt: It would be very nice if the country was in an economic position that allowed me to deliver such a categorical assurance to the hon. Gentleman but, as he knows perfectly well, I am afraid that I cannot do so. He also knows that part of the Ministry of Justice's contribution to the £6 billion target was a £20 million reduction in the probation service's budget. However, that budget had been added to by £26 million in mid-year by the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw), who is now the shadow Justice Secretary.

Mary Creagh: Wakefield is home to two prisons: New Hall young offenders institution and women's prison, and, of course, Wakefield prison, which houses some of the country's most dangerous and prolific offenders. West Yorkshire probation service, and Wakefield in particular, do a tremendous job of keeping local people safe and monitoring those who are released from those prisons, who are some of the most difficult individuals in the country. Does the Minister agree that public protection is the No. 1 priority for the probation service and that any future funding arrangements must not put that at risk?

Mr Blunt: Of course public protection is an absolute priority. We inherited good MAPPA—multi-agency public protection arrangements—from the previous Administration to deal with the sort of offenders who are released from Wakefield. It is right that probation services and all other agencies that are involved in MAPPA are closely engaged in delivering public protection with regard to such offenders.

Mark Lancaster (Milton Keynes North) (Con): I have visited the probation service in Milton Keynes and pay tribute to its tremendous work. Under the previous Government, however, the number of staff at headquarters ballooned, while front-line staff numbers remained static or even reduced. Might this Government reverse that trend?

Mr Blunt: Yes.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): The previous Government refurbished the Ministry of Justice building at a cost of £130 million shortly before they announced redundancies, including to front-line managers, that saved £50 million. Can the Minister and his team say that this Government will have a better and more responsible set of priorities for spending in his Department?

Mr Blunt *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. On the probation service, Minister.

Mr Blunt: I can guarantee that the probation service will not be led by the Ministry of Justice on any further refurbishments. I think that we have had enough refurbishments inside the Department for the time being and that we have an office that is perfectly fit for purpose.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his post, which is an excellent job that I am sure he will enjoy. Will he confirm to the House that reoffending rates fell considerably under the Labour Government, not least because of the 70% increase in probation funding over those 13 years? Will he also clarify what I think he said—that the £870 million budget agreed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) in October 2009 is now £850 million? What discussions has he held—and will he hold—with probation services about the impact of that £20 million cut?

Mr Blunt: As the right hon. Gentleman pointed out, I have referred to the £20 million cut. The director of the National Offender Management Service and the regional offender managers will be doing their level best, in agreement with the probation trusts, to ensure that that reduction does not have an impact on services. However, we ought to remember that the budget settlement for the probation trusts that was agreed just more than a year ago was £844 million. That budget was being worked to during the transfer from probation boards to probation trusts, and that transfer was supposed to drive forward many efficiency savings to ensure that front-line services were delivered as efficiently as they should be.

Sentencing Policy

2. **Tony Baldry** (Banbury) (Con): What timetable he has set for the completion of his Department's review of sentencing policy. [2216]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Crispin Blunt): We are conducting a comprehensive assessment of sentencing policy with a view to introducing more effective sentencing and rehabilitation policies. We will take the time to get it right, and will consult widely before bringing forward coherent plans for reform. We intend to bring forward proposals on sentencing and the rehabilitation of offenders after the House returns from recess in October.

Tony Baldry: Does my hon. Friend agree that the punishment, in being sent to prison, is the loss of freedom? Does he also agree that what is important is trying to reduce reoffending rates, and ensuring that when people are in prison, they undertake activities that mean that they are less likely to reoffend when they are released? Alternatively, we might have not so many people going to prison, but if they are to be punished in the community, that punishment should involve activities that help to reduce the chances of reoffending. It is reducing the reoffending rate that is so important.

Mr Blunt: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. We have inherited a disaster, in terms of the reoffending rate among short-sentence prisoners. I do not think that anyone would want to defend the reoffending rate in that category, which is somewhere between 60% and 70%. Prisoners in that category do not receive probation supervision, and if we do not engage them with the great army of auxiliaries in the third sector who want to help us with offender management, we will not be able to address offender behaviour in the way that my hon. Friend suggests.

Alun Michael (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister undertake to read the excellent report drawn up on a cross-party basis by members of the Select Committee on Justice not long before Dissolution, which proposes a number of ways in which the large amount of resources that go into the criminal justice system could be focused more effectively on reducing reoffending?

Mr Blunt: Yes. The report is excellent, and it will inform the proposals that we bring forward when the House returns in October.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does my hon. Friend accept that it adds insult to injury when a victim of crime, having seen the perpetrator sentenced, finds that the person is released halfway through their sentence? What steps will we take to reintroduce honesty in sentencing?

Mr Blunt: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for that question, because plainly the proposals that were in the Conservative manifesto will inform the outcome of the sentencing review. I am quite sure that he will be satisfied with the outcome, and that we will have a great deal more honesty in sentencing at the end of the process than we have today.

Prison Capacity

3. **Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): What plans he has for prison capacity and prison construction programmes. [2217]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Crispin Blunt): We must provide prison places for those whom the courts judge should receive a custodial sentence. As I said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), we intend to bring forward proposals on rehabilitation and sentencing after the House returns in October. Long-term decisions on prison capacity programmes will be taken in the light of the policy agreed at the end of the process.

Mr Jones: On 30 January 2007, when asked whether we needed more prisons, the Prime Minister said, on the Jon Gaunt "talkSPORT" show:

"Yes...no doubt more prisons have got to be built."

How does that fit with the Justice Secretary's announcement this week that he would like to see fewer people in prison? Is this an example of Opposition rhetoric catching up with the Prime Minister, or is it yet another example of a policy disagreement between the Prime Minister and the Justice Secretary?

Mr Blunt: Absolutely not. I notice that the date to which the hon. Gentleman referred was in 2007, and there certainly has been a significant increase in the prison population between then and today. As far as the prison building programme is concerned, I draw attention to the evidence that the then Justice Secretary and Lord Chancellor gave to the Committee referred to by the right hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Alun Michael). He said that the prison building programme, as it now stands, is an opportunity to upgrade and update our prison capacity to make it more fit for the purpose of addressing reoffending

behaviour. If we are successful in bringing about a drop in prisoner numbers—I am quite sure that everyone in the House would like to see that—we may be able to release other parts of the estate.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): In the context of capacity and overcrowding, what are the Minister's views on short sentences, especially for women?

Mr Blunt: The evidence is that short custodial sentences are not working. They produce terrible reoffending rates. We do not have the capacity in the probation service to address people on licence, which is one reason why they do not have any supervision when they leave prison, and we are on the most dreadful merry-go-round. It is one of the glaring gaps in the way that we deal with offenders and reoffending behaviour, and the current Administration will do their level best to address the issue.

Libel Law

4. **Tom Blenkinsop** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): What recent discussion he has had on reform of libel law. [2219]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Jonathan Djanogly): We are committed to reviewing the law on defamation to protect free speech, and are currently considering the issues involved. In that context, Lord McNally yesterday met Lord Lester of Herne Hill to discuss his private Member's Bill on the subject, which was recently introduced in another place.

Tom Blenkinsop: I am sure the Minister is aware of the case of Dr Simon Singh, who was famously sued by the British Chiropractic Association for his research. Although the case was unsuccessful, Mr Singh will recover only 70 per cent. of his £200,000 legal costs. Will the Government support Lord Lester's private Member's Bill to reform our libel system, which at present stifles scientific research?

Mr Djanogly: We are considering Lord Lester's private Member's Bill. The issues involved in it are complex and of great breadth, so we will look at it carefully and respond at a later date.

Rape Defendants (Anonymity)

5. **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley) (Lab): What evidence he took into account in deciding to bring forward proposals to extend anonymity to defendants in rape trials. [2220]

9. **Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): What evidence he took into account in deciding to propose to grant anonymity to defendants charged with rape. [2224]

11. **Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): What evidence was considered before the announcement of proposals to introduce anonymity for defendants in rape cases. [2226]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Kenneth Clarke): The proposal to grant anonymity to defendants in rape trials was included in the coalition agreement following negotiations between the two coalition partners. All the policy commitments made by the coalition Government were derived from the existing policy of one or both of the governing parties. The issue of anonymity for defendants in rape trials was adopted as party policy by the Liberal Democrat party while in opposition. It was also the subject of an extensive inquiry by the Home Affairs Committee, in its fifth report published on 24 June 2003.

Caroline Flint: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his answer. His Minister has indicated that he believes the stigma associated with those accused of rape is so damaging that, uniquely, they need further protection through anonymity, but evidence shows that the public are far more hostile to paedophiles and murderers, so why, on the evidence, does he choose to extend anonymity to those accused of rape?

Mr Clarke: There are arguments on both sides of the question, and they have frequently come before the House over the years. The Government think it is right to have a reasonable debate on them. That is one of the arguments in favour of anonymity. The argument that I have always thought is the strongest for anonymity is in cases in which the victim has anonymity—when there are allegations by children against teachers and others, or allegations made by women or men in rape cases. Where the victim is allowed anonymity all the way through, there is a case, which the House has accepted on occasions in the past, for giving anonymity to the person who is accused. There are other arguments on both sides of the case. We are not likely to have early legislation on the matter. This was the principal subject of debate in 2003 when there was a Bill before the House, and it divided all three parties. It is not a matter for party political ideology. It is a question that the House as a whole should consider with care.

Meg Munn: In my experience of working with sex offenders, it is extremely unusual for someone to offend on only one occasion. Publicising the name of the person accused often allows other women to come forward. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman look seriously at this evidence, at research that has been done by the Home Office, and at research to which I have been directed, by the excellent criminology department at Sheffield university?

Mr Clarke: As the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr Blunt) reasonably said in the Adjournment debate, we are looking at evidence and seeing how many cases are multiple offenders, and in what particular cases that might have led to further complaints and detection, but I point out that 53%—I think that is the figure—of those accused in serious rape cases are known to the person making the accusation. They are usually ex-partners or ex-husbands. In those cases, where the person sometimes gets anonymity if they are the husband, not granting it might betray the identity of the complainant, and sometimes the person accused does not get anonymity, if they are the partner. There is a perfectly serious case to be made on both sides of the argument, and the coalition agreement has contemplated going back to anonymity. I had to

look up which way I voted the last time the question was before the House. Other hon. Members would probably have to do the same. I voted in favour of anonymity then, but we are now listening to the arguments.

Bridget Phillipson: I have worked with victims of sexual violence and know how difficult it is for women to come forward and report offences. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right that the issue is not about party politics; it is about protecting very vulnerable victims of crime. If the Government intend to press ahead with those proposals, will he outline how they intend to encourage women to report rape offences and what measures will be brought forward to drive up the conviction rate in rape cases, which remains significantly lower than it should be?

Mr Clarke: The Government are committed to providing up to 15 more rape crisis centres. I agree entirely with the hon. Lady that, obviously, nobody is questioning the long-standing decision that anonymity be given to all victims making allegations of rape. It is obviously important that everything possible be done to encourage more women who have suffered from that crime to come forward and seek the prosecution of the perpetrator.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I listened with great care to what the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Secretary of State said about the mystery of where the policy came from, but can he enlighten the House as to why, over that weekend of negotiations between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative party about the coalition agreement, the matter suddenly became a major priority when it had not been in either manifesto before? Will he also please tell us how many women were involved in those negotiations?

Mr Clarke: I was not involved in the negotiations, but the policy actually emerged from them. I remind the hon. Lady that the Liberal Democrat assembly voted in favour of the policy in 2006, but it did so against a background of considerable debate. People from all parts of this House decided to vote for anonymity in 2003, and we recently had a report from Baroness Stern, who I do not think supports anonymity but recommended that the matter be debated more extensively.

The one thing that I can say to the hon. Lady is that the idea that the proposal was a male decision to the exclusion of female sensitivity on the subject is, frankly, slightly wide of the mark. Nobody in the House denies that rape is a serious offence; nobody in the House wants to reduce the protection that is given to women who are threatened with it or experience it.

6. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on the likelihood of rape victims coming forward of his policy to extend anonymity to defendants in rape trials. [2221]

10. **Katy Clark** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): What plans he has to extend anonymity to defendants in rape cases. [2225]

15. **Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the likely effect of his proposal to introduce anonymity for defendants in rape cases on the number of prosecution brought in such cases. [2230]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Kenneth Clarke): The Government totally support the anonymity of rape victims and regard rape as a very serious crime that should be prosecuted in all cases where sufficient evidence exists. There seems to be no reason, however, why a victim should be deterred from complaining because the name of the accused will not be immediately publicised. The Government are, however, prepared to consider all arguments on that or any other aspect of the issue.

Kevin Brennan: The point is that the Justice Secretary has come before the House and talked about the proposal as if he were suggesting perhaps a Green Paper or a national debate, but it is in his programme of government, and I notice that his Front-Bench team is a Liberal-free zone. Does he feel, and will he now admit to the House, that basically he has been sold a pup?

Mr Clarke: No. I think that it is a serious issue, and, although I may not have initiated its appearance in the coalition agreement, the hon. Gentleman may gather that I am not averse to the House looking at it again. There are people who want us to do so, and we will have an opportunity, no doubt in due course, to put it to Members. I am not responsible for the whipping in the House, but I suspect that all three parties would rather prefer a fairly free vote on the issue, because I do not think that there is any consensus in any part of the House, unless I am suddenly told it is—*[Interruption.]* The Labour party is looking for new policies, I know, but I do not think that it has decided to make this issue the central plank of its much overdue reform.

We have said that we are attracted by the argument, and that we will debate it and consider all the arguments produced by Members from all parts of the House. The Prime Minister actually referred Members to the Home Affairs Committee on which he sat, which on an all-party basis recommended anonymity, at least until the time of charge, only a few years ago.

Katy Clark: I am pleased to hear that there may be a free vote on this issue and that the Secretary of State has so little personal enthusiasm for the policy. Does he agree that the main problem in rape cases is the low conviction rate and the fact that rape victims are not believed? Rather than trying to create ways to provide those accused of rape with more protection, we should be looking at ways to make sure that women feel able to come forward and that we increase the conviction rate.

Mr Clarke: I hasten to repeat that I have no responsibility or control over the whipping arrangements of any of the political parties in the House. When I was operating as a Back Bencher, I took this sort of vote very seriously. I considered it seriously in 2003 and came down in favour of voting for anonymity. It is no good trying to sweep the issue from the field, and we are not going to do that.

The conviction rate among those charged with rape is 38%, which is lower than that for some other offences, but rape is different in many ways from more straightforward crimes such as theft. In rape cases, we are essentially relying on the frame of mind of one of

the parties; something that is perfectly lawful and affectionate if the woman is consenting is a very serious criminal offence if she is not.

Juries are the best people to decide whether they believe one version or the other in what, in my very distant experience of such trials, can sometimes be difficult cases that are best left to juries. That is why I am urging that this is a serious issue, and the coalition agreement was right to raise it. We have expressed our current intention, but Members from all parties will want to listen to all the arguments on both sides and not just be driven away from considering them.

Emma Reynolds: When the black cab driver John Worboys was charged with a string of sex attacks, more than 80 women felt that they could come forward and present themselves as victims. Anonymity for rape defendants would have prevented that from happening. Surely the Justice Secretary agrees that it is important that victims should feel able to come forward, not only to seek justice for themselves, but to strengthen the case for prosecution.

Mr Clarke: That could be a good argument, and we will look at it; evidence of that is, I think, one of the things that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary said we would consider. We are trying to have a look at the Worboys case, which is always cited, to see how far the response to that was caused by publicity about the name of the accused person and how far it was a result of the police investigation into the nature of the rape. We can come back to that in later debate. It is not a conclusive argument. A very large number of rape cases do not involve multiple offenders; essentially, they often involve people who are well known to each other and have a history of a consensual sexual relationship.

Jonathan Evans (Cardiff North) (Con): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is important that the appropriate counselling is available for victims coming forward? That counselling has recently been withdrawn in my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan). It is now provided by volunteers. Will my right hon. and learned Friend look at ensuring that appropriate funding is put in place for that service?

Mr Clarke: I certainly will. I have already referred to our commitment to try to provide new rape crisis centres, preferably using the proceeds of crime when they are recovered from criminal offenders. I strongly agree with my hon. Friend that we are long past the stage at which a woman complaining of rape is treated as if she were complaining about a handbag robbery. There is no doubt that all these cases have to be treated with considerable sensitivity because it is very difficult for a woman to bring herself to complain and not enough do so, even in the present climate of opinion.

Reoffending

8. **Simon Hughes** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): What steps the Government plan to take to reduce reoffending by prisoners after release; and if he will make a statement. [2223]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Nick Herbert): May I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election as deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats?

The Government believe that more can be done to cut reoffending by overhauling the system of rehabilitation. We are exploring how sentencing and treatment for drug use can help offenders to come off drugs once and for all. We are also exploring how we can do more with independent providers, including the voluntary sector, to reduce reoffending.

Simon Hughes: I welcome the Minister and all his colleagues to the Front Bench to consider such an important subject. May I encourage them, as they work out the plans to deal with reoffending—as has been said, it is a serious issue, which the previous Government did not address adequately—to take the advice of people such as the previous governor of Brixton prison, who were clear that, if secure housing and continuing support to deal with addictions are provided when people are released, the chance of immediate reoffending, which often starts in days, is hugely reduced?

Nick Herbert: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. We must improve the multi-agency approach to tackling reoffending. That means bringing together the police, probation, prisons and local authorities, and ensuring that they work together more effectively. The key is to get offenders off drugs and into work, and, in particular, as he says, into housing. If we can do that, we have a chance of reducing the unacceptably high reoffending rates that we currently experience.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): But how will the cuts that have just been announced to the future jobs fund, which provides employment for ex-offenders in my constituency—a third of a million pounds comes from Connexions and an equal sum from Positive Activities for Young People—contribute to reducing reoffending in Slough?

Nick Herbert: Clearly, the Opposition still have not grasped the scale of the fiscal deficit that the country faces or their responsibility for creating it. Reoffending costs the criminal justice system and wider society billions of pounds a year. If we can succeed in reducing reoffending and capture some of that money to invest in rehabilitation services through a payment-by-results model, which we proposed in our rehabilitation revolution, we have a chance of producing the rehabilitation services that the previous Government lamentably failed to provide.

Prison Building (Costs)

12. **Sir Alan Beith** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): What assessment he has made of the balance of expenditure between (a) prison building and (b) community sentences and restorative justice schemes. [2227]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Crispin Blunt): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his unopposed re-election as Chair of the Justice Committee.

As I said in reply to earlier questions, our proposals for implementing the coalition agreement commitments on sentencing and rehabilitation will be presented after

the House returns in October. Our future plans for, and the balance of expenditure between, custodial and community provision will need to be considered in the light of that, and restorative justice will feature strongly in that work, as will the work of the Justice Committee in its first report of 2009-10 on the case for justice reinvestment.

Sir Alan Beith: I thank the Under-Secretary for his kind words and congratulate him on taking office. Did he notice when he arrived at the Department that he was committed to a prison building programme, inherited from the previous Government, that cost more than £4 billion? It produced the highest incarceration rate in western Europe and pre-empted resources, which, if they were used to prevent crime, would save victims from suffering from crime in the first place.

Mr Blunt: My right hon. Friend will be glad to know that it did not entirely escape my attention. However, I draw his attention to the evidence that the then Justice Secretary gave to the Justice Committee in 2008. He pointed out that there was an opportunity to deliver the new prison places more cheaply on a revenue basis than the existing prison estate, and for them to be more fit for purpose in enabling the prison estate to address reoffending behaviour. The prison building programme per se is not, therefore, the problem but the number of offenders whom we have to sustain in custody. We need to examine the policies that drive those numbers.

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): May I add my welcome to the Under-Secretary? I also offer my congratulations to the Justice Secretary and to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) on their 40th anniversary this week as Members of the House.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Don't tell Osborne.

Mr Straw: I think my hon. Friend means that it was shortly before the Chancellor was born.

Does the Under-Secretary acknowledge that there has been a sustained fall in crime from 1995 to date, and that the increase in prison places and the fact that more serious and violent offenders are now incarcerated has contributed to that fall?

Mr Blunt: Evidence on the effects of incarceration is mixed at best. We must take the political temperature out of the debate. Outbidding each other on how robust we will be in dealing with offenders probably does potential future victims no good. We must have policies that address future offending behaviour and consider the life cycle of potential and actual offenders so that we can support them effectively.

Mr Straw: The whole House would agree that the fundamental test of an anti-crime policy is whether crime has fallen. With that in mind, will the Minister now acknowledge that crime fell consistently from 1995 and throughout the 1997 to 2010 Administration?

Mr Blunt: No, because the change in trend on crime was achieved by Michael Howard, the then Home Secretary, who delivered a robust policy that effected changes. He was the author of the change in policy, but there is a limit to continuing that process, as there must be to the rate of growth of incarceration. In the end, we cannot lock up everybody who might be a threat to someone, because in that way, the entire population would end up in prison. There is a logical end to that process, and we will do our level best to deliver more effective policies to ensure that there are fewer victims in future.

Prison Places

13. **Claire Perry** (Devizes) (Con): How many and what proportion of prison inmates are accommodated on a doubled-up basis; and if he will make a statement. [2228]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Crispin Blunt): In 2009-10, the average number of prisoners sharing a cell designed for one was approximately 19,000, and there are more than 1,000 cases in which three prisoners are sharing a cell designed for two. That overcrowding is concentrated in male local prisons, where 47.6% of prisoners are held in overcrowded conditions.

Claire Perry: Will the Minister comment on the fact that the previous Government's mismanagement of the indeterminate public protection sentencing regime in many ways contributed to that overcrowding? That was brought to my attention by a prisoner in HMP Erlestoke in my constituency, who copied me in on a very good letter to *Inside Time* this month. Will the Minister tell the House what he will do to help to reform the IPP regime?

Mr Blunt: I notice that the previous Government had to reform the IPP arrangements in 2008, having introduced them in the Criminal Justice Act 2003. We inherit a very serious problem with IPP prisoners. We have 6,000 IPP prisoners, well over 2,500 of whom have exceeded their tariff point. Many cannot get on courses because our prisons are wholly overcrowded and unable to address offending behaviour. That is not a defensible position.

Mr Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): In opposition, Conservative Members thought it was a good idea—in fact, they thought there was an extremely strong case—to build a new prison in north Wales. Is that still their view?

Mr Blunt: Yes.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Does the Minister agree that there would be a lot less overcrowding in prisons were we to adopt the very sensible policy of sending back to secure detention in their countries of origin the 13% of our prison population who are foreign nationals?

Mr Blunt: I can assure my hon. Friend that we will do our absolute level best to improve the position.

Pleural Plaques

14. **Mr Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow) (Lab): What recent representations he has received on compensation for people with pleural plaques. [2229]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Jonathan Djanogly): Let me first recognise the hon. Gentleman's relentless campaigning on compensation for pleural plaques sufferers. I recently answered two written parliamentary questions relating to pleural plaques, and Ministers have received a number of letters from hon. Members and their constituents.

Mr Hepburn: I thank the Government for standing by the previous Government's commitment to compensate past pleural plaques victims, but will the Minister go one step further, as Labour did when in office, and give a commitment that if any new medical evidence comes forward on the condition, the issue will be reopened?

Mr Djanogly: The issue was considered extensively in the last Parliament. A public consultation was carried out, and authoritative medical reports were prepared by the chief medical officer and the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council. The Government consider that in the light of that evidence, it would not be appropriate to overturn the House of Lords 2007 judgment that the condition is not compensatable under the civil law of tort. However, of course, if the situation were to change, we would look at it again. If new medical evidence emerges that suggests that the existence of pleural plaques is an actionable cause and that the condition counts as compensatable damage, it will be open to claimants to pursue an action under the law of tort.

Rape Convictions

17. **Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): What the conviction rate was for cases of rape reported in Liverpool, Wavertree constituency in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [2232]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Kenneth Clarke): Conviction rates are based on the proportion of defendants proceeded against who were found guilty. I can tell the hon. Lady that 44 defendants were proceeded against in the Merseyside police force area in 2008 and 13 were found guilty, giving a conviction rate of 30%. Court proceedings data are not available at parliamentary constituency level.

Luciana Berger: As the Secretary of State has just highlighted, the conviction rate for rape in my constituency is already dangerously low. Can he give us a definitive answer as to why rape defendants should be afforded greater protection than defendants accused of other serious crimes?

Mr Clarke: There are some relevant arguments on both sides, and other arguments that—with respect—are less relevant. I do not think that the conviction rate for rape is affected by whether the defendant had anonymity up to the trial. Nor is a woman's decision to complain affected by whether the man's name will be published in the newspaper immediately. It is important to ensure that all cases of rape are reported by victims who are then treated properly and that cases in which the evidence is sufficient are prosecuted and convicted. I trust that that will be pursued in Merseyside. As I say, some 30% of those charged are convicted, and I shall not dilate further than I did earlier on the particular nature of rape allegations, which are rather different from the allegations of normal violent crime or theft—*[Interruption.]* No, the nature of the issue before the jury is very different in such cases. The best analogy is with other sexual offence complaints made against teachers and others, in which anonymity is given to the victim but not to the person accused, and some Members have argued for that to be reconsidered.

Prison Capacity

18. **Mr David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): What his policy is on increasing prison capacity; and if he will make a statement. [2233]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Crispin Blunt): I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for North Durham (Kevan Jones) earlier.

Mr Evennett: I thank the Minister for his response earlier and agree with the comments that he made. Does he agree that the successful reduction of reoffending levels requires a long-term focus rather than a series of short-term piecemeal proposals? The Labour Government had short-termism and failed.

Mr Blunt: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am afraid that we have seen too much focus on the pursuing of political positions and influence by the media. What we have to do now is take advantage of the change in Administration, and the fact that we have a coalition Government, to try to take the political heat out of the issue, and achieve consensus on a long-term strategy to address reoffending.

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): The Justice Secretary is reported as saying that millions of pounds could be saved by jailing fewer offenders and slashing sentences. Does the Minister accept that our first duty is the protection of the public and that we must provide prison capacity accordingly?

Mr Blunt: Yes, but I do not entirely recognise the hon. Gentleman's presentation of my right hon. and learned Friend the Justice Secretary's comments over the weekend. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the first objective is public protection, and if we are to protect the public of tomorrow, so that there are fewer victims, we have to ensure that we have a justice service that will deliver a reduction in reoffending rates and can divert people from offending in the first place.

Victims of Crime

19. **Esther McVey** (Wirral West) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that the interests of victims of crime are effectively represented in the criminal justice system; and if he will make a statement. [2234]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Nick Herbert): The coalition Government's aim is to establish a criminal justice system that rebuilds public confidence in the system and ensures that our streets are safe. The rights and welfare of the victim are vital to this. The Government are dedicated to ensuring support for victims and witnesses.

We want to involve voluntary sector victims groups more and harness their ideas and innovation to help us to improve support.

Esther McVey: A constituent of mine, Jean Taylor, set up the charity, Families Fighting for Justice, after the murder of her son and daughter. Can the Minister assure her, and many others in similar situations, that these charities, which are filling the gaps in the justice system to provide support for victims of crime, will have sufficient transparency and lines of communication open to his Department in order to carry out their work?

Nick Herbert: I am happy to assure my hon. Friend of that. Charities and voluntary groups set up to promote the interests of victims are immensely important, and I would be delighted to meet the group concerned. Consistent with the proposals for a big society that we have been setting out for some time, we want to find ways to ensure that such groups have a voice, and give victims a voice, in the criminal justice system.

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): What are the Minister's plans for the future of the National Victims Service?

Nick Herbert: We are reviewing all these arrangements to promote the interests of victims. I welcome the appointment of the Victims Commissioner and the work she will embark upon. We are aware of the important work that the National Victims Service is planning to do.

Topical Questions

T1. [2240] **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Kenneth Clarke): The Ministry of Justice is responsible for the entire justice system, including the courts, prisons and probation services. Over the past four weeks, since taking office, I have sought to look at the major issues facing the Department and have worked closely with my ministerial colleagues to identify policy objectives and where savings can be made, given the current economic circumstances. We are conducting a full assessment of sentencing and rehabilitation policy to ensure it is effective in deterring crime, protecting the public, punishing offenders and cutting reoffending, while ensuring good value for the taxpayer. We intend to concentrate on the needs of justice while ensuring that legal aid works efficiently and that taxpayers' money is well spent. In addition, I would like to inform the House that the Prime Minister has asked me to be the Government's anti-corruption champion.

Andrew Rosindell: I thank the Secretary of State for Justice for his answer, although he did not mention his Department's responsibility for the British Crown dependencies of the Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey, Sark and Alderney. He will know that the previous Government were rather negative towards the loyal subjects in the Crown dependencies. Will he confirm that the new Conservative-led Government will be positive towards them and value their contribution to the British economy?

Mr Clarke: I recognise the important and very enjoyable responsibility I had for the Crown dependencies when I was Home Secretary, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government give a high priority to ensuring that the relationship with the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man is completely satisfactory. I am surprised that responsibility has found its way to the Justice Department—perhaps it was not considered carefully enough by the previous Government. I only raise the possibility that we will have a look at the allocation of responsibilities between Departments to find which allocation best suits both Her Majesty's Government and the Governments of the Crown dependencies.

T2. [2241] **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Ministers have referred to the recommendation in the Stern report on false allegations of rape. What are their plans to address the other 22 recommendations in the report?

Mr Clarke: The recommendations were only made recently, but I agree that there is no point looking at one aspect of the subject without looking at the others. I think the whole House agrees that we should do everything possible to protect the victims of rape, to enable proper allegations to be brought and to enable justice to be done, so that those responsible for this serious crime are brought to justice. I only mentioned one aspect of Baroness Stern's report, but the whole report is indeed important.

T5. [2244] **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): A High Court judge, sitting on the board of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, recently told all MPs that they should be treated in exactly the same way as every other public servant. Will the Minister therefore consider publishing the travel and accommodation expenses and allowances of High Court judges so that we can find out whether we are indeed matched pound for pound with their lordships?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Jonathan Djanogly): The Lord Chief Justice decided that, from the start of the new legal year in October 2009, the expenses claims of High Court judges and above should be recorded in such a way that they can be attributed to individual judges and published at regular intervals. The first set, covering October to the end of December 2009, was published in March, and the next set, covering January to Easter, is due to be published in July. Figures for the summer term will be published in the autumn.

T3. [2242] **Mr Graham Allen** (Nottingham North) (Lab): May I congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment? As a fellow Nottinghamshire MP, may I ask him to have a look at a problem that eluded his three predecessors, which is the creation of a community court in the city of Nottingham? People in Nottingham want the community court and people in the communities want it. However, it seems that the legal establishment in Nottingham does not want a community court. Will he use his good offices to make that wish come true in an area that is, as he knows, fighting crime very well?

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Nick Herbert): I am aware of the operation of the community court up in Liverpool, which I have visited, and the community court in Red Hook in New York, which pioneered this system of community justice. They are indeed interesting, and we should look at their success carefully. I am afraid that I cannot give the hon. Gentleman any commitment on Nottingham, but we are interested in and aware of the importance of community courts.

T6. [2245] **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): May I congratulate the Justice Secretary on his new position? Can he explain what the coalition Government's position is on self-defence in the event of burglaries in one's own home and the level to which we can defend our properties? I understand that we have undertaken a review of the position, and people would like clarification, following a number of Back-Bench Bills from Government Members.

Nick Herbert: I can tell my hon. Friend that we are reviewing the law and its interpretation carefully, and we will explore all the options before bringing forward proposals. We must ensure that the responsible citizen acting in self-defence or for the prevention of crime has the appropriate level of legal protection.

T4. [2243] **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): Will the Lib Dem-Tory Government be legislating to give prisoners the vote?

Mr Kenneth Clarke: The previous Government were considering the question carefully, and we are still carefully considering our policy on the issue.

T7. [2246] **Mr Dominic Raab** (Esher and Walton) (Con): What plans does the Justice Secretary have to reform drug rehabilitation in our prisons, so that we see fewer offenders languishing on methadone prescriptions than under the previous Government, and more going clean on abstinence-based programmes?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Crispin Blunt): Clinical guidance for the treatment of heroin addicts in prison has been updated to reinforce the expectation that prisoners jailed for more than six months should not be maintained on methadone unless there are exceptional circumstances. We recognise that continuity of management of drug users is a key challenge. The work of Lord Patel's prison drug treatment strategy review and last year's review of the drug interventions programme will help us to strengthen arrangements between prisons and the community. However, I absolutely acknowledge my hon. Friend's great concern about the issue.

T9. [2248] **Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): In a recent case, a Salford man had committed a rape and was bailed, but then committed a further rape, and the police believe that there are further victims of this man. Can the Secretary of State explain why the Government have committed in their coalition agreement to extending anonymity to such defendants before all the evidence is heard? Can he also say who will now be consulted for that evidence?[1]

1. *[Official Report, 24 June 2010, Vol. 512, c. 1-2MC.]*

Mr Kenneth Clarke: With great respect, I find it very surprising that so many questions are being raised about a proposition that has been before the House, on and off, for the past 20 years and is not easily resolved. We will, of course, look at all arguments, including the experience of the case to which the hon. Lady has referred, but that is only one of the considerations to be taken into account. There will undoubtedly sometimes be cases where the publication of the name of the accused person gives rise to other people coming forward with well-founded complaints against that person. We will have to see whether there is any evidence that such cases are a significant proportion of the total cases of rape. We shall also have to consider the arguments on the other side, where a woman can make an anonymous complaint, the man can eventually be convicted, after going through a long and probably rather destructive ordeal, and the woman retains her anonymity as she walks away, with her ex-boyfriend or ex-husband left to live with the consequences.

Hon. Members: What?

T8. [2247] **Mr Gary Streeter** (South West Devon) (Con): Given that it is a surprise to some of us that so many drugs enter our prisons every day through a variety of methods, what steps will this exciting new Government take to try to crack down on this abuse of Her Majesty's prisons?

Mr Blunt: Plainly, this issue is not new, and there have already been reviews of how drugs get into prisons. We are going to examine this matter and, as I have said, it will be a priority of mine. I am minded to try to ensure that prisoners have the opportunity to get on to abstinence-based programmes successfully and safely, within the prison estate, and to ensure that they do not get knocked off course by the availability of illegal drugs in our prisons—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt. It is understandable that Ministers should look backwards at those questioning them, but they must face the House.

Mrs Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): Seventeen-year-old Ashleigh Hall, who lived in my constituency, was murdered last year by Peter Chapman, who is now serving a life sentence. While in prison, Mr Chapman has been writing to Ashleigh Hall's parents and family. Does the Minister think that that is acceptable?

Mr Blunt: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for bringing that to my attention. Perhaps she could write to me with the details of the case. Obviously, on the face of it, it sounds unacceptable, and I would be pleased to look into the matter.

T10. [2249] **Mr David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): What is the legal aid funding allocation per head in England and Wales, and how does it compare with legal aid funding in other countries?

Mr Djanogly: England and Wales have by far the most generous legal aid provision in the whole world. For example, Spain spends £2.55 a head, France spends £3.31, and Germany spends £4.69. Countries with a

similar system, such as New Zealand, spend on average £8 a head, compared with £38 a head in England and Wales.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): On the issue of pleural plaques, when does the Minister expect to make the first payments under the new compensation scheme?

Mr Djanogly: The mechanics of the scheme are being consulted on, and we hope to start making payments towards the end of this month.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): In his capacity as the new anti-corruption tsar, will the Justice Secretary have a word with Andy Coulson? Andy Coulson and Rebekah Wade both admitted that they had paid police officers for information when running newspapers. They paid police officers; that is suborning a police officer. Will the Justice Secretary institute a review of the process whereby newspapers sometimes pay for information from police officers, and put a stop to it?

Mr Kenneth Clarke: Personally, I think that this Government are going to give a very high priority to restoring and, I trust, maintaining this company's reputation—*[Laughter.]*—this country's reputation as one of the leading advocates of the elimination of corruption in trade and in Government contracts. We shall also ensure that the Bribery Act 2010, which we supported, is properly enforced, and that we are in the forefront of the people paying regard to this matter. With respect, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's question bears very closely on that. I would also say to him that making allegations against people who are not Members, under cover of parliamentary privilege, should be done with great caution. He should not accuse people of corruption in the course of putting a question to me on this subject.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Justice Secretary acknowledge that, when our constituents are the victims of crime, they often need support and assistance to navigate the criminal justice service? Will he take this opportunity to, at the very least, ring-fence his Department's expenditure on services for the victims of crime?

Mr Clarke: The Government will give priority to victims to exactly the extent that the House would expect. It should be in the forefront of all our minds when trying to protect the country against crime that the interests of victims should be paramount. My reflection on this hour of questioning is that it is no good for the Labour party to respond to every suggestion that there might be budget constraints as though that represents a threat to an essential service. The fact is that there is no money, and that is the fault of those in the Labour party. They will not be taken seriously again until they face up to the reality of the situation to which they have largely contributed, and start producing some realistic alternative policies to challenge those being put forward by the Government.

Mr Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): Will the Secretary of State clarify whether his Department is to review the current system of classification of controlled drugs—which has been called seriously into question in recent months—and particularly the role of the Advisory Committee on the Misuse of Drugs?

Mr Clarke: We have been looking at practically every aspect of policy in our first weeks in office, but we are not rushing to readdress the categorisation of drugs and we are going to ensure that scientific advice on this subject is treated properly, objectively and in the public interest. Any views that my hon. Friend wishes to put forward on the workings of the present system will be carefully considered by myself and my team of Ministers.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that the recent spectacle of Roy Whiting exploiting British taxpayers to demand a reduction in his sentence is an abuse of justice and an insult to the memory of Sarah Payne?

Mr Blunt: The important principle to establish here is judicial independence. I think we should therefore respect the decisions that judges come to on these matters.

Saville Inquiry

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement. Today, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is publishing the report of the Saville inquiry—the tribunal set up by the previous Government to investigate the tragic events of 30 January 1972, a day more commonly known as "Bloody Sunday". We have acted in good faith by publishing the tribunal's findings as quickly as possible after the general election.

I am deeply patriotic; I never want to believe anything bad about our country; I never want to call into question the behaviour of our soldiers and our Army, which I believe to be the finest in the world. And I have seen for myself the very difficult and dangerous circumstances in which we ask our soldiers to serve. But the conclusions of this report are absolutely clear: there is no doubt; there is nothing equivocal; there are no ambiguities. What happened on Bloody Sunday was both unjustified and unjustifiable. It was wrong.

Lord Saville concludes that the soldiers of Support Company who went into the Bogside

"did so as a result of an order... which should have not been given"

by their commander. He finds that

"on balance the first shot in the vicinity of the march was fired by the British Army"

and that

"none of the casualties shot by soldiers of Support Company was armed with a firearm".

He also finds that

"there was some firing by republican paramilitaries... but... none of this firing provided any justification for the shooting of civilian casualties",

and that

"in no case was any warning given before soldiers opened fire".

Lord Saville also finds that Support Company

"reacted by losing their self-control... forgetting or ignoring their instructions and training"

and acted with

"a serious and widespread loss of fire discipline".

He finds that

"despite the contrary evidence given by the soldiers... none of them fired in response to attacks or threatened attacks by nail or petrol bombers"

and that many of the soldiers

"knowingly put forward false accounts in order to seek to justify their firing".

What is more, Lord Saville says that some of those killed or injured were clearly fleeing or going to the assistance of others who were dying. The report refers to one person who was shot while

"crawling... away from the soldiers"

and mentions another who was shot, in all probability,

"when he was lying mortally wounded on the ground".

And the report refers to a father who was

"hit and injured by Army gunfire after he had gone to... tend his son".

For those looking for statements of innocence, Saville says:

"The immediate responsibility for the deaths and injuries on Bloody Sunday lies with those members of Support Company whose unjustifiable firing was the cause of those deaths and injuries",

and, crucially, that

"none of the casualties was posing a threat of causing death or serious injury, or indeed was doing anything else that could on any view justify their shooting".

For those people who were looking for the report to use terms like murder and unlawful killing, I remind the House that these judgments are not matters for a tribunal, or for us as politicians, to determine.

These are shocking conclusions to read and shocking words to have to say, but we do not defend the British Army by defending the indefensible. We do not honour all those who have served with distinction in keeping the peace and upholding the rule of law in Northern Ireland by hiding from the truth. So there is no point in trying to soften, or equivocate about, what is in this report. It is clear from the tribunal's authoritative conclusions that the events of Bloody Sunday were in no way justified.

I know that some people wonder whether, nearly 40 years on from an event, a Prime Minister needs to issue an apology. For someone of my generation, Bloody Sunday and the early 1970s are something that we feel we have learnt about rather than lived through. But what happened should never, ever have happened. The families of those who died should not have had to live with the pain and hurt of that day, and with a lifetime of loss. Some members of our armed forces acted wrongly. The Government are ultimately responsible for the conduct of the armed forces, and for that, on behalf of the Government—indeed, on behalf of our country—I am deeply sorry.

Just as the report is clear that the actions of that day were unjustifiable, so too it is clear in some of its other findings. Those looking for premeditation, those looking for a plan, those even looking for a conspiracy involving senior politicians or senior members of the armed forces, will not find it in this report. Indeed, Lord Saville finds no evidence that the events of Bloody Sunday were premeditated. He concludes that the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland Governments, and the Army, neither tolerated nor encouraged

"the use of unjustified lethal force".

He makes no suggestion of a Government cover-up, and he credits the United Kingdom Government with working towards a peaceful political settlement in Northern Ireland.

The report also specifically deals with the actions of key individuals in the Army, in politics and beyond, including Major-General Ford, Brigadier MacLellan and Lieutenant-Colonel Wilford. In each case, the tribunal's findings are clear. The report does the same for Martin McGuinness. It specifically finds that he was present and probably armed with a "sub-machine-gun", but concludes

"we are sure that he did not engage in any activity that provided any of the soldiers with any justification for opening fire".

While in no way justifying the events of 30 January 1972, we should acknowledge the background to the events of Bloody Sunday. Since 1969, the security situation in Northern Ireland had been declining significantly. Three days before Bloody Sunday, two officers in the

[The Prime Minister]

Royal Ulster Constabulary—one a Catholic—were shot by the IRA in Londonderry, the first police officers killed in the city during the troubles. A third of the city of Derry had become a no-go area for the RUC and the Army, and in the end 1972 was to prove Northern Ireland's bloodiest year by far, with nearly 500 people killed.

Let us also remember that Bloody Sunday is not the defining story of the service that the British Army gave in Northern Ireland from 1969 to 2007. That was known as Operation Banner, the longest continuous operation in British military history, which spanned 38 years and in which over 250,000 people served. Our armed forces displayed enormous courage and professionalism in upholding democracy and the rule of law in Northern Ireland. Acting in support of the police, they played a major part in setting the conditions that have made peaceful politics possible, and over 1,000 members of the security forces lost their lives to that cause. Without their work, the peace process would not have happened. Of course some mistakes were undoubtedly made, but lessons were also learnt. Once again, I put on record the immense debt of gratitude that we all owe those who served in Northern Ireland.

I thank the tribunal for its work, and thank all those who displayed great courage in giving evidence. I also wish to acknowledge the grief of the families of those killed. They have pursued their long campaign over 38 years with great patience. Nothing can bring back those who were killed, but I hope that—as one relative has put it—the truth coming out can help to set people free.

John Major said that he was open to a new inquiry. Tony Blair then set it up. That was accepted by the then Leader of the Opposition. Of course, none of us anticipated that the Saville inquiry would take 12 years or cost almost £200 million. Our views on that are well documented. It is right to pursue the truth with vigour and thoroughness, but let me reassure the House that there will be no more open-ended and costly inquiries into the past.

However, today is not about the controversies surrounding the process. It is about the substance, about what this report tells us. Everyone should have the chance to examine its complete findings, and that is why it is being published in full. Running to more than 5,000 pages, it is being published in 10 volumes. Naturally, it will take all of us some time to digest the report's full findings and understand all the implications. The House will have an opportunity for a full day's debate this autumn, and in the meantime the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and for Defence will report back to me on all the issues that arise from it.

This report and the inquiry itself demonstrate how a state should hold itself to account and how we should be determined at all times—no matter how difficult—to judge ourselves against the highest standards. Openness and frankness about the past, however painful, do not make us weaker; they make us stronger. That is one of the things that differentiates us from the terrorists. We should never forget that over 3,500 people, from every community, lost their lives in Northern Ireland, the overwhelming majority killed by terrorists. There were many terrible atrocities. Politically motivated violence was never justified, whichever side it came from, and it can never be justified by those criminal gangs that today want to drag Northern Ireland back to its bitter and bloody past. No Government I lead will ever put those who fight to defend democracy on an equal footing with those who continue to seek to destroy it, but nor will we hide from the truth that confronts us today. In the words of Lord Saville:

> "What happened on Bloody Sunday strengthened the Provisional IRA, increased nationalist resentment and hostility towards the Army and exacerbated the violent conflict of the years that followed. Bloody Sunday was a tragedy for the bereaved and the wounded, and a catastrophe for the people of Northern Ireland."

Those are words we cannot and must not ignore, but I hope what this report can do is mark the moment when we come together, in this House and in the communities we represent; come together to acknowledge our shared history, even where it divides us; and come together to close this painful chapter on Northern Ireland's troubled past. That is not to say that we must ever forget or dismiss that past, but we must also move on. Northern Ireland has been transformed over the past 20 years and all of us in Westminster and Stormont must continue that work of change, coming together with all the people of Northern Ireland, to build a stable, peaceful, prosperous and shared future. It is with that determination that I commend this statement to the House.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): May I thank the Prime Minister for his statement? As he said, it is more than 12 years since the then Prime Minister Tony Blair set up the Saville inquiry to establish the truth of what happened on what became known as Bloody Sunday. For the 14 families whose loved ones were killed, for the 13 who were injured, for the soldiers and their families, for all those whose lives would never be the same again, the report has been long-awaited. We all recognise how painful this has been, and the Prime Minister has been clear today. He said that there is no ambiguity, that it was wrong; he has apologised and we join him in his apology.

I also join the Prime Minister in thanking Lord Saville and all those whose work contributed to the report. The report speaks for itself and it speaks powerfully.

I remind the House of what Tony Blair said on the day that the House agreed to establish the Saville inquiry. He said that Bloody Sunday was a day we have all wished "had never happened" and that it was "a tragic day" for everyone. I reiterate his tribute to the dignity of the bereaved families, whose campaign was about searching for the truth. He rightly reminded the House of the thousands of lives that have been lost in Northern Ireland. May I restate our sincere admiration for our security forces' response to terrorism in Northern Ireland? Many lost their lives. Nothing in today's report can or should diminish their record of service. They have been outstanding.

The Prime Minister has acknowledged that the Saville inquiry was necessary to establish the truth and to redress the inadequacy of Lord Widgery's inquiry, which served only to deepen the sense of grievance, added to the pain of the families of those who died and were injured, outraged the community and prolonged the uncertainty hanging over the soldiers. I am grateful to the Prime Minister for reminding the House that the setting up of the Saville inquiry played a necessary part in the peace process. Does the Prime Minister agree

that, notwithstanding the considerable cost of this inquiry, its value cannot be overestimated in both seeking the truth and facilitating the peace process? Does he believe that Saville has now established the truth?

How the Government handle the report is of great importance, so I thank the Prime Minister for committing to seek a full day's parliamentary debate on it. Will he consider allowing for a period of time between the debate in each House, so that what is said in this House may be considered before the debate in the Lords? When will he be in a position to say what, if any, action will be taken in Government as a result of the findings of the Saville report? What will be the decision-making process, and will the process be as transparent as possible?

The Prime Minister must recognise that some will no doubt raise the possibility of prosecutions. The prosecution process is independent, but has he been asked to consider the question of immunity from prosecution if we are instead to take things forward by a wider process of reconciliation? Is the time now right to move towards a process for reconciliation, building on the work of the Consultative Group on the Past, chaired by Lord Eames and Denis Bradley? Can there now be a comprehensive process of reconciliation to address the legacy issue of the troubles, such as that proposed by my right hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Mr Woodward) when he was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland? Does the Prime Minister agree that that is what is now necessary?

The peace process is a great achievement by the people of Northern Ireland as well as by politicians. It is a process built on the value of fairness, equality, truth and justice. This House has played its part, not least in agreeing to the Saville inquiry. The Belfast agreement, the St Andrews agreement and, of course, this year's Hillsborough castle agreement are all great milestones on the path to a lasting peace. Does the Prime Minister agree that the completion of devolution just a few weeks ago is relatively new and fragile and still requires great care? Our response to Saville must be as measured as it is proportionate. We have sought the truth; now we must have understanding and reconciliation.

May I conclude by expressing the hope that while people will never forget what happened on that day, this report will help them find a way of living with the past and looking to the future?

The Prime Minister: May I thank the right hon. and learned Lady for what she has said? I do not think there are any significant divisions between us on this vital issue and, as she said, how we respond to this matters: it matters for the peace process, it matters for the families and it matters for our country. She is right that the value of this is getting to the truth. Of course we can argue about the process, the time and the money, but that is secondary to the issue of the substance, and the substance is about getting to the truth on this issue. The right hon. and learned Lady raised a number of specific questions, and I shall try to deal with them.

The idea of leaving a period of time between the debates in the Commons and the Lords is very sensible, and I will ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to look at that—although, of course, we are not responsible for timings in the Lords. In terms of the action the Government should take, I should point out that this report is 5,000 pages long; as the right hon. and learned Lady has seen, it is the most enormous document, and it will take some time to go through all of it and identify all the points that need to be responded to. That will be led by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Defence and for Northern Ireland. They will consider it and come to me with suggestions for what needs to be followed up, and I think we will have to see how others respond to this very full report too.

The right hon. and learned Lady raised the question of prosecution. She is right, of course, to say that these are decisions for the Director of Public Prosecutions to take in Northern Ireland and that should be entirely independent. On the issue of immunity, I am informed by the Advocate-General that the evidence given to the inquiry is subject to the undertaking given by the Attorney-General in February 1999

"that evidence given by witnesses to the Inquiry would not be used to the prejudice of that person in any criminal proceedings except proceedings where the witness is charged with giving false evidence."

I think that is the right position.

The right hon. and learned Lady will know that we do not agree with some parts of the Eames-Bradley report, particularly the idea of universal recognition payments; we do not think it is right to treat terrorists and others in the same way. I think that it is right to use, as far as is possible, the Historical Enquiries Team to deal with the problems of the past and to avoid having more open-ended, highly costly inquiries, but of course we should look at each case on its merits. May I thank her again for the way in which she has responded to this important statement for Britain, for Northern Ireland and for a peaceful future for our country?

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): As the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition have said, it is very important to have a measured and proportionate response to this report, both in this House and in Northern Ireland. Is it not, therefore, important that the leaders of all the parties in Northern Ireland, on both sides of the divide, show leadership in that respect? One thing that we do not want to do is see the Army return to the streets of Northern Ireland, and to avoid that situation coming about again we must have the correct response to this report. It will take time to digest, because it is 5,000 pages long and raises many issues. We have to look at this issue and the whole report, and we must do justice to it. That will take time and a reasoned approach.

The Prime Minister: First, may I congratulate my hon. Friend on being elected as the Chair of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs? He has had a long interest in this part of our United Kingdom, and I know that he will do an excellent job. The point he makes is entirely right: how we respond to this as party leaders—this applies to all parties—will make a huge difference to the way that this is seen and understood. It is a highly charged and highly emotional issue, even 38 years on, and in our response we have to be responsible for what we say and how we say it. I think that it is important that everyone recognises that.

Paul Murphy (Torfaen) (Lab): As the political development Minister in 1998, when this inquiry was started, I think that I was right in agreeing with it.

[Paul Murphy]

Having listened to the Prime Minister's statement, all of which I agree with, I believe that, despite the costs and the length of time, it was right for this report to come forward today, after all these years. Does the Prime Minister agree that the chief priority, still, for Northern Ireland is its peace process and that all parties in Northern Ireland must agree with that process and with the way we go forward? Will he undertake to take personal charge of ensuring that that peace process continues, despite what he rightly calls the "shocking" revelations of this report?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman served with great distinction as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and I know his commitment to the Province and to the peace process. He is right to say that the peace process still needs to be given our priority. I was keen to get to every part of the United Kingdom within the first 10 days or so of becoming Prime Minister, and I did go to Northern Ireland, where I met party leaders, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would agree, as a former Secretary of State, that it is important for us to give responsibility to our Secretaries of State and to ensure that, in the first instance, they are leading the process and making sure that the peace process moves forward—it is moving forward. It has been challenged many times over the past decade, and I am sure that today will be another fresh challenge. But I hope that the way that people respond to this report will make sure that, as I said in my statement, we can draw an end to this very painful chapter in Northern Ireland's history.

Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North) (Con): Every soldier should be responsible for what actions he takes through the sight of a gun and every officer must bear responsibility for individual orders that they give, as must members of the IRA and other terrorist organisations. What steps will the Prime Minister take to make sure that the Saville inquiry report is used to draw a line under the past and ensure that peace remains in Northern Ireland, and is not used as a tool for propaganda by politicians to hit each other over the head with?

The Prime Minister: First, I know that my hon. Friend served in Northern Ireland in the Army, and I pay tribute to that. I think that how people respond will be a matter for them. I cannot stop people—as he put it—hitting themselves or indeed even each other over the head with this report. What I hope can happen as a result of today, given the clarity of the report and the lack of equivocation, is that whatever side of the arguments or whatever side people have been on, they will be able to draw a line under what happened and recognise that very bad things happened on that day; it was not justified and it was not justifiable, and there is no point quibbling or arguing with that. As I said, of course people in Northern Ireland will go on looking back to the past, because of the painful memories and also because of the information that has not yet come out, but at the same time as doing that it must be possible to look to the future. In my view, Northern Ireland has a very bright future.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): May I thank the Prime Minister for his clear statement? From talking to representatives of the families a short while ago, I know that they would want to be associated with those thanks.

This is a day of huge moment and deep emotion in Derry. The people of my city did not just live through Bloody Sunday; they have lived with it since. Does the Prime Minister agree that this is a day to receive and reflect on the clear verdicts of Saville, and not to pass party verdicts on Saville?

The key verdicts are:

"despite the contrary evidence given by soldiers, we have concluded that none of them fired in response to attacks or threatened attacks by nail or petrol bombers. No one threw or threatened to throw a nail or petrol bomb at the soldiers on Bloody Sunday".

A further verdict is:

"none of the casualties...was posing any threat of causing death or serious injury."

Of course, there is also the verdict that

"the British Army fired the first shots, these were not justified and none of the subsequent shots that killed or wounded"

anyone on Bloody Sunday "was justified." In rejecting so much of the soldiers' submissions and false accounts, the report highlights where victims were shot in the back or while crawling on the ground, or shot again when already wounded on the ground.

Will the Prime Minister confirm that each and every one of the victims—Bernard McGuigan, 41; Gerald Donaghey, 17; Hugh Gilmour, 17; John Duddy, 17; Gerard McKinney, 34; James Wray, 22; John Young, 17; Kevin McElhinney, 17; Michael Kelly, 17; Michael McDaid, 20; Patrick Doherty, 31; William McKinney, 27; William Nash, 19; and John Johnston, 59—are all absolutely and totally exonerated by today's report, as are all the wounded? These men were cut down when they marched for justice on their own streets. On that civil rights march, they were protesting against internment without trial, but not only were their lives taken, but their innocent memory was then interned without truth by the travesty of the Widgery tribunal. Will the Prime Minister confirm clearly that the Widgery findings are now repudiated and binned, and that they should not be relied on by anyone as giving any verdict on that day?

Sadly, only one parent of the victims has survived to see this day and hear the Prime Minister's open and full apology on the back of this important report. Lawrence McElhinney epitomises the dignity and determination of all the families who have struggled and strived to exonerate their loved ones and have the truth proclaimed.

Seamus Heaney reflected the numbing shock of Bloody Sunday and its spur to the quest for justice for not only families but a city when he wrote:

"My heart besieged by anger, my mind a gap of danger,
I walked among their old haunts, the home ground where they bled;
And in the dirt lay justice, like an acorn in the winter
Till its oak would sprout in Derry where the thirteen men lay dead."

The Bloody Sunday monument on Rossville street proclaims:

"Their epitaph is in the continuing struggle for democracy".

If today, as I sincerely hope it does, offers a healing of history in Derry and Ireland, may we pray that it also

speaks hope to those in other parts of the world who are burdened by injustice, conflict and the transgressions of unaccountable power?

The Prime Minister's welcome statement and the statement that will be made by the families on the steps of the Guildhall will be the most significant records of this day on the back of the report that has been published. However, perhaps the most important and poignant words from today will not be heard here or on the airwaves. Relatives will stand at the graves of victims and their parents to tell of a travesty finally arrested, of innocence vindicated and of promises kept, and as they do so, they can invoke the civil rights anthem when they say, "We have overcome. We have overcome this day."

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman spoke with great power and great emotion on behalf of his constituents and his city, and I would like to pay tribute to the way in which he did that, and to the service that he has given to them. He spoke about the healing of history, and I hope and believe that he will be right. I know that he represents many of the families who lost loved ones that day, and he has always fought for them in a way that is honourable and right, and has always, in spite of all the difficulties, stood up for the peace process and for peaceful means.

To answer the hon. Gentleman's specific questions, he is right that the Widgery report is now fully superseded by the Saville report; this is the report with the facts, the details and the full explanation of what happened, and it should be accepted as such. In terms of the people who were killed on that day, they were innocent of anything that justified them being shot; that is quite clear from the report. Let me read it again:

"none of the casualties was posing a threat of causing death or serious injury, or indeed was doing anything else that could on any view justify their shooting."

That is what Saville has found. I hope that that is some comfort to the families, and to the people in Londonderry who have suffered for so many years over the issue, and that, as the hon. Gentleman says, we can now draw a line, look to the future and build Northern Ireland as a prosperous part of the United Kingdom.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I congratulate not only the Prime Minister but the Leader of the Opposition on their opening statements today, which, I have to say, were two of the most statesmanlike contributions I have heard on any subject in more than 13 years in this House?

On the question of possible prosecutions, may I draw to the House's attention one fact? There was a sniper on the IRA side who killed something like two dozen British soldiers, but who was arrested only a relatively short time before the Good Friday agreement was concluded. As a result of that man's conviction, he received a very long sentence, but served only a very short sentence. Should it not be borne in mind that that man, after all he did, is now out on the streets, a free man, before anybody starts calling for prosecutions of people, even though they did very wrong things a very long time ago?

The Prime Minister: May I thank my hon. Friend for what he said about the statements by me and the Leader of the Opposition? I know that he cares deeply about this issue, too. What I would say to him about the very strong point that he makes is that the Good Friday agreement included clauses that were incredibly painful for people on all sides to cope with. The idea that someone who had murdered—and, as my hon. Friend said, murdered perhaps more than once—would serve only two years in prison was incredibly painful for people to understand, but these things had to be done to try to end the long-running conflict and to bring people to pursue their goals by peaceful means. That is what the peace process is about.

In terms of making a contrast between that and what soldiers have done, I am very clear that we should not try to draw an equivalence between what terrorists have done and what soldiers have done, because soldiers are operating under the law—operating for a Government. We should not draw equivalence. On the issue of prosecutions, I can only repeat what I said to the Leader of the Opposition, and I also make the point that it is important that I do not say anything today that would prejudice either a criminal prosecution or, indeed, a civil action, were one to be brought.

Let me end, again, on the point about the painful decisions that had to be made in the peace process. We all, particularly on the Conservative side of the House, know people who have been affected. The first person I ever wrote a speech for was Ian Gow, who was murdered by the IRA. It is incredibly painful and difficult for people to put behind them what happened in the past, but we have to if we are to make the peace process work.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement, and of course it will take some time fully to divulge the contents of the Saville inquiry. The events of 30 January will live with the surviving relatives for the rest of their lives. Thousands of other surviving relatives have had to do likewise. They have had no costly inquiries and no media interest, and there have been 10,000 other bloody days in Northern Ireland's recent history. Murder and mayhem were caused by the Provisional IRA in the days, weeks and months before Bloody Sunday. Indeed, the two police officers whom the Prime Minister mentioned were murdered in the immediate vicinity of the march just three days before that march. I am glad the Prime Minister mentioned them today on the Floor of the House, because Lord Saville did not. That is an unfortunate and deeply regrettable omission.

We did not need a £200 million inquiry to establish that there was no premeditated plan to shoot civilians on that day. We did not need a report of such length to tell us that as a result of IRA actions before Bloody Sunday, parts of the city "lay in ruins". Many have said that the difference between Bloody Sunday and the other atrocities that I have alluded to was that Bloody Sunday was carried out by state forces, whereas other murders were carried out by terrorists.

There has been no similar inquiry into the financing of the Provisional IRA at the inception of that organisation by another state—the Irish Republic. That Irish state acted as a midwife at the birth of an organisation responsible for murdering many thousands of UK citizens.

Soldiers answered questions in the course of the Saville inquiry. The 2IC of the Provisional IRA, Martin McGuinness, appears not to have answered questions. The public will want to know from today what he was doing with a Thompson sub-machine-gun on the day of

[Mr Gregory Campbell]

Bloody Sunday. Does the Prime Minister agree that the sorry saga of the report is finally over and done with, and that we should look forward, rather than looking back?

The Prime Minister: I agree that we should look forward rather than back, and I hope the report will enable us to do that. Of course the hon. Gentleman is right to refer, as I did in my statement, to the 1,000 members of the Army and security services who lost their lives during the troubles, and all that they did to try to keep Northern Ireland safe and secure. Of course he is right to refer to the many thousands of families who have lost loved ones through terrorism and who have not had an answer and have not had an inquiry into what happened to their loved ones. When it comes to answering questions, yes, it is important that IRA members and people who were responsible for things even now come forward and answer so that people can at least bury those whom they lost. Of course that is important.

I hope, as well, that the hon. Gentleman will understand that there is something about Bloody Sunday—about the fact that 13 people were shot by British Army soldiers and died on that day—that necessitated a proper inquiry. That is what the report today is about. Yes, we must come up with the answers to other people's questions and yes, we have to go through with the historical inquiries team to try to settle those issues of the past, but let us not pretend that there is not something about that day, Bloody Sunday, that needed to be answered clearly in a way that can allow those families—all those people—to lay to rest what happened on that day.

Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): I thank the Prime Minister for his courageous and honourable statement and, through him, Lord Saville for a very clear and unequivocal report which has, at last, answered the questions to which 27 families have been waiting for answers for so long. Does the Prime Minister agree that, given that the truth is the precondition of closure, justice and reconciliation, we now have the best possible way to move on because we have, at last, the truth about all those events on that terrible day?

Does the Prime Minister have any plans, when we have all had a chance to digest the report, to go to Northern Ireland and to Derry not just to express the solidarity of the whole House with the people there, and to confirm our support for the troops who for so long did honourable things in the name of the democratic Government, but to encourage the families of the bereaved and all those who, since that day in Derry and beyond, have worked so hard to make sure that Northern Ireland will never again have the terrible past that it had, but always have the prosperous democratic future which events such as Bloody Sunday made much more difficult, but which, in spite of adversity, so many people, including the women of Northern Ireland, did so much to achieve?

The Prime Minister: I certainly agree. This is about trying to heal the wounds of the past. As the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan)—the former leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party, who represents so many of the families in his constituency—put it, people in Londonderry have not just lived through it, but lived with it. That is the point, and that is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes) makes.

In terms of going to Northern Ireland, I am keen that as Prime Minister I should visit Northern Ireland regularly, and as I said, I have already been there in the relatively early days of my being Prime Minister. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was in Londonderry two weeks ago and met the families, and he has plans to go back and do that again. I know that many people support Derry's bid to be the European city of culture, and that is another part of the healing process in closing that painful chapter around the past.

Naomi Long (Belfast East) (Alliance): I thank the Prime Minister for his very considered and thoughtful comments in respect of this particularly sensitive report. Since Bloody Sunday the families have had to live with not only the consequences of what unfolded in that short period, but the consequences of the many speculative reports and so on, which were produced following the events and which compounded their pain. So I am glad that, today, this report would seem to be a start in delivering for them the truth that they required and, I hope, the justice that they needed to be able to rebuild their lives.

The tragic events of that afternoon clearly and irrevocably changed the direction and course of the lives of people who were immediately affected by it, but it also cast a very long shadow over the society in which all of us live. Therefore I seek the Prime Minister's assurances that, given how polarising the incident has been throughout politics and society in Northern Ireland, he will listen carefully to all the voices surrounding it, give people time to consider the content of the report fully and encourage them to take the time to read it in full before reaching conclusions on it. Can he also reassure us that he will deal with the Northern Ireland Executive and discuss with the Ministers there who have responsibility for individual victims how he intends to take forward the wider project of dealing with the legacy of the past?

The Prime Minister: First, may I take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Lady on her election victory as the new Alliance MP for Belfast East? What she said was extremely sensible. The report is comprehensive and people should take time to study it, but it will take time for them to engage properly with all the information. Our key aim was to try to get it out as fast as we could in a reasonable way, to give the families and others advance sight of it and to try to publish it in one go properly. Mercifully, for a report as complicated and detailed as this, there have been relatively few leaks, and I hope that people can see it, read it and fully engage with it.

The hon. Lady says that people should read the report, but I also recommend the summary document, which is some 60 pages long and incredibly clear. That is why I reached my conclusion about there being no equivocation. When one reads the summary, whatever preconceived ideas one brings to the whole area and to what happened, one is given an incredibly clear sense of what happened and how wrong it was. I hope that, whatever side of the argument people come from, a report as clear as this will help them to come to terms with the past, because it puts matters beyond doubt. In that way, as I said, I think that the truth can help to free people from their preconceived ideas.

Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said at the beginning of his statement that that period of the 1970s was something that people of his generation had learned about. In the period between 1971 and 1975, we lost more members of the British Army than we have during the past four years in Afghanistan, such was the bleakness of the troubles in Northern Ireland.

I was born in the Royal Victoria hospital on the Falls road in Belfast in the latter part of the year that the events unfolded in Derry/Londonderry, and the events in Northern Ireland at that time shaped very many of us. One of the great joys of returning to Northern Ireland today is talking to young people, in their teens, for whom even the most recent events of the troubles themselves are something that they study and do not remember. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if civic leaders and politicians in Northern Ireland take the lead of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan), this could be a cleansing opportunity of historic proportions, whereby the process of normalisation in Northern Ireland can continue and young people will never have to go back to the dark days of the 1970s?

The Prime Minister: I hope that my hon. Friend is right. As I said, I think that the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) spoke extremely clearly and passionately, and there should be a chance of working for a shared future. That is what we want in Northern Ireland.

The point that my hon. Friend makes is right. Every year—every month—that goes by with the peace process working and without a return to violence further embeds a culture in which we do things by political means and we get normal politics in Northern Ireland. That is what we should be aiming for, and it is certainly what we shall try to do.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): The Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition both spoke with great sensitivity and balance this afternoon. In that spirit, does the Prime Minister agree that any action taken against former members of the armed services subsequent to the Saville report should be carried out in the interests of justice and not vengeance?

The Prime Minister: The short answer to that is yes. These matters should be determined independently by the Director of Public Prosecutions in the correct way. One of the things that should mark us out is that these things should happen only in the interests of justice and not in the interests of vengeance. I am sure that that is what will happen. I set out the position to the right hon. and learned Lady.

Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): I should like to thank the Prime Minister and the right hon. and learned Lady for their measured contributions. On other days, soldiers who had been based at the Colchester garrison lost their lives in Northern Ireland. In 1987, I spent three days with 3rd Battalion the Royal Anglian Regiment on duty in Belfast and was full of admiration for their courage and bravery, because they faced the prospect of being shot at by fellow British citizens. I wonder whether the Prime Minister will confirm that awful though Bloody Sunday clearly was, more than 1,000 members of the security forces lost their lives during the years of the troubles?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right; over 1,000 people—from the security services, the Army, the police and other services—lost their lives. Also, 250,000 people served in the Army in Northern Ireland during Operation Banner. Those of us who have not served in the Army cannot possibly know how tough it must be to be on duty on the streets, faced with violence and the threats of violence. It is worth remembering what service those people all gave and what restraint, in almost every case, they showed.

I was speaking to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who served in Londonderry, in Derry, a year after Bloody Sunday. He rightly made the point to me that the pressures that we put on our often very young soldiers were huge, and we should pay tribute to all those who served for what they did. But it is not in their interests, and nor is it in our interests, to try to gloss over what happened on that dreadful day. The report enables us to face up to what happened and to accept what happened, and that is the best way of moving on and accounting for the past.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): First of all, I thank the Prime Minister for bringing forward the very welcome statement on the Saville report today. I thank the members of the Opposition who brought the report to this point today.

Given the very personal tragedy of Bloody Sunday for the families of the bereaved and wounded and the major political implications that this serious incident had for the people of Derry, the wider community of Northern Ireland over the last 38 years and the wider island of Ireland, could the Prime Minister tell us about the parameters and context of the debate and the possible time scale of the assessment and report from the Secretaries of State for Defence and for Northern Ireland? Will he also give consideration to possible measures of redress for the families in Derry following the exoneration of the victims by the Saville report? In that debate, could wider consideration be given to the Ballymurphy families, who also experienced a lot of distress and pain because the Parachute Regiment, some five months earlier, was involved in those incidents, which resulted in the wounding, but above all the killing, of 10 people?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Lady for her questions and congratulate her on becoming leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party and on her election as Member of Parliament for South Down. She asked several questions. First, on how long the Government's assessment will take, the report is very long and detailed, and we want to take the summer to consider it and come back to the debate in the autumn, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can answer questions more fully and make announcements, if appropriate.

On redress, I do not think that today is the day to talk about such matters; today is the day to consider the report and take it all in. As the hon. Lady knows, perhaps better than anyone, the families have been involved in a search for the truth rather than for recompense or redress. However, all those issues need to be examined.

[The Prime Minister]

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has meetings with the Ballymurphy families. The first port of call should be the historical inquiries team. It is doing good work, going through all the issues of the past and trying to settle them as best it can. We want to avoid other such open-ended, highly costly inquiries. We cannot rule out for ever that there will be no other form of inquiry, but let us allow the Historical Enquiries Team to do its very good work.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the balance that he has achieved in the statement. It is important to recognise not only the truths of the Saville inquiry, but the sacrifice and the grief of the forces, who played such an important part in bringing peace to Northern Ireland. May I suggest that if the inquiry and the report are to be a true marker in helping the healing process and the peace process to move forward, it is terribly important to keep that balance in one's remarks and perspective about the sacrifice on both sides?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. As I tried to say in my statement, we should pay tribute—I do so again—to the 250,000 of our fellow countrymen who served in Northern Ireland with great distinction, often in great personal danger. We should pay tribute to all those who were injured, who suffered and who lost their lives. It was incredibly tough and difficult work but necessary not just to maintain the rule of law, but to make possible what we have now: the peace process. It would not have happened without that service. However, we do the forces no service if we try to gloss over the dreadful events set out in the report. I am sure that serving and retired members of the armed forces, as well as people on the Benches behind me or, indeed, in front of me, who served in the armed forces, want the truth about the events to be out there. That is the right thing to do. We honour the British Army—we should put it at the front and centre of our national life and celebrate what it does—but we do it no service if we do not look properly and in detail at things when they go wrong.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement and the previous Government for having the courage to establish the inquiry in the first place. Will he acknowledge that the inquiry came about only because of very brave campaigning for many years by Irish people, throughout Ireland and over here, who often got much press opprobrium for doing so? I am unclear about what happens next and whether there are to be further investigations or prosecutions of those who committed those acts of murder on the streets of Derry, or whether that will be left to the Director of Public Prosecutions. I realise that it is difficult for the Prime Minister to answer all that today, but does he expect to be able to give us clearer guidance in the debate in the autumn?

The Prime Minister: Let me try to answer the hon. Gentleman as clearly as I can. Prosecutions are a matter for the DPP, and that is right. We cannot have inquiry judges or politicians trying to order prosecutions. Indeed, we must be careful about what we say so that we do not prejudice any potential prosecutions. If it would help, I can repeat the Attorney-General's clear advice about people not prejudicing their own potential proceedings.

On the campaign, yes, I pay tribute to people who campaigned because the report in some ways justifies itself to those who wanted a clear, truthful and accurate answer. In the report, they have something very clear and accurate that cannot be quibbled with.

Mr Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): Having read the summary report of Saville, the Prime Minister talks about it bringing out the truth, but is not the difficulty that we have the truth on one side but not the truth on the other? Of Martin McGuinness, the report states:

"The question remains as to what Martin McGuinness was doing"

that day. We do not know the truth about what Martin McGuinness and the IRA were doing that day, and the problem is that while we regret every death in Northern Ireland—they are all personal tragedies—we must not lose sight of the need for balance, as other hon. Members have said. I can well remember hearing the two explosions at Narrow Water close to my home in South Down when I was a child, when 18 members of the Parachute Regiment were cut down in cold blood by the Provisional IRA. No one was ever convicted of their murders. If we are to have the truth and a quest for justice, it should apply right across the board, and not just in a small nub.

The Prime Minister: Let me say to the right hon. Gentleman that I absolutely want us to get to the truth on all of those dreadful murders. As I said, ought former paramilitaries to come forward and give information so that we can clear up murders and so that people can bury their loved ones properly? Yes, they should—absolutely. I can see members of the SDLP nodding at that.

As for Martin McGuinness, he must answer for himself on the evidence he gave to the inquiry. Let me read the relevant paragraph:

"In the end we were left in some doubt as to his movements on the day. Before the soldiers of Support Company went into the Bogside he was probably armed with a Thompson sub-machine gun, and though it is possible that he fired this weapon, there is insufficient evidence to make any finding on this, save that we are sure that he did not engage in any activity that provided any of the soldiers with any justification for opening fire."

The right hon. Gentleman is right that in the end, we want the truth to come out about all the murders, and we want to know all the information, but in respect of the Government's responsibility for bringing clarity on Bloody Sunday, I think Lord Saville has done us a service. I think people from all parts of Northern Ireland, from all parts of all communities, should welcome the fact that although we might not have clarity on everything that happened, we have clarity on one bad thing that did happen. Let us not make that a reason for not welcoming the clarity of what has been said today.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I congratulate the Prime Minister on the clarity with which he has set out, in his words today, the Government view on the publication of the Saville report. Does he agree that as this report is digested and looked at in great detail—difficult though that may be—across all communities in Northern Ireland, what really matters

for the future of Northern Ireland and all its people in all its communities, is reconciliation, leaving the past behind and moving to a new and brighter future for Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is right that what we really want is reconciliation and working for a shared future, and everyone working across all communities to put the past behind them, but I think we all know that there is still some work to be done on the past, because loved ones remain unburied and murders remain unsolved. That is what the Historical Enquiries Team is there to do. We have to try to do those things at the same time. We must uncover and come to terms with what happened in the past in a way that can allow families to move on, but at the same time we must recognise that Northern Ireland's shared future will be about economic growth and people working together, whatever tradition they come from.

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): I am sure the Prime Minister would not like to support a hierarchy of victimhood. On 17 January 1992, eight innocent civilian construction workers at Teebane were murdered by the Provisional IRA, and six others were seriously injured. On 9 April 1991, my cousin Derek was gunned down and his child was left to put his fingers into the holes where the blood was coming out to try to stop his father dying. On 7 February 1976, my two cousins were brutally murdered—one boy, 16, and his sister, 21, on the day she was engaged to be married. Therefore I say this to the Prime Minister: no one has ever been charged for any of those murders, and there have been no inquiries. Countless others, including 211 Royal Ulster Constabulary members, were also murdered. Saville says:

"None"

of the casualties

"was posing any threat of causing death or serious injury",

but that could be said of Teebane, of Derek, of Robert and of Rachel. How do we get closure, how do we get justice, and how do we get the truth?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman rightly speaks with great power and emotion about how people on all sides in Northern Ireland have suffered, and people in the community that he represents have suffered particularly badly. Some horrific things have happened to people completely unconnected with politics—people who are innocent on every single level—and there is nothing that you can do to explain to someone who lost a loved one in that way that there is any logic, fairness or sense in that loss. The hon. Gentleman asks how we try to achieve closure on such matters. There is no easy way, but we have the Historical Enquiries Team, which goes through case after case, and if it finds the evidence, prosecutions can take place.

I hope that the inquiry report published today will give some closure to those families from Londonderry, but one way for families who have suffered to gain more closure about the past is for terrorists or former terrorists to come forward and give information about those crimes. However, in the end, we have to move forward and we have to accept that dreadful things happened. We do not want to return to those days, and that sometimes means—as he and I know—burying very painful memories about the past so that we can try to build a future.

David Cairns (Inverclyde) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister recall that in the last Stormont elections the single biggest issue by a long way for both sides of the community was water charges and rates? Does not that demonstrate that in many ways the majority of the people of Northern Ireland have already moved on from the troubles that dominated so much of the past? Is it not important that on a day like today, when emotions will understandably run high, we do not lose sight of the fact that the majority of people in Northern Ireland are today concerned about the same issues about which his constituents and my constituents are concerned? That is a good thing and it represents progress.

The Prime Minister: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. One of the great prizes of the peace process would be for Northern Ireland to experience politics in the same way as the rest of us in the United Kingdom where it is about knocking on doors and talking about the health service, schools and water rates. That is what politics should be about, and there is a chance of that happening. It was great to go to Northern Ireland as Prime Minister without the normal security paraphernalia that previous visits involved, so we are making progress. That is what politics in Northern Ireland should become. The more that happens, the more people will find it unthinkable to go back to the days that came before.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): Thirty-eight years is too long for any bereaved family to wait for justice and today's report is a historic step on the long road to permanent peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Does the Prime Minister agree that today's report will be welcomed by the families who have campaigned for so long for justice for the 13 men and boys who died on that day?

The Prime Minister: I hope that the families will welcome the report, and I know that they are gathered in Derry today. I know that they will have been watching our proceedings and will have read the report—they had access to it in advance of its publication. As I have said, nothing that anyone can write or say will bring back those who were killed, but I was very struck by a remark by one of the relatives, quoted in a newspaper this morning, that the truth can help to set you free. If you have been living with something for 38 years without any answers, the answers do not end the grief, but they do give you a chance to learn what happened and therefore bring some closure to those dreadful events.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Following the eloquent contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (Dr McCrea), one wishes that on a day such as today the House had time to hear the names of everybody who died in tragic circumstances in Northern Ireland. It has been said that this report could lead to closure and cleansing, but it is difficult to see how that could happen if this report is used as a springboard for more years of agitation about prosecutions over events that happened 38 years ago. If

[Mr Nigel Dodds]

there are prosecutions, presumably they might include prosecution for the possession of illegal firearms, for example.

Would it not be a true testament to all this if the Prime Minister were to announce today that the HET, which he has mentioned on several occasions, will be given anything like the same level of funding given to this inquiry? The HET has been grossly underfunded compared to this inquiry. The thousands of other victims who demand justice are looking to the HET and other such forums to achieve it. Will he today guarantee that the same emphasis will be given to those victims as has been given to innocent people otherwise?

The Prime Minister: I hope that the report will not be used as a springboard for further inquiries or action. It is supposed to help by delivering the truth and helping to achieve closure—that is what it should be about. The hon. Gentleman asked about the Historical Enquiries Team, the funding of which, as he knows, is about £34 million—much less than the cost of the Saville inquiry. However, I think that everyone accepts that the cost of that inquiry was huge—£100 million was spent on lawyers alone. While acknowledging, as I have done, that it is a full, clear and unequivocal—and, in that respect, a good—report, I am sure that even the former Government would have recognised that lessons needed to be learned about cost control. That is why there was the Inquiries Act 2005 to replace the 1921 arrangements. The issue of the HET is now a devolved issue, and I would add that in opposition we supported the generous funding settlement for the devolved Administration to cover such areas.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Speaking as someone of Northern Irish heritage and representing a constituency with large numbers of the Irish diaspora, I welcome the publication—finally—and clarity of the Saville report. I also thank the hon. Members for Foyle (Mark Durkan) and for South Antrim (Dr McCrea) for the moving way in which they addressed the House today. However, although the report has clarity, does the Prime Minister agree that there are times when truth and justice do not necessarily go together?

The Prime Minister: I echo what the hon. Lady said about the Members who have spoken today. On truth and justice going together, without wanting to write a whole essay, it seems to me that a very important part of the justice that people in Northern Ireland seek is having the truth about what happened out in the open. People in the city of Londonderry want that transparency and accountability, and many Democratic Unionist Members want the same for their constituents who have suffered in the same way. Having the truth out about what happened does not bring back relatives and loved-ones, but it at least enables people to understand what happened; and it enables prosecutions to be brought forward, if that is the right thing to do. However, I repeat that it must be for independent prosecuting authorities to take those decisions—we must not get into a situation where politicians nudge the prosecuting authorities in one direction or another in that sort of way.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Like the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) and my hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell), I hope that this is the end of a matter that has bedevilled and poisoned Northern Ireland's politics for so long. However, will the Prime Minister take this opportunity and dismiss completely, from the Dispatch Box, claims by commentators that this inquiry has been a war crimes tribunal, and that the people in the dock have been the British citizens of Northern Ireland? Such a shameful slur on us citizens is intolerable and wrong, and serves only to perpetuate that poison through the veins of the body politic in Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, can the Prime Minister be less ambiguous on the matter of future inquiries? He said in his statement that there will be no more costly inquiries, but in answer to the hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie), he said that he cannot rule out all inquiries. Which is it to be? If we cannot rule out all inquiries, there are 211 RUC officers who have been murdered and their killers have never been brought to justice, and there has been no inquiry into those murders. Indeed, more than 3,000 people killed in Northern Ireland have not yet had justice. What is it going to be?

The Prime Minister: First, let me welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place in the House. He is right: this is not, as he said, a war crimes tribunal—that would be an appalling thing to say—but an inquiry into what happened. It is an inquiry to get to the truth of the events of that day and the events surrounding it. I meant what I said about no more costly open-minded inquiries. We should not have more open-ended and costly inquiries. I want to support the work of the Historical Enquiries Team. That is the right way to go about things. Of course, we can never say never about any other form of inquiry, however big or small, but my strong intention is to use the Historical Enquiries Team process to get to the bottom of the events of the past. That is the right way to go about things.

I know that this is probably unparliamentary, but may I welcome the other Ian Paisley, who is in the Gallery and whom we remember so fondly sitting in this House? Let me just say this. Everyone has had to take big risks for peace in Northern Ireland, and no more so than the Big Man, as they like to call him. We should all recognise that people in this process have known so many victims of terrorism and so much suffering, and everyone has had to take risks and make movements in order to bring the peace process about, and that will continue to be true. Even today, as we remember the painful memories of the past, we still have to say, "Yes, I remember those things—I don't forget them for a second—but that doesn't mean we don't work together for a shared future for Northern Ireland."

Michael Connarty (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (Lab): I wish particularly to thank the Prime Minister for his frank apology on behalf of the Government and the people of this country. I think that the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) will accept that that will in some way be a salve for the people in the Bloody Sunday incident and the families of the dead. However, does the Prime Minister accept that unless people can see the names and know the people who carried out the acts, for many of the families there may not be a way of putting the incident behind them, as I found out from

my contact with the families of those who were killed in McGurk's bar? I hope that he will consider that, not in terms of what will happen with the prosecutions or anything else, but because people must know who carried out those acts.

Finally, will the Prime Minister look in the longer term at the role of the intelligence forces in possibly preconditioning people in the armed forces for what happened on Bloody Sunday? Those dark forces are clearly at work in the British Army, and we must not allow them to hide.

The Prime Minister: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's description of "dark forces" in the armed forces. The report is clear that there was no conspiracy—there was no premeditation, there was no plan, and it is not right to say that there was. He should read the summary of the report and what it says about not just the politicians, but the senior officers who were involved. That is important.

Let me address the hon. Gentleman's other point. As for the anonymity of the soldiers, that was part of the Saville process and what was agreed in order that the evidence should be given and the truth should be got at. Let me say this about apologies, because I know that some people are—in some ways, I think, rightly—cynical about politicians standing up and apologising for things that happened when they were five years old. I do not do so in any way lightly; it just seems to me that it is clear that what happened was wrong—that what the soldiers did was wrong—and that the Government should take responsibility. The Government of that day are no longer around, so it falls to the Government of this day to make that apology. I do not believe in casting back into history and endlessly doing that, but on this occasion it is absolutely clear that it is the right thing to do.

Kris Hopkins (Keighley) (Con): As a former soldier who served in Northern Ireland, I found today's statement a difficult one to listen to. Listening to it was nearly as difficult as watching mass murderers leave prison free or watching some very interesting people come to power in Northern Ireland, but those are all things that we did to facilitate peace and reconciliation. There is a possibility of revenge taking over from justice in this case, so we must ensure that we get the balance right and continue to pursue peace and reconciliation.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend puts it extremely well. Today's statement is a difficult statement: it was a difficult statement to make and a difficult statement to listen to, because it contains some uncomfortable truths for people who, like me, are deeply patriotic, love the British Army, love what it stands for, revere what it has done down the ages and have seen what it does in Afghanistan. It is incredibly painful to say what has been said today, but we do not serve the Army if we do not say it.

I mentioned Ian Gow, who was the first MP I ever worked for. I also think of Airey Neave, the first MP to represent me, who was blown up in the precincts of this Palace by Irish terrorists. This is incredibly painful, but my hon. Friend is right: we have to make these leaps in order to make the peace process work. I think that former soldiers will understand that the service they gave in Northern Ireland is worth more now that they can see peace and peaceful progress. In a way, that is what it was all about, difficult as it was. I had Martin McGuinness sitting opposite me at the Cabinet table in No. 10 Downing street; it was difficult, but it was right, because peace is so much better than the alternatives.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): May I thank the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition for the statements that they have made today and, indeed, for the apologies that they have given on behalf of the present Government and of the Opposition? The Prime Minister is absolutely right to say that there cannot be costly inquiries of this kind in the future, but does he also agree that there can be no more whitewashes such as Widgery, when inquiries into these incidents take place? Finally, does he agree that it is essential for all of us, as politicians and leaders, in responding to the inquiry, to pursue truth and reconciliation rather than blame and recrimination?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is right about the inquiries. Standing back from it all, however, I would say that we can take some pride—as can the former Government—in the fact that, in the end, the British state has gone to huge lengths to get to the truth about what happened on Bloody Sunday, and that an earlier report from an earlier inquiry has effectively been laid aside and replaced by a much fuller and clearer one. Not many states in the world would do that, and I think that we should see it as a sign of strength that we have done it.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): May I also thank the Prime Minister for the painful honesty of his statement? I salute him for that. In respect of the families, he is absolutely right to talk about issues of redress being for another time. However, this is a very raw day for the families. Will he assure the House that he, his Government and the Northern Ireland Office are doing everything possible to provide advice, assistance and access to those friends, families and neighbours who have never forgotten what happened in 1972 but who are today being reminded almost unbearably of it?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. It has been a difficult day for the families; it has been a difficult 38 years for them. We thought very carefully about this, and we wanted to build on the arrangements that were put in place by the right hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Mr Woodward) when he was Northern Ireland Secretary to ensure that the families could see the report some hours in advance of its publication today, and in a way in which all their needs would properly be met, because this is an incredibly stressful document for them to read. I pay tribute to the former Northern Ireland Secretary for what he did to put those arrangements in place, and to my right hon. Friend the current Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what he has done to build on them, as well as for meeting the families, as he has done, and for offering to meet them again in the future, which he will also do.

Tom Greatrex (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Prime Minister's statement and, particularly, his commitment to a day's debate on the report in the autumn. May I urge him and his Cabinet

[Tom Greatrex]

colleagues, between now and the autumn, to encourage everyone to consider the report, and the issues that it raises for all communities, reflectively and with maturity, so that we can get the benefit of all the efforts that have gone into producing it?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can do that. The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, which is that people will want to study the report in detail. The scale of it is enormous. I have brought in only one of the eight or ten volumes—

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Owen Paterson): Ten.

The Prime Minister: This is just one of the 10 volumes that have been published today. People will want to take time to read them. In a way, I am sorry that the debate is not until the autumn, but it is probably right to give the Government, the families and others time to assess what is in the report and to come back with sensible proposals, where necessary, on how to deal with them.

Points of Order

4.49 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Are you aware that the report that we have just discussed is not available to Members of the House? Would it not be appropriate, if we are to have a proper debate on the matter, to have full copies of the report distributed to us?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for airing the concern that he and others might feel on this matter. I think that the House is aware of the special conditions that have obtained in relation to this report and of the arrangements made for advance sight under controlled conditions for it to be read. I certainly think it important—I hope this helps the hon. Gentleman—that all Members should have sufficient time to study the report fully before a debate takes place. Even though the hon. Gentleman is a new Member, he has taken the opportunity to raise this point of order in a very timely way in the presence of senior people who, I feel sure, will have taken note of what he has said.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I hesitate and only tentatively raise this point of order with you, but it has previously been the practice in the House that where a statement is made, hon. Members wishing to ask questions about it should be present at the beginning and rising throughout that statement, and preference is then usually given to those who are. Has there been any change to existing practice on that?

Mr Speaker: There has been no change, and I would want to say to the hon. Gentleman that I do not want to travel down that route. If I were an uncharitable and ungenerous fellow and of an unusually suspicious frame of mind, none of which things is true, I would think that the hon. Gentleman was challenging the judgment of the Chair as to whom to call.

Kevin Brennan *indicated dissent.*

Mr Speaker: As I am none of those things, however, and because the hon. Gentleman shakes his head in disavowal, I am happy to accept that that is not so. I look very carefully to see who is trying to contribute, and, as I think the record shows, I try, subject to limitations of time, to accommodate everybody who wishes to do so. It is probably worth saying that this statement ran longer than I would ordinarily allow a statement to run, but I think that colleagues will appreciate that there were very special reasons for doing so today.

Business of the House

4.52 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Heath): I beg to move,

That, at today's sitting, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Sir George Young relating to Backbench Business Committee, Election of Backbench Business Committee, Backbench Business (Amendment of Standing Orders), Westminster Hall (Amendment of Standing Orders), Topical Debates (Amendments of Standing Orders), Pay for Chairs of Select Committees, Backbench Business Committee (Review), September Sittings, Business of the House (Private Members' Bills), Deferred Divisions (Timing), Select Committees (Membership), Select Committees (Machinery of Government Change) and Sittings of the House not later than 9.30 pm; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.

It is important that we facilitate finally reaching decisions on the large number of matters before us in the motions on the Order Paper today. That is the purpose of the motion—to enable us not to defer matters to another day, not to have matters continuing into the future.

Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are in a position today where we are discussing motions that will effectively exclude Plaid Cymru Members from being a member of the Welsh Affairs Committee and Scottish National party Members from being on the Scottish Affairs Committee. Additionally, there will be no room for those parties' Back-Bench Members to sit on the Back-Bench business committee. What kind of motions are these? What is the point behind them? I urge the Minister to take them away and think them through, as these motions will not stand the test of time, and the people in Wales and Scotland will be furious when they find out.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I thank Mr Llwyd for his point of order, which is not a point of order. Sufficient amendments have been selected to allow him to make his points.

Mr Heath: Of course, the sooner we can dispose of the business of the House motion, the sooner we can move on to the important debates on the membership of Select Committees.

I should like to welcome you to the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, as I do not think I have had the opportunity to do so previously. The point I was making is that the motion will enable us to reach decisions on these matters tonight rather than at some time in the future. It seeks to balance the time we need for debate and the time we need to take decisions on some 14 motions on the Order Paper—and, of course, on the amendments to them that Mr Speaker has selected. It would be foolish of us to take up a great deal of time debating the business of the House motion at the expense of the important debates that I know the House is eager to move on to at the first opportunity.

4.54 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I, too, welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It seems that north-west England is now very well represented in the Chair, which is a very good thing.

I am astonished that the Leader of the House has tabled a programme motion relating to important changes in the business of the House, given that Conservative Members argued against programme motions on many occasions when in opposition. It seems that things change.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Has my hon. Friend noticed that many of the Members who used to stand up and say how awful such motions were do not appear to be taking part in today's debate?

Barbara Keeley: That is an interesting observation.

It was right that today we were given a considerable amount of time on the Floor of the House to discuss the statement on the Saville inquiry, but it also important for us now to have adequate time in which to debate changes in the business of the House. We have already heard a point of order indicating the seriousness with which one Member takes the issue.

During business questions last week the shadow Leader of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster Central (Ms Winterton), drew attention to the lack of consultation with the Opposition on the details of the changes before the motions were tabled. I am sure that the Deputy Leader of the House is aware that it has been customary for the Opposition to be given advance sight of proposals on House business. That happened throughout all the discussions on reform of the House and the Wright Committee, but it is a courtesy that the coalition Government seem now to have abandoned, and I regret that.

We want to move on. A large number of amendments have been tabled to the motions, and it is only right for us to have time to debate them fully.

4.56 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

During the nine years that I have been in the House, I have listened to Conservative Members objecting to programme motions and guillotines as though they were the wicked invention of a terrible Labour Government. The business of the House motion lists the motions on today's Order Paper:

"Backbench Business Committee, Election of Backbench Business Committee, Backbench Business (Amendment of Standing Orders), Westminster Hall (Amendment of Standing Orders), Topical Debates (Amendments of Standing Orders), Pay for Chairs of Select Committees, Backbench Business Committee (Review), September Sittings, Business of the House (Private Members' Bills), Deferred Divisions (Timing), Select Committees (Membership), Select Committees (Machinery of Government Change) and Sittings of the House".

I shall say more about the motion on September sittings later.

The changes that we are to debate will make a fundamental difference to the way in which the House operates not only in terms of the role of Back Benchers, but in terms of the representation of the minor parties

[Mr Kevan Jones]

in the House, and we should be given sufficient time in which to discuss these extensive motions. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) that it was wrong to tag such important House business on to a major statement about the Saville inquiry—on which, rightly, many Members wished to comment, in an emotive debate that showed the House at its best—and to try to rush it through.

Many of us have recently been on the receiving end of ill-thought-out and ill-informed reform. I am sure that if we had had more time to debate the proposals of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority in detail, we would not have signed up to some of the craziness as a result of which all Members in all parts of the House are suffering.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's arguments—I think that I sometimes advanced them from that side of the House myself—but is he suggesting that he would like the House to sit through the night to make the necessary decisions in the early hours of the morning?

Mr Jones: No. As one who can remember all-night sittings, I have to say that they were conducive neither to the health of individual Members nor to the scrutiny of legislation. Let us be honest, however: the coalition has hit the ground running with reviews, commissions and study groups. The programme for the period between now and the summer recess is not exactly packed with legislation that would take up time. Unless all the various reviews, study groups and commissions are to report instantaneously, we should find more time in which to discuss the important changes that we are discussing, which will have an effect on the way in which the House operates.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): Notwithstanding the genuine issues raised by the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd) in a point of order, which have to be discussed, would the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) at least concede that many of the motions on today's Order Paper merely put into effect what the House has already discussed at length in the previous Parliament, on 4 March and 18 March, in respect of the Wright Committee?

Mr Jones: I am sorry that the hon. Lady wants to disfranchise up to a third of this House, who were not here in the previous Parliament. It is important that those Members be allowed to look at the proposed reforms and have their say on them. I know that, along with her colleagues, she has signed up to the Conservative party. I thought that the Liberals were not in favour of an authoritarian approach. We see the two sides of the Liberal party.

It is important that we have debates. I served for seven and a half years on a Select Committee and am a keen supporter of the scrutiny role that Select Committees play. There are issues about, for example, the size of such Committees and the representation of the minor parties. If this is steamrollered through on a Conservative-Liberal Democrat guillotine, many people in both Scotland and Wales will rightly be annoyed.

The Parliamentary Secretary and the Leader of the House have made a very quick conversion on a short road to Damascus. In the previous Parliament, when we talked about modernisation, the Parliamentary Secretary said:

> "At the moment, there is a nod and a wink between the usual channels, and then a programme motion is plonked before the House, which can take it or leave it—the answer is that we take it, because there is a Government majority in favour of the programme motion. That is not a good enough way of doing business, and it does not do justice to hon. Members."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 2006; Vol. 451, c. 335.]

In the new coalition Government and in the new spirit of co-operation, or conversion, that has taken place in the past few weeks, the Parliamentary Secretary has clearly changed his mind on programme motions. It is bad enough to have programme motions, which he used to argue vociferously against in the previous Parliament, for legislation that is being introduced, but to have them for something that affects individual Members of the House is wrong.

Mark Tami: I think that my hon. Friend will find that, even in this Parliament, in addressing an Adjournment debate, the Parliamentary Secretary still seemed to be opposed to programme motions.

Mr Jones: That is not surprising, because the Parliamentary Secretary is a Liberal Democrat and they say one thing in one place and another in another. We are increasingly seeing—we certainly saw it at Justice questions—the push me-pull me coalition, where some Members think that they can say anything in one sphere and say something else in another.

The Leader of the House, who has been in the House a lot longer than I have, clearly was against programme motions and spoke vigorously about them. I looked up his speech to the last Conservative party conference, which took place on 5 October 2009. It was revealing. He needs to explain to the House why tonight he is a great convert to guillotine motions. He said that

> "one of Labour's worst reforms has been to introduce a guillotine motion before a bill gets a second reading, automatically cutting short the time available, before we even know how complex or contentious the issues are or by how much the government will amend them. Harriet is always there, with her knitting needles."

No doubt he will be getting the knitting out later. I can visualise the Parliamentary Secretary knitting. I find it hard to visualise the Leader of the House doing so.

I am sorry to say that there is more. The Leader of the House went on to say in his speech:

> "As a result, we send huge amounts of poor quality legislation through to the Lords. We don't have time to do what we tell you to do—read the small print."

I agree with the Leader of the House in that we need to read the small print of the measures we will be deciding on tonight.

Mr Bone: The hon. Gentleman is being very generous in giving way and is making a powerful speech. Will he remind the House of how many times he has voted against programme motions?

Mr Jones: Actually, I agree with programme motions, because any idiot in opposition who argues that Government legislation can somehow be got through

without programme motions should be taken out to the nearest lunatic asylum. What we are talking about here, however, is House business, which is a different issue.

I find the situation facing us a little bit galling. To be fair to the hon. Gentleman, if we divide on the programme motion he may well join me in the No Lobby, and if so it will not be the first time he has voted against his party because he is an independent soul; and I am sure he will cause havoc to his party on many more occasions in the coming months and years. The important point here is that insufficient time is available to us tonight to examine in detail the complex measures that have been proposed.

It appears that we are being asked to agree to measures that raise questions as to whether we will be able to debate the issues involved again. For instance, motion 10 on the Order Paper, in the name of the Leader of the House, is on September sittings and it states:

"That this House reaffirms the importance of its function of holding the Government to account: and accordingly asks the Government to put to this House specific proposals for sitting periods in September 2010."

Some of us were Members when the House last had September sittings, and they were a complete disaster in that there was never any business to debate. Frankly, it was just a public relations stunt, which might have made some people feel good—*[Interruption.]* There is no need to worry, as I am not going to debate September sittings; I shall return to the subject under discussion shortly.

There is a question to be asked, however. If we agree to this motion tonight, will the Government then allow another debate on what is being proposed, because the motion seems to give them carte blanche to impose September sittings? If we agree to the motion tonight, we will need to have a debate on September sittings in Government time. If that is not allowed, we will be denying something that is stated in the motion, in that we will not be reaffirming the importance of the

"function of holding the Government to account".

Instead, we will in effect tonight be giving the Government a blank cheque to do exactly what they want in September, and that cannot be right.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman recall the business statement of, I think, the week before last, when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said he would propose the first two weeks in September this year as September sittings for this House, and that he would bring forward a motion to that effect for the House to vote on? Motion 10 does not seem quite to do what was suggested on that occasion.

Mr Jones: No, I think that first of all we need to have a debate on whether we should have September sittings at all, because some of us think they are a complete waste of time. Last time, they descended into farce, in that we had two weeks of basically Opposition day after Opposition day and endless pointless debates.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman does now seem to be going quite wide of the mark, and to be addressing the substantive debate. I therefore ask him to restrict himself to the particular motion under discussion.

Mr Jones: I will do so, Mr Deputy Speaker, but the important point is whether or not we have a debate and vote in Government time on the Floor of the House, and what the constraints on that will be. Will we be able to propose alternative September dates, because no doubt some new Members and others will have fixed holidays? What will the motion actually mean, therefore?

Mark Tami: Does my hon. Friend agree that we need a true understanding of the costs and of what those sittings cost in the past?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That is way outside what we are talking about now. I ask hon. Members to restrict themselves to discussing the motion before the House.

Mr Jones: I will, Mr Deputy Speaker. Not for the first time, my hon. Friend has tried to lead me down a path that I do not want to go down. I would shudder to incur your ire so early on in your time in the Chair. If we are to have a situation where the reforms that have been proposed actually will give Back Benchers and all the Opposition parties the chance to provide scrutiny and will give the power that the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Sir George Young) supported when he was in opposition, we need more than the debate and time that we will have tonight. Therefore, I will oppose this motion. Ample time will be available to us between now and July, unless the plethora of commissions, working groups and others report back and bring back legislation, and it is important that we do not rush through these things tonight and that we can address the serious issues that have clearly been raised by the minor parties in this House tonight.

5.11 pm

Mr James Arbuthnot (North East Hampshire) (Con): I was listening with great agreement to the Deputy Leader of the House's comments about the need for this programme motion in order for us to be able to come to a decision. We do need to come to a decision tonight and we do not need to defer any questions. What troubles me is that the points made by the minority parties are not being addressed today, so it is clear to me that on those issues we will be deferring a decision. It seems absolutely wrong that the minority parties should not have appropriate representation on the Regional Committees. They should also be entitled, as appropriate and in appropriate numbers, to representation on an appropriate number of non-regional Committees. So I hope that we will be able, at some stage, to come to a decision on that too. Irrespective of whether it happens today, we need to give all parties in this House an appropriate degree of fairness.

5.12 pm

Mr Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): The point that has just been made is extremely important. It is richly ironic that the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) was parading in front of us today expressing concern that there is a guillotine on House business. This was, of course, a long-echoed and genuine call made by many Conservative Members in the previous Parliament, and one that I have made in respect of not only House business, but all business for 25 years. So

[Mr Richard Shepherd]

consistency is certainly not behind the hon. Gentleman, but he did make some fine points. I feel strongly that the way of these guillotine motions, which I had hoped would not be in the locker of the coalition in this way, on House business, is wrong. One of the constant irritations in having so many motions grouped together in this way and then having a vote at the end is it results in our having a general debate that has no coherency in the thread of what we are debating. This is a poor business motion because as each of the motions comes to be voted on after 9.30 pm we will have lost where we stood in the arguments—this is a muddle. A typical trick of past judgments was to muddle all this up, so that no theme and no argument is consistent, necessarily, with the business as we vote upon it.

Barbara Keeley: That is part of the point that I was making. A discourtesy was shown to the Opposition because the motion was not shared with us. I would have expected our main debate to be segmented. In the past, if we were considering several House business motions, we would have given an hour on one, and perhaps taken two motions for an hour and half—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] That is the case; I remember it happening. If there had been any discussions with us, we could have suggested such an approach.

Mr Shepherd: Of course the hon. Lady could have held discussions. I know that those on the Government Front Bench are open to discussions, and if the hon. Lady had thought that her point was genuine—I accept that it must be, given that it is the point that I am arguing—she could no doubt have spoken to them. She represents a significant party in this country.

Mr Kevan Jones: I would not refer to the hon. Gentleman as a constant irritant; his approach on such matters is obviously consistent. However, if the motion is pressed to a Division, will he vote against it? Will he also consistently speak against programming, as he has done since I have been a Member?

Mr Shepherd: I will vote as I have always voted on these matters. However, given the temper of new Labour's opposition, as on identity cards, I rather suspect that there will not be a vote, but I am prepared to toss a coin and do my duty.

The Deputy Leader of the House has made all the arguments that I am setting out on previous occasions, so I am surprised that he has acceded to the motion. I am making an important point about the segmentation of debate. The approach proposed in the motion causes confusion. Many Members with a terrific interest in a particular motion that we will consider will be drifting around. The approach makes it easy for people to desert the Chamber to go off across London, and to return only at 9.30 pm to become part of the machine that will roll the proposals through.

The hon. Member for North Durham has a point in that we rarely discuss such matters and the House has a record of constantly using the power of a majority to get this sort of proposal through. He made the good point that about a third of hon. Members—certainly more than 100—are new Members who have never been party to such discussions. The changes that we will consider are important. I support almost all of them, although my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot) made a point that must be addressed. If our debate was segmented, his well-made point would command our attention and we would see how wrong it is to exclude properly elected Members of Parliament for distinctive parts of the United Kingdom from having representation on Committees that are of importance to the House, and whose importance is intended to be reinforced by the very measures that we will consider.

This business of the House motion is poor, so if it is pressed to a Division, I shall think carefully about what to do.

5.18 pm

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) did the House a great service by raising his points, although I am not sure whether he intended to. He set out one of the strongest arguments that I have heard for a Back-Bench business committee. We on the Back Benches—he now joins us there—should elect our own people to decide how our time is carved up. The argument about segmentation made by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr Shepherd) is right, but if we had a Back-Bench business committee, we would be able to discuss such considerations sensibly. It is always the Government who impose such rigidity on us, and that is why we are talking about creating that committee.

Mr Kevan Jones *rose—*

Mr Allen: I wanted to be brief, but I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend has gone from a gamekeeper as a Whip to a serial poacher on these issues—

Mr Allen: I was a poacher before that.

Mr Jones: That might be the case, but several hon. Members will remember that when my hon. Friend was a Whip, he took quite a hard line on such issues. Given the limited time that is being allocated to the main debate, does he agree that there is a danger that some of the motions will not even be debated?

Mr Allen: It is very unfair of my hon. Friend to raise my history. I am a recovering Whip; I am taking one day at a time. I think that I am doing pretty well so far, and with his encouragement, I will continue to try to do so.

The important and serious point raised by this exchange is one that every Member in this House must confront: there is a limit on time in this House and this Chamber. How do we dispose of that time effectively? We can guillotine. That is a pejorative term for a stop on debate, regardless of what has been debated, and what important issues have not been debated at all.

Programming was introduced in 1997; I was instrumental in that, so perhaps I was not quite as barbaric a Whip as my hon. Friend tried to paint me. We tried to introduce a system whereby we had agreement across the Floor, and with the minority parties, on how we would divide

business, so that it could be sensibly debated, and so that no serious issue was ever left undebated. Unfortunately, that fell apart—this may be a useful history lesson for the newer Members—when a number of Opposition Members wanted to extend and play around with the rules of the House. A number of senior Government Members said, "Okay, we're not going to play. We're just going back to the old system of imposing a timetable."

I hope that we will have a sensible debate on timetabling, and if the Government will not allow us to have one, I hope that the Back-Bench business committee will create one at the very first opportunity. It is outrageous that while vast amounts of time are expended on clause 1, line 1, we never reach serious issues in the midst of Report stage. Those are really important matters. In a sense, that is the elephant in the room, and the issue that we need to confront. I hope that, some day soon—at an early day, perhaps, if early-day motions are tidied up—we can have a debate on how we ensure effective timetabling. If the Government do not ensure that, the Back-Bench business committee probably will. I hope that it will. In order to do that, we need to make progress this evening. We have to ensure that the business of the House motion is put to the vote speedily and move on, so that we can get that long-awaited Back-Bench business committee, which was voted for by the House unanimously before the general election.

5.22 pm

Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I should like to make two or three brief points, because I, too, want the business of the House motion to be dealt with quickly.

I served on the Wright Committee with a completely open mind, and I hope that I did an honest job of work. The point was to try to ensure that everybody in the Chamber was properly represented on Committees. I have been a member of one or two Select Committees, and I am a member of the Standards and Privileges Committee. We Plaid Cymru Members are prepared to pull our weight as parliamentarians, but I was alarmed to discover late last night that the likelihood is that if the motion on Select Committee membership is passed unamended, we shall find ourselves not represented on the Welsh Affairs Committee. It is not just that that is offensive; it is more important than that.

The Welsh Affairs Committee plays a central, pivotal role in the legislative process in Wales, because it carries out pre-legislative scrutiny of Bills from the National Assembly for Wales. We are in government in Wales. Are the Government saying that we, as members of a governing party, cannot be represented on the Committee performing that important function? I understand that my friends in the Scottish National party will be excluded in a similar way. It is quite outrageous if that is to happen.

Mr Heath *indicated dissent.*

Mr Llwyd: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to intervene and clarify matters? *[Interruption.]* I shall speak to my colleagues. If motion 13 is not to be moved, I shall move on to the issue of the Back-Bench business committee. When I was on the Wright Committee, I made the point several times that the minority parties must be represented on the Back-Bench business committee as well, because we play a full part in what goes on in this place. I am in my 19th year here, and if I did not pull my weight, I would not still be here.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I know the hon. Gentleman is making an important point, but it is not one that should be made in the debate on the motion before the House, which is a programme motion. Will he please confine himself to the motion before us?

Mr Llwyd: We should have more time to discuss all these issues. One of the evils that we are now confronting is the fact that there has been no discussion. Chairs of Select Committees are not being brought into the discussion, and least of all are the minority parties. I speak for my colleagues and friends in the Scottish National party and, I believe, the Democratic Unionist party and the Social Democratic and Labour party as well.

Mr Kevan Jones: My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) raised the point that the new Back-Bench business committee will have supernatural powers to unpick decisions. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that even if time is found in a future debate to discuss the issues that he mentions, we may have a debate in the House that wafts over many subjects, but does not change what has happened?

Mr Llwyd: That is a rather pessimistic view. I thought the purpose of the Wright Committee was to make changes. I believed that when the motions came before the House a few months ago, we were on the way to making proper changes. We fell short—we did not get it all—but at least we moved forward. From the perspective of the minority parties, we are now moving backwards. I shall say no more at this stage, except that if the motions go in the way that they will, it is because of a lack of consultation. There has been no proper discussion, and I am disappointed because I have great respect for the Leader of the House and the Parliamentary Secretary.

5.26 pm

Mr Heath: With the leave of the House, I shall respond briefly to the excellent debate on the business motion.

I shall deal first with the important point made by the right hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot), which touched on the point of order from the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd). It is essential that we find a way of allowing the minority parties to play their part properly in the Select Committee system. It may be helpful to the House to indicate that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will not move motion 13 this evening, because we need to talk further about this.

Unfortunately, the proposition and the amendments that have been tabled are not helpful to the hon. Gentleman in securing what he wants. Indeed, the amendment to which he put his name would have prevented the minority parties from having a member on the Select Committees that he wanted. That shows that it is important that we discuss the matter further, and make sure that we get the right result.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Has the hon. Gentleman any explanation whatsoever for how we got ourselves into such a mess?

Mr Heath: I cannot go into detail at this point because we are debating the business motion and I would be out of order. The hon. Gentleman may wish to raise the point with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

Mr Kevan Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Heath: No. I think we have heard enough from the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) spoke about our position on programme motions. I say gently to her that there may be a world of difference between a programme motion intended to prevent Members reaching a conclusion or even debating important matters of legislation, and one intended to help the House reach a conclusion on a matter that we have been debating for a very long time. That is a real difference, which she ought to appreciate. I hope that that partially answers the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr Shepherd).

The hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) made an extremely important point—that if we secure the agreement of the House this afternoon to the changes, never again will it be for a Minister to determine these matters. It will be for the Back-Bench business committee to decide its own business, and that is as it should be.

Barbara Keeley: The hon. Gentleman has not yet answered the point about the lack of consultation. The mess that Government Members have got themselves into this afternoon could have been avoided if there had been more consultation with the Opposition and the minority parties.

Mr Heath: I do not accept that there has not been consultation, that the motions were not tabled at an early stage, or that we have not been talking about this subject for months and months and months, nay, years. I note that the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Kevan Jones) says that today is not appropriate for discussing the matter, but I note also that the previous Government never found a day when it was right to take a decision on these essential reforms. Today, we are going to put that right. Today, we are actually going to reach some decisions and open up the business of this House to the control of Back Benchers, where it belongs. I hope that we will now proceed with that.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 301, Noes 198.

Division No. 5] **[5.31 pm**

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Aldous, Peter
Alexander, rh Danny
Amess, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bagshawe, Ms Louise
Baker, Norman
Baker, Steve
Baldry, Tony
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Binley, Mr Brian
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Mr Crispin
Bottomley, Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brake, Tom
Bray, Angie
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Mr Steve
Brooke, Annette
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona
Bruce, rh Malcolm
Buckland, Mr Robert
Burley, Mr Aidan
Burns, Conor
Burns, Mr Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burstow, Mr Paul
Burt, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Cable, rh Vince
Cairns, Alun
Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cash, Mr William
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Crockart, Mike
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, David T. C. *(Monmouth)*
Davies, Glyn
de Bois, Nick
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dorries, Nadine
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Jonathan
Evennett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farron, Tim
Featherstone, Lynne
Field, Mr Mark
Foster, Mr Don
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fullbrook, Lorraine
Fuller, Richard
Gale, Mr Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
George, Andrew
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gilbert, Stephen
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Damian
Greening, Justine
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, Robert
Hames, Duncan
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hands, Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, Mr John
Heath, Mr David
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollingbery, George
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Horwood, Martin
Howarth, Mr Gerald
Howell, John
Hughes, Simon
Huhne, rh Chris
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hunter, Mark
Huppert, Dr Julian
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, Sajid
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kelly, Chris
Kennedy, rh Mr Charles
Kirby, Simon
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamb, Norman
Lancaster, Mark
Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
Latham, Pauline
Laws, rh Mr David
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Jessica
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leech, Mr John
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Mr Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim

Luff, Peter
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
Main, Mrs Anne
May, rh Mrs Theresa
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, Esther
Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Menzies, Mark
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, Maria
Mills, Nigel
Milton, Anne
Moore, rh Michael
Morgan, Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Ollerenshaw, Eric
Opperman, Guy
Osborne, rh Mr George
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, Mr James
Parish, Neil
Patel, Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Pickles, rh Mr Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Raab, Mr Dominic
Randall, rh Mr John
Reckless, Mark
Redwood, rh Mr John
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reevell, Simon
Reid, Mr Alan
Robathan, Mr Andrew
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rogerson, Dan
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, Amber
Russell, Bob
Rutley, David
Sanders, Mr Adrian
Sandys, Laura
Scott, Mr Lee
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Sir Robert
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mr Mark
Stanley, rh Sir John
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Mr Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sturdy, Julian
Swales, Ian
Swinson, Jo
Swire, Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thurso, John
Timpson, Mr Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Truss, Elizabeth
Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Uppal, Paul
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Ward, Mr David
Watkinson, Angela
Weatherley, Mike
Webb, Steve
Wharton, James
Wheeler, Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, rh Mr David
Williams, Mr Mark
Williams, Roger
Williams, Stephen
Williamson, Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wright, Jeremy
Wright, Simon
Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
James Duddridge and Miss Chloe Smith

NOES

Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Alexander, Heidi
Allen, Mr Graham
Bain, Mr William
Balls, rh Ed
Barron, rh Mr Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Roberta
Blears, rh Hazel
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Blunkett, rh Mr David
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Brown, Mr Russell
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Byrne, rh Mr Liam
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Chapman, Mrs Jenny
Clark, Katy
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crausby, Mr David
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Tony
Curran, Margaret
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Mr Wayne
Davidson, Mr Ian
Davis, rh David
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, rh Frank
Docherty, Thomas
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Doran, Mr Frank
Doyle, Gemma
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Eagle, Ms Angela
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elman, Mrs Louise
Engel, Natascha
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, rh Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Goggins, rh Paul
Goodman, Helen
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Griffith, Nia
Hamilton, Mr David
Hamilton, Mr Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Mr Tom
Havard, Mr Dai
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hillier, Meg
Hilling, Julie
Hodge, rh Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Illsley, Mr Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jamieson, Cathy
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Jowell, rh Tessa
Keeley, Barbara
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
MacShane, rh Mr Denis
Mahmood, Shabana
Mann, John
Marsden, Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
McCann, Mr Michael
McCarthy, Kerry
McCrea, Dr William
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKinnell, Catherine
Mearns, Ian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morris, Grahame M.
Munn, Meg
Murphy, rh Mr Jim
Murray, Ian
Nash, Pamela
O'Donnell, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Ian
Pearce, Teresa
Perkins, Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan

Robertson, Angus
Robertson, John
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Roy, Mr Frank
Roy, Lindsay
Ruddock, rh Joan
Sarwar, Anas
Seabeck, Alison
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Shepherd, Mr Richard
Sheridan, Jim
Shuker, Gavin
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Mr Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela *(Penistone and Stocksbridge)*
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Soulsby, Sir Peter
Spellar, rh Mr John
Straw, rh Mr Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Mr Stephen
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Vaz, Valerie
Walley, Joan
Watts, Mr Dave
Weir, Mr Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, rh Malcolm
Williams, Hywel
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wishart, Pete
Woodcock, John
Woolas, Mr Phil
Wright, David
Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Noes:
Mark Tami and
Mary Creagh

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That, at today's sitting, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Sir George Young relating to Backbench Business Committee, Election of Backbench Business Committee, Backbench Business (Amendment of Standing Orders), Westminster Hall (Amendment of Standing Orders), Topical Debates (Amendments of Standing Orders), Pay for Chairs of Select Committees, Backbench Business Committee (Review), September Sittings, Business of the House (Private Members' Bills), Deferred Divisions (Timing), Select Committees (Membership), Select Committees (Machinery of Government Change) and Sittings of the House not later than 9.30 pm; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.

Backbench Business Committee

[Relevant documents: The First Report from the House of Commons Reform Committee, Session 2008-09, on Rebuilding the House, HC 1117, and its First Report of Session 2009-10, Rebuilding the House: Implementation, HC 372.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Mr Speaker has published his provisional selection of amendments. Those selected can be debated as part of the joint debate on the motions on the Order Paper. At the end of the debate, and in the light of what has been said, Mr Speaker will decide which of the provisionally selected amendments should be called formally and, if necessary, pressed to a Division.

5.48 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir George Young): I beg to move,

That the following new Standing Order be made:—

(1) There shall be a select committee, called the Backbench Business Committee, to determine the backbench business to be taken in the House and in Westminster Hall on days, or parts of days, allotted for backbench business.

(2) The committee shall consist of a chair and seven other Members, of whom four shall be a quorum.

(3) The chair and other members of the committee shall continue as members of the committee for the remainder of the Session in which they are elected unless replaced under the provisions of Standing Order No. (Election of Backbench Business Committee).

(4) The chair and members of the committee shall be elected in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. (Election of Backbench Business Committee).

(5) No Member who is a Minister of the Crown or parliamentary private secretary or a principal opposition front-bench spokesperson shall be eligible to be the chair or a member of the committee: the Speaker's decision shall be final on such matters.

(6) The committee shall have power to invite Government officials to attend all or part of any of its meetings.

(7) The committee shall determine the backbench business to be taken—

(a) in the House on any day, or any part of any day, allotted under paragraph (3A) of Standing Order No. 14, and

(b) in Westminster Hall, in accordance with paragraph (3A) of Standing Order No. 10, and shall report its determinations to the House.

(8) At the commencement of any business in the House or in Westminster Hall which has been determined by the committee, a member of the committee shall make a brief statement of no more than five minutes explaining the committee's reasons for its determination.

Mr Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss motions 3 to 15 inclusive.

Sir George Young: This is the first time I have spoken with you in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, so I welcome you. As the Deputy Leader of the House said in the final stages of the debate that has just ended, we will not be moving motion 13, and I shall explain why not in a moment.

Today we are presenting the House with an opportunity to seize back some of the powers that have been taken away by the Government. We want to restore to Back-Bench Members greater control over the business of the House than they have had for not only a generation, but more than a century. As the hon. Member for Nottingham

North (Mr Allen) said earlier, in future, how long debates such as this last and whether they should be segmented into their component parts will be a matter for the House and the Back-Bench business committee, and no one will be more pleased about that than the Leader and Deputy Leader of the House.

In tabling the motions on the Order Paper, we are pressing ahead with the implementation of the Wright Committee's proposals by setting up the Back-Bench business committee that was endorsed so emphatically by the House in the previous Parliament, and delivering the first of the Government's commitments on parliamentary reform from the coalition agreement. Although many members of the Wright Committee are no longer in the House, I pay tribute to them, and to those who remain, for a ground-breaking report produced in record time. I similarly commend the work of Parliament First, which is continuing to set the pace on reform.

Although many useful reforms were introduced in the last 13 years—debates in Westminster Hall, better sitting hours and the replacement of Standing Committees with Public Bill Committees—on some occasions the momentum was frustrated by the previous Government. If one looks at the delays and prevarications in setting up the Wright Committee and debating its report—and, indeed, reaching a conclusion on its central recommendation of a Back-Bench committee—they make the case more eloquently than anything else for the Government to relinquish their iron grip on the procedures and agenda of the House. Now we are finally giving the House a chance to debate and vote on that issue.

Mr William Cash (Stone) (Con): In the context of the iron grip to which my right hon. Friend refers, is there any reason why we cannot have the committee for an entire Parliament?

Sir George Young: I will come in a moment to the question of whether the committee should be established for one year or five years.

I turn now to Standing Order No. 14. It is just over 107 years—in fact it was on 1 December 1902—since the House first passed a Standing Order governing the precedence of business at different sittings. That was the predecessor of today's Standing Order No. 14, which provides for Government business to have precedence at every sitting, with certain exceptions. The motions before the House today will change that proposition radically. For the first time in over a century, the House will be given control over significant parts of its own agenda.

The new committee will give Back Benchers the power and time to schedule debates on issues that matter to them and to their constituents, and allow the House to become more responsive to the world outside. Motions 2 to 5 establish the committee, make arrangements for its election by secret ballot of the whole House and set out its powers and role. Much of what we propose is self-explanatory and, in the interests of brevity, I will direct my remarks towards those points that I feel need some further explanation, and on which Members have tabled amendments.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Does the Leader of the House agree that to be effective the Back-Bench committee must include Back Benchers from every part of this House, including the minority parties?

Sir George Young: The Wright Committee is specific about the size of the committee, which it said should have between seven and nine members. We have proposed that it should have eight members. The chair will be elected by the same process as other elected Select Committee Chairs, but with no prior party allocation—so the hon. Gentleman would be free to stand. There will be total freedom to choose a chair from either side of the House. The remaining members will then be elected by another secret ballot, using the same system as for the Deputy Speakers in order to ensure overall party and gender balance. We propose that, in the first instance, the committee should be re-elected every Session.

Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): It is surely not possible to reflect the balance in the House with so few members.

Sir George Young: We are implementing the recommendations of the Wright Committee, of which the hon. Gentleman was a distinguished member. The Wright Committee said that the committee should have between seven and nine members, and we are proposing that it should have eight members—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman may not have been able to persuade other members of the Wright Committee to recommend a larger business committee that would have greater opportunity to include minority parties, but the proposition—

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): May I attempt to help the Leader of the House?

Sir George Young: If the hon. Gentleman will help me, I will of course give way.

Mr Allen: I cannot remember an occasion on which I did anything other than help the Leader of the House. I even attempted to help previous Leaders of the House. I shall try to elaborate the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd). The Back-Bench committee is the culmination of a process. When it meets and puts its report to the House, that will be the summit of a process that will involve much wider and deeper consultations with all parties and any Back Bencher who wishes to participate. So we do not need to have a vast, all-encompassing committee that would be too bulky to work properly. The members of the Wright Committee felt that that was an appropriate approach and we had no intention of trying to freeze anyone out.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and I may give way to him later if I feel that he can elucidate my points as well as he has just elucidated that one.

I turn now to the question of why the committee should be elected every year. The committee will have power to schedule business in the House and Westminster Hall. Given the significance of this, we believe that members of the committee should be accountable to their peers for the decisions they take in scheduling debates. This will not affect the eligibility of the chair and members, who will still be able to offer themselves for re-election. This will be by secret ballot, so there is no question of Members coming under the malign influence of the usual channels in making their choices.

[Sir George Young]

As well as providing accountability, it will, I hope, also provide a way of bringing new blood on to the committee from time to time, to keep its thinking fresh.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): I concur with the point made by hon. Members from the minority parties, because it is important that the whole House has the opportunity to be represented on the committee. However, motion 3(1)(c) states that

"no fewer than ten"

of the nominators

"shall be members of the candidate's party".

That may be an oversight, but perhaps the Leader of the House can explain how it would be possible for Members from the minority parties or independent Members to be nominated. I am sure that the intention is not to exclude them, but that wording might need Mr Speaker to interpret it flexibly when it came to nominations.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for pointing out those restrictions which might preclude the nomination of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) for chair of the committee, unless he was minded to join a larger party for a day.

If colleagues believe that the committee should be accountable to the House, they might wish to resist the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Nottingham North, which would have the committee elected for the whole Parliament.

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire has tabled an amendment to increase the size of the committee, and I have already dealt with that point. Although I understand the reason behind his amendment, the review may also be able to consider it.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): My right hon. Friend is involved in a historic shift of power to this House that is extremely welcome, but will he consider the balance that needs to be struck between accountability and independence? Members of the Back-Bench business committee may be able to act more courageously and independently if they do not feel under threat of defeat at an election.

Sir George Young: I am not sure that I buy that point. The object of the Back-Bench business committee is to reflect the views of the House in selecting the agenda for discussion. I am not sure that a display of heroic independence—to an extent that led the committee away from the centre of gravity of the House—is what the committee should be about.

Motion 4 defines Back-Bench business and provides for the committee to have 35 days at its disposal in the House and in Westminster Hall. This is one of the central recommendations of the report, but it is important to remember the bigger picture. The Wright Committee noted:

"The single greatest cause of dissatisfaction...with current scheduling of legislative business in the House arises from the handling of the report stage of government bills."

In implementing one part of the Wright report, it is important not to undermine what another part of the same report says. In addition, the Back-Bench business committee is only half of the picture, and we must not lose sight of the progress that we want to see made in the third year of this Parliament on a House business committee. The creation of a House committee—looking at both the scheduling of Government and Back-Bench time as a single entity—will be better able to balance the time more effectively between debates and scrutiny.

I shall explain briefly how the proposals will work. The committee will have a total of 35 days at its disposal, which equates, as the Wright Committee recommended, to about one day per sitting week. The time will be divided between the House and Westminster Hall. The Liaison Committee will have 20 Thursday sittings in Westminster Hall for debates on Select Committee reports, and all other Thursdays will be for business determined by the Back-Bench business committee. Each of these Thursdays will count as half a day towards the total allocation of 35. In a typical Session of about 35 sitting weeks, therefore, the committee will use seven or eight days of its allocation in Westminster Hall debates, and the remainder—about 27 or 28 days—will be taken in the Chamber. Some of that time may be taken in the form of 90-minute topical debates, under Standing Order No. 24A, which will count as a quarter of a day; and I am happy to say that I see no difficulty in accepting amendment (a) to motion 4, which encapsulates the 27 days in the form I just outlined.

It may also be helpful if I say to the House that it is my intention to invite the Procedure Committee to consider whether the sittings in Westminster Hall could be extended to allow for sittings on Monday afternoons. That would provide the Back-Bench business committee with even more flexibility in how it schedules business. In future, it will also be for the Back-Bench business committee, not the Government, to schedule debates on pre-recess Adjournments, on set-piece debates on defence, Welsh affairs and international women's day, and on topical debates. These decisions will rest entirely in its hands, and just as I am accountable to the House for Government business, so it will be so accountable for Back-Bench business.

Finally on the Wright Committee recommendations, we propose that the operation of the new system should be reviewed at the beginning of the next Session, in late 2011. I recognise that there is concern about the reasoning behind this review, but the object of the review is to enable the House to move forwards, rather than, as some have said, to wind back. There is absolutely no intention to shut down the Back-Bench committee after the first Session. We are committed to establishing a House business committee, dealing with both Government and Back-Bench business, by the third year of this Parliament, so a review of the Back-Bench business committee any later than that would make no sense. I would therefore urge the hon. Member for Nottingham North not to press his amendment deferring the review until the beginning of the next Parliament, which, as I said, will be after the House business committee has been set up.

I shall now deal briefly in turn with each of the remaining motions on the Order Paper.

Mr Allen: If having a review every year is such a good system, will it be extended to decisions on Select Committees, the occupant of the Chair and perhaps even to Government Ministers? If it is so good to review

everybody and put everything up in the air annually, does the Leader of the House intend to extend the practice?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman was a distinguished member of the Wright Committee, which said that its recommendations needed to be implemented in stages. To that extent, the proposals before the House are different from those that govern other Select Committees, which are well established and do not need to be subject to review to make progress. For example, I have just outlined that we have not gone the whole way on the 35 days—they will not all be allocated to the Chamber—but I hope to make progress, and the review that I have outlined will enable the Government and the Back-Bench committee to see what progress has been made and how the momentum might be driven further forward.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): My experience in the Leader of the House's office was that one was not necessarily in charge of one's destiny in these matters, and that the relationship with Whips tended to be difficult when it came to allowing things to go forward—

The Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household (Mr John Randall) *indicated dissent.*

Chris Bryant: I see there is a charming Whip saying the whole world has changed, but I do not think that is true. The Leader of the House is asking the House to take it on trust that at some stage he will come forward with further proposals. That means we have a long way to go.

Sir George Young: At the end of the day, it is of course up to the House to deal with the matter. The Chief Whip is as my brother on these matters. If the hon. Gentleman reads the coalition agreement, he will see a clear commitment to implementing the Wright Committee recommendations in full. That is in the coalition agreement and that is why we want the review—to make further progress towards full implementation.

In February, the previous Parliament resolved that the new Parliament should have an early opportunity to decide on the issue of September sittings—indeed, sufficiently early to be able to decide on them this year. Motion 10 gives effect to that decision.

Mr Nick Raynsford (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman has made a great argument on the importance of increasing the powers of the House as against the Executive. Does he not consider it ironic, therefore, that he is proposing, in motion 10, that in order to reaffirm

"the importance of its function of holding the Government to account"

the House should ask

"the Government to put to this House specific proposals for sitting periods in September 2010."?

Should the Back-Bench business committee not have been invited to consider whether September sittings are appropriate, and if so, to come forward with proposals for how they should be organised?

Sir George Young: The Back-Bench committee does not yet exist, and the recommendation of the Wright Committee was that the House should have an early opportunity to decide on it. The House can only do that if we give it the opportunity today. So we are implementing the Wright Committee recommendations in full by giving the House the opportunity to decide whether it wants to sit in September.

The House already sits for longer than almost any other comparative legislature in the democratic world, but it is obvious that the public do not easily understand why MPs are effectively unable to scrutinise the Government over the lengthy summer recesses, some of which have stretched out over a fairly long period of 82 days. I have already announced that, subject to the will of the House tonight, the House will sit for two weeks from 6 September. Unlike in previous September sittings that the House has experimented with, I fully expect there to be substantive business for the House to consider during that period. This is not a cosmetic change, but a declaration of intent.

Mr John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I just want my right hon. Friend to know that some of us think that this is a huge advance. We want a Parliament that is serious, and able to dictate more of its own agenda and to hold the Government to account. It is remarkable that a Government are keeping their word and offering just that.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his robust support for the propositions before the House.

The Government have set out the dates of the 13 Fridays provided for in Standing Orders to allow consideration of private Members' Bills. Amendment (a) to motion 11 would provide extra days for the consideration of such Bills in this Session. Private Members who have been successful in this year's ballot will be advantaged by the fact that the longer Session allows for more time between the Fridays provided for consideration of their Bills on the Floor of the House. That will allow more time for Members to progress their Bills outside the Chamber, in Committee or the other place. I told my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope), when we debated this matter in the last Session, that I would not

"commit any future Administration to an increase in the pro rata number"—[*Official Report*, 6 January 2010; Vol. 503, c. 228.]

of private Members' Fridays in the first Session of this Parliament, and that, I am afraid, is what I will do.

Mr Tom Clarke (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman has referred to Fridays several times. As one who has been fortunate enough to steer two private Members' Bills through both Houses, in very difficult circumstances and on Fridays, I would like to know whether we are stuck with Fridays? Are private Members not to be given the same rights as Government spokespersons?

Sir George Young: The Wright report recognised deep dissatisfaction with the current system for private Members' Bills, which was last considered by the Procedure Committee in 2002-03, so I understand the right hon. Gentleman's anxiety. My view is that the House might feel it is time, once again, to give this issue proper

[Sir George Young]

consideration. The Procedure Committee ought to consider it in one of its first inquiries and look at the procedures and scheduling in the round. That, rather than addressing concerns in a piecemeal way—as provided for in some of the amendments—is the right way to do it.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): My right hon. Friend referred accurately to our exchange in the last Parliament. During that debate, he was very sympathetic to the argument that, if we have a Session lasting 18 months, there should be more private Members' time than in a Session lasting for only one year. Surely his argument that private Members will be advantaged by the gap between the Fridays is a bit disingenuous because whether a private Member can get legislation through depends on the time available at Report, which is why we need more private Members' Fridays.

Sir George Young: My response to my hon. Friend is the one that I have just given. Rather than just look at the question of how many Fridays a private Member's Bill has, one ought to stand back and look at the whole procedure for private Members' Bills, and ask whether Friday is the right day, whether the pathway through the House is the right one and whether it is too easy to impede progress. That is the right way to approach private Members' Bills: through a proper consideration by the Procedure Committee, rather than a one-off amendment this afternoon.

Mr David Hamilton (Midlothian) (Lab): As a member of the Procedure Committee in 2002, I can say that the most fundamental change to have taken place over this period is the reduction in our hours on Wednesday and Thursday. Perhaps the Procedure Committee could look into extending our hours on Wednesday and Thursday nights, so that private Members' Bills could be considered then.

Sir George Young: That is a helpful suggestion that I am sure the Procedure Committee would like to take on board.

Chris Bryant: Will the Leader of the House give way?

Sir George Young: No, I am going to move on, as I am conscious that a large number of Members want to speak.

Motion 12 extends the time allowed for voting on deferred Divisions by one hour, by starting the voting time at 11.30 am instead of 12.30 pm. That means that Members can vote before Prime Minister's questions, which should ease the number of Members trying to vote directly after questions. I hope that Members will support this small but helpful innovation.

There are two motions on the Order Paper relating to Select Committees. On Select Committee sizes, let me explain the reason for originally tabling those motions. The previous Parliament agreed in February to a reduction in the standard size of Select Committees, from 14 to 11, which was introduced for most Committees at the start of this Session. The Wright report expressed concern about the number of places to be filled on Select Committees, which had doubled since 1979. As well as reducing the standard membership to 11, the Government have eased the strain by abolishing the Regional Select Committees, which has reduced the number of places to be filled by 81, and by abolishing the Modernisation Committee.

However, the Wright report recognised that

> "Members in individual cases can be added to specific committees to accommodate the legitimate demands of the smaller parties".

The demography of the House has undergone a major change since then. For the first time since 1974, a general election has returned a House with no overall majority. It was the Government's intention to allow representation in the Select Committee system for the minority parties, which have an important role to play in holding the Government to account in this new-look Parliament. Our intention was to make swift progress on setting up Select Committees, in line with the six weeks that Wright recommended. However, having looked at the Order Paper, I recognise that a large number of colleagues, many of whom are distinguished Chairs of Select Committees, have concerns about the course of action that we have proposed. In line with this Government's desire for a more collaborative relationship with the House than a confrontational one, it is not our intention to move that motion at the end of today, but to come back to the House soon, after further consultation with the interested parties.

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): Let me express my appreciation to my right hon. Friend for taking that matter away. I should be delighted to have the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd) on the Justice Committee, but not if he has to be attended by an army of four other extra members. I hope that the Leader of the House can initiate a discussion to find a more satisfactory way of dealing with that matter.

Sir George Young: It is just such consultation that I want to promote. Let me put it on record that it is our intention to ensure that minority parties continue to have representation on Select Committees, just as they did in the previous Parliament, as is proper in a United Kingdom Parliament.

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con) *rose—*

Mr James Arbuthnot (North East Hampshire) (Con) *rose—*

Sir George Young: I will give way once more, but then I really must make progress.

Mr Arbuthnot: I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend. I hope that in finding a solution to that problem, he will remember that on 22 February he said:

> "Having been the Chairman of a Select Committee, I have long thought that the size of membership should be no more than 11 to allow for a more focused discussion and a more manageable meeting."—[*Official Report*, 22 February 2010; Vol. 506, c. 49.]

I am delighted that he is showing both good sense and consistency.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. One of the members of the small Committee that I chaired was from a minority party, so it is possible to have representation, even on a reduced size, from Members from the smaller parties.

Joan Walley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: Yes, but for the last time.

Joan Walley: I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. In view of what he has said about the possibility of there not being a vote on the issue today, let me flag up an issue that I have flagged up previously, about the Environmental Audit Committee. Just for the record, it was originally set up along the lines of the Public Accounts Committee, which has 16 members, on account of there being a Finance Minister and shadow Ministers among its members. However, in practice, it has not been easy on some occasions to achieve a quorum on the Environmental Audit Committee from among its 16 members. I would therefore be most grateful if the right hon. Gentleman could give some consideration to the numbers on the Environmental Audit Committee and come back to the House at an appropriate time.

Sir George Young: I am glad that I gave way to the hon. Lady. I should be happy to engage in that discussion and see whether we can reduce the numbers in line with those in the other Select Committees.

If agreed, motion 14 on the Order Paper would change the name of one of the departmental Select Committees from the Children, Schools and Families Committee to the Education Committee. That will align the Committee to the Department that it scrutinises, the name of which changed following the election. Finally, motion 15 would change the sitting times on Tuesday 22 June, so that the House would sit at 11.30 am, instead of the normal start time of 2.30 pm. It will not have escaped the notice of the House that 22 June is Budget day. I hope that hon. Members will agree that the earlier start time will be for the convenience of the whole House.

This Government believe in a strong Parliament—one that is fearless in holding the Executive to account, effective at scrutinising legislation, responsive to the demands of its constituents and relevant to the national interest. I believe that the decisions that the House will make today will be remembered long into the future, as a defining moment of parliamentary reform. I commend the motion to the House.

6.16 pm

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster Central) (Lab): Let me welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, congratulate you on your election and say how much we are looking forward to your chairmanship over the years. I also thank the Leader of the House for setting out the Government's motion on changes to the business of the House.

I want to start by reiterating the important point that my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) made, which is that it would have been genuinely helpful if there had been more consultation on the motions before they were placed on the Order Paper. If there are further proposals in future, I hope that we will be able to have such consultation.

The creation of the Back-Bench business committee is another important step in the implementation of the recommendations of the cross-party Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, which was chaired by Tony Wright, as the Leader of the House said. It is also thanks to the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), that we are now having this debate, as it was he who agreed to the setting up of that Committee. We have already elected our Select Committee Chairs by secret ballot, which was another step forward, and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all right hon. and hon. Members who were successful in that election.

Chris Bryant: Perhaps we should add Robin Cook to the list of people who should be thanked for the election of Select Committee Chairs, because it was he who brought the idea to the House. Unfortunately the Whips at the time conspired to ensure that it did not happen, but now we have finally got it. However, the one Committee that we have not yet elected a Chair for is the European Scrutiny Committee. Does my right hon. Friend hope that that Committee will be set up soon? Europe is moving on apace, but at the moment we have no means of scrutinising it at all.

Ms Winterton: My hon. Friend is right on both counts. It is important that we pay tribute to Robin Cook for everything that he did to make many of the reforms happen. He is also right that we should set up the European Scrutiny Committee, which performs an extremely important task.

There is no doubt that we need the proposed reforms to give more power to Back Benchers. I am sure that there will be a lively debate on the proposals today—indeed, it has already started. I will be brief, as I know that many Back Benchers want to contribute, but I want to raise a few issues. Obviously it is important that the Back-Bench committee timetables as much non-governmental business as possible. However, I seek an assurance from the Deputy Leader of the House when he replies to this debate that the operation of the Back-Bench business committee will not impact on either the number or the timetabling of Opposition days.

I was pleased that the Leader of the House was able to assure us that there would indeed be Government business to debate during the September sittings.

Mr David Hamilton: Would my right hon. Friend also consider allowing the House to rise in June? The children of Scottish Members are on holiday in July, and that is already causing great difficulty for us.

Ms Winterton: Perhaps my hon. Friend would like to raise that point during the debate tonight.

At the moment, the new Government legislation is not ready to be debated in September, but I hope that the Deputy Leader of the House will be able to assure us that we shall not have a repeat of the situation that we have at the moment, in which about three out of every four days are allocated for general debates. The public rightly expect value for money from Parliament, and it is important that we should be able to debate as much Government business as possible, in the form of Second Readings, at that time.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): With regard to value for money, I am really glad that there is to be a programme of work in September. Does my right hon. Friend think that it would be helpful, however, if the austerity Government could tell us the cost of the cancellation of the contracts for the work that normally takes place on this estate during the summer recess, as well as the cost of any penalty clauses that might be invoked in relation to work that cannot be completed because of the September recall? In that way, we could evaluate the costs and benefits of meeting in Birmingham in September, rather than meeting on a building site.

Ms Winterton: I know that my hon. Friend is keen for the House to consider seriously his suggestion of meeting in Birmingham. I hope that the Deputy Leader of the House will be able to tell us what estimates have been made of the additional cost to the taxpayer of meeting in September, perhaps taking into account my hon. Friend's point about possible breaks in contracts.

I recall that the last time we debated and voted on September sittings—I think it was in 2006—the current Leader of the House voted against them, but the Deputy Leader of the House voted for them. I hope, therefore, that we shall not have just half a Government sitting here in September, and that we shall get the full double act—the full Monty, if I can put it that way. Will the Deputy Leader of the House give us that assurance when he winds up the debate? The proposal for extra time for voting on deferred Divisions is also a sensible one, and I am sure that it will be welcomed by all Members.

It is important that Back Benchers have as much time as possible to debate these proposals, so I shall leave it at that, but I hope that the Deputy Leader of the House will be able to answer some of these points later.

6.24 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): It is surprising and novel for me to be called to speak so early in a debate. My speaking note says: "I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for X, who made a powerful and thoughtful speech." Well, the shadow Leader of the House did just that.

This is an historic moment. These are radical reforms of Parliament and we are lucky to have two outstanding parliamentarians in the Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader of the House, both of whom believe in the House. If any of my remarks are critical, it is only because I want to improve matters. Some of my concerns revolve around the fact that there is to be a review in a year's time, and we are not assured that the same Leader of the House and Deputy Leader of the House will still be sitting at the Dispatch Box then.

We are leaving behind a decade in which Parliament and the role of Parliament were diminished year by year. Back Benchers' powers were reduced each year, there was more centralisation, and debate in Parliament was either extensively curtailed or, in some cases, non-existent. Parts of some Bills went through without even being debated in this House, and we had to rely on the other place. The media were routinely told in advance about new policy before statements were made in the House, and attempts were made by the Whips to crush the thoughts of independent Back Benchers. Parliament was seen as a rubber stamp for whatever the Prime Minister wanted. The number of sitting days was reduced, and the amount of time allowed for private Members' Bills was savagely cut. People outside Parliament recognised that that was happening, and they wanted not only to see changes to the expenses system but to have a Government—of whatever political persuasion—who could be subject to serious scrutiny and held to account.

Things are changing, however. We have a new Speaker who is determined to protect the role of Parliament and, particularly, the power of Back-Bench MPs. We have only to look at the speed with which questions are dealt with, the restriction on Front-Bench speakers, and the number of urgent questions that are granted to see that improvements have already been made.

We also have a new coalition Government who—this next bit is very important—have abandoned the automatic programming of Bills. I have to say that I do not support the Government's position on the programming of tonight's business, because I believe that this debate could have gone through the night. I was not prepared to support the Opposition, however, because I felt that their stance represented pure opportunism, given that they had constantly voted for programme motions in the past.

We have also seen the Government overseeing the election of Deputy Speakers and Select Committee Chairmen. Real progress has already been made—

Chris Bryant: But that was put in place by us.

Mr Bone: The hon. Gentleman says that that was put in place by the previous Government, and that is true. Tonight, however, we are taking a huge leap forward with this raft of radical proposals. The establishment of a business committee, the introduction of September sittings and the speedy announcement of private Members' Bill days are all signs that the Government have hit the ground running and are really keen on major reforms. But certain things could be improved, and many of the amendments that have been tabled need to be discussed, because they could improve on what are already important, radical proposals.

In the short time available to me, I want to speak to amendment (a), which stands in my name, relating to the number of days allocated to private Members' Bills. In the Executive's haste to bring this matter to the House, they have failed to appreciate that the number of days allowed for private Members' Bills needs to be increased to compensate for the curtailing of private Members' Bills in the previous Parliamentary Session. The amendment states:

"Line 1, leave out from 'That' to end and add—

'(1) Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business) shall have effect for this Session with the following modification, namely:

In paragraph (4) the word 'eighteen' shall be substituted for the word 'thirteen' in line 42; and

(2) Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 10 and 17 September, 15 and 22 October, 12 and 19 November and 3 December 2010 and 21 January, 4 and 11 February, 4 and 18 March, 1 April, 13 May, 10, 17 and 24 June and 1 July 2011.'"

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): I am tempted to support the hon. Gentleman's amendment, so I wonder whether he could address this

particular point. The Leader of the House said that having the same number of days for private Members' Bills, but extending them over a longer period, would make it easier for those Bills to go through. I did not understand that; I wonder if the hon. Gentleman could explain it.

Mr Bone: I am grateful for that intervention; I have to say that I thought there was a little bit of smoke and mirrors there. We have already heard the comments that the Leader of the House made during the previous debate on this topic, but some other comments—from both the Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader of the House—perhaps express a slightly different view.

Chris Bryant: I wholeheartedly support the amendment that the hon. Gentleman has tabled on private Members' Bills, but I hope he is going to go on to say that the real problem with such Bills is not the number of days we devote to them, but the shenanigans that go on on a Friday morning. Either enough people cannot be got together for a quorum or Bills are talked out, and all the rest of it. Surely what we need is a system that treats Back-Bench Members with respect because they might have very good ideas that they want to get on to the statute book, so we should not be playing these sorts of silly games.

Mr Bone: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman, but because of the way in which the business has been set out today, I have not touched on that matter, as it might have been ruled out of order. I have sought to amend the motion in the best way I could.

Early attempts to increase the time allotted for private Members' Bills under the previous Labour Administration sadly fell by the wayside. I very much hope that our new leadership will be taking an altogether happier approach towards something that it is at the heart of ensuring a more balanced and free legislative process. How the leadership responds will to a certain extent be a litmus test of the Government's commitment to the new type of politics.

This is not the first time that I have proposed such an amendment. The last time I did so was on 6 January 2010, when I and several other hon. Members challenged the Government on why they were cutting the days available for debate on private Members' Bills from 13, as required by the Standing Orders, to a mere eight. The then Government's answer was that because the parliamentary Session was a particularly short one, there should be fewer days pro rata for private Members' Bills. I pointed out then that nowhere did the Standing Orders mention any exemption for unusually short or long parliamentary Sessions, but the Government won the vote that day.

I note that, on that day, the Deputy Leader of the House voted for my amendment. In fact, on 6 January 2010, he stated:

"I agree with an interesting point that the hon. Member for Wellingborough made… Perhaps there should be a provision in Standing Orders relating the number of days devoted to private Members' business to the length of the Session. That would be perfectly logical and is probably a view shared by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire. There is logic in saying that there should be more days for a long Session and fewer for a short Session, and I do not think that any of us would disagree with that."—[*Official Report*, 6 January 2010; Vol. 503, c. 230.]

I could not have put it better myself.

Mr Russell Brown (Dumfries and Galloway) (Lab): I fully recognise that the hon. Gentleman wants to move the issue of private Members' Bills forward, but I am sure that he heard the words of my very good and hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr Hamilton) about using the spare time that exists on a Wednesday evening, for example, so that private Members' business could be dealt with at that stage. Does the hon. Gentleman believe he is in a position to convince his Whips that they should take that issue on board?

Mr Bone: I am grateful for that intervention, which deals with a very important point that I will briefly touch on. There is a problem with the way Fridays are run, but because of how the motions were laid before the House by the Executive, as I said before, I am rather limited in what I can say on that particular point.

Mr Allen: I am listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman is saying. I am sorry that he has had to delve into the internecine conflict between the Conservatives and Liberals who now occupy the Front Bench, so I will try to help him back to the core of the issue. Does he accept that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said, this is not about quantity, but about quality? If we had fewer private Members' Bills, perhaps even only six, but they were brought to a conclusion, that would be much to the credit of this House. On this more than any other issue, people outside this House look to us. Interest groups, charities and others invest immense amounts of time in the process, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Mr Clarke), who incredibly managed to get two such Bills through. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we could do better by focusing on that area?

Mr Bone: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who shows great interest in these matters. I am aware that I am in danger of getting somewhat out of order here, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I would say that the hon. Gentleman is both right and wrong. Yes, we want quality, but we also want the same number of days, so I do not accept that it is an either/or choice. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to speak of an alleged dispute between the two parties on the Front Bench. I have an interesting quote from the Leader of the House, who was most helpful in the January debate. He was quite right to say he could give no commitment, but let us look at what he did say on 6 January 2010:

"It is important that the House jealously protects private Members' time… Of course, I sympathise with my hon. Friend's desire to maximise the number of days for private Members' Bills."

He went on to say that one of my

"more compelling points was that in a shorter Session, the number of days decreases, but in a longer Session, the number does not increase. The House may want to revert to that in the context of the Wright debate and allocating the future business of the House."—[*Official Report*, 6 January 2010; Vol. 503, c. 227.]

Of course, that is exactly what tonight's debate is about. I do not think that there is a division among the Front Benchers on that. Furthermore, when the Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader of the House were in opposition, they were supportive, and I am sure that nothing has changed just because they are now sitting on the Government side and have red boxes. I genuinely mean that.

[Mr Bone]

I would like to explain to new Members that the issue here is about parliamentary Sessions, most of which run from the beginning of November to the next November. Because of the election in May, however, this Session will run from May until November 2011, which makes it particularly long. All my amendment would do is restore the five days for private Members' Bills that were lost in the last Session to this unusually long Session.

Any member of the public reading this debate in *Hansard* might wonder why we should spend parliamentary time on such a seemingly arcane matter. However, private Members' Bills are vital for democracy, and every individual in the country should have been worried about the growing power of the Executive over the last 10 years. Private Members' Bills are important because they provide one of the few chances for Members of Parliament who are not part of the Executive to initiate, debate and ultimately create legislation, thus giving power and influence to Parliament and Back-Bench Members—outside the direct control of the Government.

There are many issues that Governments fail to recognise as important, but individual Members might see them as a priority. For example, in my view there should be an Act of Parliament requiring children to wear cycle helmets when they are riding on the public highway, but the Government will not necessarily want to bring such legislation forward. Equally, and perhaps more worryingly, because Government and Opposition Front Benchers take the same view on some important issues, they might not get aired in Parliament or be made subject to a substantive motion in the House. An example might be a referendum on our membership of the European Union. That is clearly an important issue, but the two Front-Bench teams can collude so that it never gets debated, whereas a Back-Bench Member could introduce such a Bill. Indeed, some issues might have no hope of ever getting passed into law, but they are so important that they should be discussed and drawn to the public's attention.

There has been a great deal of upheaval in politics over the past year. We have a coalition Government and Liberal Ministers. Just a few weeks ago such a situation would have been unthinkable, but I have to say that the addition of Liberal Ministers to the Government has been remarkably successful so far as they have seemed to turn themselves into neo-Conservatives.

Let me make a more serious point. We have a remarkably large intake of new Members of Parliament in all parties, who have shown themselves to be very impressive and independent-minded. I have sat here and been amazed at the style and substance of maiden speeches. Surely that proves to everyone that the public are hungry for change, and if we are to deliver that change—which means more than just setting up reviews on transparency, or creating an unworkable expenses system—we must ensure that Back Benchers can hold this Government to account, and that the House is truly a place for debate. As the Speaker said recently, MPs must become citizens of the Chamber, and as I look around the Chamber tonight, I see a very good example of that. I think that there are more Members in the Chamber now than we saw at almost any time in the last Parliament.

Mr Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Although a number of issues that have been raised tonight are outwith my hon. Friend's amendment, which relates to private Members' Bills, I can assure him—as Chairman of the Procedure Committee—that we will examine the points that have been made.

Mr Bone: I think that Members throughout the House will consider that to be good news. There are problems with private Members' Bills, and it would be most welcome if the Procedure Committee could examine them.

Mr Cash: In the light of what has just been said by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr Knight)—the Chairman of the Procedure Committee—and in the light of the important points made by my hon. Friend, does my hon. Friend accept that any restriction on the number of days will exert pressure on private Members' Bills? For example, a Bill may need more time, particularly on Report. In my 26 years in the House, I have so often seen Bills fall at that point because they needed Government time to reach their final stages and that was not possible. My hon. Friend is entirely right to insist that the maximum possible number of days should be available.

Mr Bone: I thank my hon. Friend. I was intending to deal with that issue shortly.

I suggested five additional days to balance the Sessions, but I have not moved the trigger forward. That means that after the eighth private Members' Friday progress can be made on Bills, which will make it easier for Members taking part in the ballot to ensure that their Bills are heard and passed into law. I thought that there was a bit of smoke and mirrors in the statement by the Leader of the House.

I have not much more to say, but I want to tell the House where I think the five extra days should go. I was going to say something about Wednesdays, but that point has already been dealt with. I propose—this touches on a point made earlier about September sittings—that two of the extra days should be in September, so that the September weeks become even more important. I was not here on the last occasion when the House sat in September, but I understand that there was a feeling that the House was almost "going through the motions". If two of those Fridays were devoted to private Members' Bills, the sittings would become even more important. I have also proposed adding one day in October this year, one day in June, and one day in July next year. Sittings on those days would inconvenience no one, and would add dramatically to parliamentary democracy.

Another of the last Government's objections to more sitting Fridays was that they would somehow prevent Members from carrying out constituency business. As my staff members have reminded me today, constituency business continues throughout the week, and is certainly not restricted to Fridays. Moreover—new Members may not know this—Members do not come to the House on days when private Members' Bills are debated unless they are interested in those Bills. Normally there is no Whip to ensure that Members attend, so there would be no requirement for a full House.

In proposing the five additional days, I am merely suggesting that the number should be returned to what would be expected in a normal two-year cycle. In a two-year period, we would expect 26 Fridays for private Members' Bills. Given that there were only eight in the

last Session, an additional 18 in the current Session would produce the 26 that would normally have occurred. I am not proposing to increase the number of days for private Members' Bills; I am proposing to keep it in line with the spirit of Standing Orders and the House.

The public are still clamouring for change in the way in which politics is conducted, and for a check on the power of the Executive. Parliament must be allowed to fulfil its role, and Members of Parliament must be allowed freedom to express their opinions and those of their constituents. How the Government respond to this issue will be an important public indication of their commitment to real openness. I am pleased to have received a pledge from them that this will be a free vote, and that there will be no guidance from the Whips. This is a genuine House matter, and it could lead to a huge leap forward. Tonight, Members will have a chance to express their opinions about private Members' Bills without any influence.

Mr Chope: My hon. Friend is making a brilliant speech. Can he confirm, in his peroration, that there is no reason why any Back Bencher should vote against his amendment? If a Back Bencher were so to do, they would be voting against the interests of other Back Benchers, and the only people who can possibly lose out if his amendment is carried are members of the Government.

Mr Bone: I agree and disagree with my hon. Friend. I agree with his remark about Back Benchers, but I also believe that it is very much in the interests of the Government and Front Benchers to support my amendment, because that would show that the Executive are open to scrutiny and new ideas.

We are experiencing the dawn of a new age. We have a coalition Government who are charging forward with reform. If I have an opportunity to do so, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall press my amendment to a vote.

6.47 pm

Natascha Engel (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): I welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have not had the opportunity to congratulate you since your election.

Before I deal with the main issue, I want to reflect a little on the time when we all served on the Wright Committee.

Mr Allen: Happy days.

Natascha Engel: They were indeed happy days, and very interesting. I am sorry that Tony Wright is not here to take part in the debate. I also want, especially, to say a big thank you to Mark Fisher, who did so much work with Parliament First, and to Evan Harris. He, too, is no longer with us. The Chamber misses him greatly, and I hate to think how he feels about not being in the Chamber any more; indeed, it does not bear thinking about.

I may not have agreed with the conclusions reached by the people whom I have mentioned, but I certainly agreed with much of the analysis of the problem that we had here in Parliament—in the context of scrutiny of the Executive, what we did as Back Benchers, and our control over our time. When I was on the Wright Committee I produced a minority report, but I consistently supported the establishment of a Back-Bench business Committee. I have always thought that, if established in the right way and for the right reasons, it could not just make debates livelier, but give Members much more control and a greater feeling of ownership of debates. Moreover, if we, as Back Benchers, could decide what issue to debate, by definition they would become more topical.

Many members of the Wright Committee are present today. I believe that our motivation was the same: we wanted to make proceedings in Parliament far more open and transparent. The detail is being discussed today, but the principle of the proposal was transparency. What people really objected to was not having an input, and not being able to see what was decided behind closed doors. The purpose of the Wright Committee was to begin re-establishing trust between not just the House, but us—its Members—and those who have elected us to represent and serve them. If we are to do justice to that intention, we must be much more open and transparent about what we do here. Without openness and transparency, people outside cannot have any say about what we do, far less have any influence on what we do.

In supporting the establishment of a Back-Bench committee, I think that we need to guard against a few things. We need to ask ourselves whether we are making a change for change's sake. In the case of the Back-Bench committee, that is absolutely not the case—it is a necessary, good change. We also need to guard against unforeseen consequences. The hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson) spoke earlier about the membership of Select Committees and said that the proposals on nominating Chairs and members excluded some of the minor parties. Those are all examples of unforeseen consequences. We need to take our time and to be careful to ensure that this is as open, transparent and fair as possible, so that we do not have unforeseen consequences—or even foreseen consequences.

My greatest concern—the thing that we most need to guard against, which I mentioned again and again when I was on the Select Committee and afterwards—is in relation to the transfer of power from one elite to another. The way that the Back-Bench committee is to be formulated and the way that its membership is to be elected means there is a danger of transferring power from the Whips Office, where deals are done behind closed doors and we learn what deal has been done when it is announced here by Front Benchers, to another back room where seven members and the Chair of the Back-Bench committee make the decision. I am not convinced that a member of that committee making an announcement of five minutes or less about its deliberations, or laying a report before the House about those deliberations, is enough. I would much rather see all the proceedings—every meeting—held in public. That is the only way in which we can ensure absolute openness and transparency. Not only that—it will engage people outside in what Back Benchers do in dealing with business here. It will engage them in a way that we have never engaged the public before. That would be a massive leap forward.

All of us would like to see an end to the current system of power and patronage held by the Whips, but we would be naive to think that, just by moving the power away from the Whips and giving it to a small

[Natascha Engel]

group of Back Benchers, we will get rid of the patronage. We will not. If meetings of the Back-Bench committee are held behind closed doors, there will just be a direct transfer of patronage from the Whips Office to the Back-Bench committee.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Lady is making a powerful point about the transfer of power from one Westminster elite to another Westminster elite. Does she therefore not see some merit in the amendment that I have tabled to increase the membership of the committee to 16 to ensure that we get a bigger range of people on it? In that way, there will be a minority party member on it, as well Back-Benchers from all sides of the House.

Natascha Engel: That is something that we should look at. Smaller memberships are not beneficial—we should look at having a much wider membership.

I want to look at the ways in which we can participate better, not just as Members, but by engaging people who have an interest in this matter. Many democracy organisations and members of the public have a deep interest in what we do. The instinct to restrict the size of things is a bad one—I would much rather see it broadened out.

Mr Allen: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's strong, clear and valuable contributions in the Wright Committee. I must, however, perhaps test her on one thing. If we had a business committee that always met in public, would there not be a danger that some of the necessary decisions that have to be taken on a give-and-take, wheeler-dealer basis, where someone does one thing and another person does another and where things are postponed, would go into the undergrowth? We might be no better off. Although I agree that some of the sittings should be in public, other sittings would benefit from being in private.

Natascha Engel *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. May I say to the hon. Lady that the amendment that the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) is encouraging her to discuss has not been selected? May I also say that I am letting the debate run, but the interventions are getting a little long now, so could we keep them sharply related to the debate?

Natascha Engel: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The amendment was not selected, and that is a great shame. However, it will at least be a marker, and something to campaign on in future. I will discuss that with my hon. Friend later.

On the reason that we seek to establish a Back-Bench business committee, the idea that we should bring things out into the open, and whether those meetings should be in public or in private, the first motion states that the Back-Bench committee

"shall be a select committee".

On the whole, Select Committees—I think that this is mentioned in "Erskine May"—have public meetings. That is part of the point of Select Committees. They are not just bodies of scrutiny; they are also bodies of public engagement. Although deals will be done, our starting point has to be that we want to be open, transparent and accessible to the public. I take my hon. Friend's point but our starting point has to be openness.

I want to ask a few specific questions about the way in which the Back-Bench committee will work. I have written them down. I will read them out and pass them over behind the Speaker's Chair so that the Minister does not have to take copious notes. Given that the Back-Bench business committee is going to be a Select Committee, does that mean that members of the public will not be excluded from the meetings? It is not mentioned either way in the motions. Does it mean that members of the public can attend those meetings, or are they excluded from the meetings of the committee?

The same goes for MPs who are not members of the Back-Bench committee. Will they be allowed to attend even the private meetings of the committee? Will they be there during its deliberations? What will the committee's party political make-up be? Has there been an arrangement that we do not know about yet on the allocation of the different memberships? If so, what will they be? How many of the seats will be allocated to the smaller parties and to Independents?

Can a chair of another Select Committee stand to be elected either as the chair of the Back-Bench committee or as one of its members? Whatever the answer to that is, I would love to know who made the decision, because the amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Andrew Miller) was not selected. I will pass those questions over via the back of the Chair. I thank hon. Members for their attention.

6.58 pm

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): As this is the first time I have spoken while you have been in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, I take the opportunity to congratulate you on your new position. I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel), who made a powerful and convincing case in favour of transparency in relation to the Back-Bench business committee, which I wholeheartedly endorse. I endorse also what she said about three former Members: Tony Wright, Evan Harris and Mark Fisher, who did so much to campaign for the committee and to bring it to fruition.

I am somewhat disappointed that we are discussing this today. The reason for my disappointment is that, in the previous Parliament, on 4 March, the House passed a motion saying that it looked forward to the House being offered the opportunity

"to establish, in time for the start of the next Parliament, a backbench business committee".

We are several weeks into the new Parliament. Unfortunately, that was not done in time for the start of this Parliament. That was despite assurances from the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), who said:

"I can assure the House that we will bring forward the Standing Orders, and there will be an opportunity for the House to endorse them before the next election."—[*Official Report*, 11 March 2010; Vol. 507, c. 433.]

She also said:

"I am under a duty and a responsibility to ensure that this happens before the next Parliament".—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2010; Vol. 507, c. 986.]

Unfortunately, that did not happen, which is a great tragedy, but perhaps it should also serve as a salutary lesson for those of us in this House who are keen to see reforms progress in general—I suspect that that is most of the Members present in the Chamber—that there is not always an easy path to reform. It is therefore important that those of us who are reform-minded make sure we continue to campaign, rather than assume that everything will be fine just because the House has agreed to a motion on something or other.

I am, however, absolutely delighted that the Leader of the House and my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House have introduced these motions so speedily in the new Parliament, and I think that goes some way towards making amends for the House's inability to get things done before Dissolution. I am especially pleased to see my hon. Friend in his new post; he was made for it, as he has always been a staunch defender of Parliament, and, indeed, of Back Benchers. I know that all of us who are eager for reform to happen take great comfort from knowing that the Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader of the House are also very much reform-minded.

In terms of control of the business of the House, the proposals are indeed an historic transfer of power from the Government to Back Benchers. The new Government are passionate about decentralisation, and perhaps that decentralisation is starting at home. My comments will be highly supportive of the Leader and Deputy Leader's efforts to make progress with reform, but I also want to tease out some issues that could be improved upon still further.

It is clearly excellent that the Back-Bench business committee will now be set up as a result of the motions laid before the House today, but there is still a slight concern about the number of days allocated, as I raised in business questions last week. The Wright report suggested 35 days for Back-Bench business. I understand that the Leader and Deputy Leader's motivation for splitting the 35 days between this House and Westminster Hall is to enable proper scrutiny of legislation by allocating additional days to the Report stages of Bills. It has been a valid criticism of how Bills have progressed that they have not received proper scrutiny on Report and entire swathes of Bills have been left undiscussed on the Floor of the House. I understand the motivation, therefore, but I very much hope that at least amendment (a) to motion 4, which would insert a reference to 27 days into Standing Order No. 14, will be accepted. That would certainly go some way towards giving reassurance. *[Interruption.]* I am very pleased that that is the case.

There is another issue I wish to raise, and which I hope my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader will be able to address in his winding-up speech. I appreciate that these measures are about moving towards Wright rather than about the Wright reforms being implemented all in one go, so in respect of this agreement that there will be 27 days of Back-Bench business in the Chamber, will there also be a move towards increasing the number of days from 27 in the future? I hope my hon. Friend will be able to say something positive about that, as that would be very helpful.

Obviously, we are at the very beginning of a new Parliament with a new Government so the legislative programme is heavy, but perhaps as the Parliament continues there might be additional time on the Floor of the House for Back-Bench business. It is also worth looking at the innovative use of time to create room for Back-Bench business. For instance, Tuesday mornings and Wednesday evenings have already been mentioned in reference to private Member business.

The next issue I want to raise in respect of the Back-Bench business committee is to do with permanence. It has been suggested that its members should be re-elected every year, and that there should be a review of its progress and how well it is working in a year's time. In some ways, that sounds very good. As a democrat, I like elections; and as somebody who likes to learn how we can do things better, a review might sound like a good idea. Taken together, however, these proposals cause a certain amount of concern, and there is a genuine danger that such a review might be used to try to get rid of the Back-Bench business committee, and that if the committee were seen as being too effective, annual elections might be used as an opportunity for the Whips to remove a particularly effective Chair.

One issue of pertinence in that regard is who will vote for the committee members. If the Government in effect have a block vote of more than 100 MPs, it will become very difficult for any candidate who is not supported by the Government to become the Chair of the committee. We recently elected the Chairs of Select Committees and the convention as originally recommended by the Procedure Committee was that Ministers and Parliamentary Private Secretaries of the relevant Department would not vote in the election of the departmental Select Committee Chair. Although this was not made explicit in the Wright report, I wonder whether it may be possible for the Government to take the same self-denying ordinance in voting for members of the Back-Bench business committee and its Chair. It does not seem unreasonable for the Back-Bench business committee, which represents Back Benchers, to be elected by Back Benchers. If that can be done, it might assuage some of the concerns about annual elections.

I also want to press my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader about the same issue on which I intervened on the Leader of the House: motion 3(1)(c). That is not only about the Chair of the Back-Bench business committee; it is about any candidate to become a member of the Committee. It clearly states that of the candidate's nominations,

"no fewer than ten shall be members of the candidate's party".

That would exclude members of the Scottish National party, Plaid Cymru, the other minority parties and, indeed, independent candidates.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Heath): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend as she has, I think, spotted a defect in the proposals, but I have to say that it is not a defect in the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and myself; it is, rather, a defect in the proposals from the Wright Committee, which, unfortunately, was not spotted in the motion drafted by the Committee. I entirely accept what my hon. Friend says about the unfortunate effects of that, and I think we may want to look at it again. I hope, however, that she will accept our defence, which is that here we have religiously stuck to the recommendation and, indeed, the draft motion of the Wright Committee.

Jo Swinson: I greatly appreciate that intervention from my hon. Friend, and that reassurance. I am sure that this can be solved. The Speaker certainly seems to be given a lot of power in these elections as almost a de facto returning officer, so I suspect a solution can be found.

I shall now turn to the issue of private Members' Bills and the two amendments in my name: amendment (d) to motion 2 and amendment (b) to motion 4. I want to share with the House why I think this is an important issue, although I also appreciate that some new Members are present and I do not wish to scare them or put them off. I just want to describe my experience of the horror of Friday sittings.

One of the first Friday sittings I attended dealt with a private Member's Bill sponsored by the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Mark Lazarowicz). His Bill was on climate change and I was keen to support it, and many of my constituents were also keen for me to do so. The second Bill on the Order Paper was about the management of energy in buildings, and we thought that because there would be five hours of business in the Chamber, we might be able to get one Second Reading finished and have another one well under way. We had not counted, however, on a two-hour speech from one Member, and then another Member standing up to try to make a speech of a similar length.

In order to get a private Member's Bill passed, there need to be 100 MPs for the closure vote, so there were dozens of MPs in the Chamber who had come along to support this private Member's Bill. Indeed, some of them wanted to make some comments on the record, perhaps through an intervention, but had we all done that, the Bill would have been talked out, and all because one or two Members were being, frankly, quite rude about using up time to talk it out.

I remember sitting in the Chamber and thinking that if I wanted the Bill to go through, I would just have to be quiet and say nothing—and not even say that I supported the Bill. I accepted that but, along with many other new Members at the time, I left the Chamber appalled and furious that this was the way we did our business, and I thought that it absolutely had to change.

I also remember that when I spoke to Members who had been in the House for longer than me, it was clear that they had got used to things as they said, "Well, that's the way it is." I thought to myself that I never wanted to accept that such a ridiculous way of working is the way it had to be. I suspect that current new MPs would be equally appalled if that happened, but I am sure that there will be an opportunity to make a change, because there needs to be one.

Mark Lazarowicz I well remember the progress of that particular private Member's Bill, and I am grateful for the hon. Lady's support on that occasion. She will also recall that that Bill came back not only on one Friday, but that it had to come back a total of three Fridays precisely because some Members chose to use their right to speak at length. Does she agree that that underlines that until such time as there is a more fundamental reform of procedure for private Member's Bills, we do not want to lose any days for private Member's Bill discussion on Friday, which is why we support the amendment of the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone)?

Jo Swinson: I agree absolutely with the hon. Gentleman, and I think that the amendment standing in the name of the hon. Member for Wellingborough is sensible. As he outlined, it just deals with the fair allocation of the equivalent of 13 days per year—or 26 days over two years. My amendments would also allow the Back-Bench business committee to programme the remaining stages of private Members' Bills, so that once a Bill had received its Second Reading a timetabling motion could be tabled and, thus, the ability of Members to talk out the Bill would be removed at that stage. Although I think that that ability should be gone from the beginning of proceedings on such Bills, and that people who wish to defeat them should do so on the merits of the argument and through a vote of this House, my amendments would be a good step in the right direction. Making a change on the ability to programme private Members' Bills would be helpful.

I was pleased to hear the Chair of the Procedure Committee say that his Committee will examine this issue more widely, because I accept that my amendment and that of the hon. Member for Wellingborough deal only with small parts of the problem and that the issue of private Members' Bills and Friday sittings needs to be examined much more in the round and more generally. I urge that such a report should be conducted quickly and acted on soon, so that we do not lose the momentum for reform. We do not want there to be an excuse to kick these issues into the long grass. I hope that if we do get some good recommendations, the demoralising and soul-destroying experience that many MPs have sat through on frustrating Fridays will be a thing of the past.

I was pleased to hear that motion 13 is not going to be moved this evening, because that motion is one of the best arguments against leaving things to the usual channels that I have come across in a long time. Expanding three Select Committees to 16 members was a very inelegant solution, and the fact that it was cooked up by the Whips without even consulting the Chairs of those Committees beggars belief. The Wright report made it clear that 11 should be the maximum number of members on a Select Committee, but we face a genuine problem in ensuring that the minority parties are represented.

There are different ways of solving that difficulty. In the previous Parliament, when the Liberal Democrats were in opposition, we made sure that some of the places that we were allocated went to the minority parties. I know that that certainly happened from time to time on Committees such as those discussing statutory instruments. One solution might, thus, be for Labour to be similarly generous. Another solution might be to add one minority party representative to these Committees, rather than for them to have an additional four members also. If necessary, in order to maintain the Government-Opposition balance, perhaps we could add a Government Member, but the arguments for adding five extra people to Select Committees do not stand up. I am pleased that the Government have listened on this issue and are going away to find a better solution—it is important that a solution is found.

In conclusion, when we examine the issues in the spirit of the Wright report we also need not to forget that further reform is required; radical and exciting as today's reforms are, this process should not stop here. The "Involving the public" section of the Wright report contained a lot of good ideas, but much further work needed to be done, particularly on petitioning and the

online engagement of this place. Good ideas come from, and reformers can be found in, all parts of this House, and on issues such as these we have been practising the new politics for a very long time in our cross-party working. With the Leader and the Deputy Leader both being so positively disposed to reform, I, for one, am optimistic that most of the motions on today's Order Paper will constitute an important next step in the vital reform of this House.

7.13 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, as other Members have rightly done. First, I wish to reflect on how pleasing it is that we are discussing not whether the procedures of this House should be reformed, but how that should be done. We have taken the debate forward from the Wright report, and it is pleasing that the House has chosen to do so.

I wish to concentrate particularly on one aspect that has not been mentioned very much, if at all, and about which the Wright Committee had some discussions; feelings were equally divided about September sittings, but clearly the Government have chosen that we should resume the practice of having them, at least for this parliamentary year. We held an experiment about seven or eight years ago, when we came back in two successive Septembers, without having particularly glorious results. On one occasion, we managed two votes in a fortnight, and we encountered certain problems with the hunt supporters getting into the Chamber because of security issues resulting from the amount of construction work being carried out on the site while the House was sitting.

It is often made out that supporters of September sittings are reformers and those who do not support them have their heads in the sand and are looking backwards. In fact, there can be a genuine division of view on how Members would most productively spend their time in September—whether that is in the House or in their constituencies—and on how much time this Parliament sits for compared with other Parliaments around the world. However, I wish to raise a more boring, domestic issue relating to the functioning of this place.

I wish to discuss maintenance and the building's being fit for the purpose of enabling meetings to take place at which the Government are held to account. It is no use passing motions that say that the job of this House is to hold the Government to account—of course, that is its job—if we do not have a building in which that can properly be done. Having lots of construction work going on around us as we carry out that function was not a happy experience when we tried it before.

When we consider Government Bills, Government legislation or private Members' Bills, we try to inform ourselves of all the issues involved. However, this House has a terrible habit when we discuss this sort of domestic issue. Things seem like a good idea, we vote one way or the other—if we are allowed a vote on such matters—and then we pass on without any proper advice and information having been made available to Members.

When I saw the September sittings motion on the Order Paper, I was pleased that it referred to this parliamentary year only. I took the opportunity to go to the chief executive's office, where Philippa Helme is always very helpful, and I then spoke to John Borley, who is the Officer in Parliament responsible for all our building and maintenance works, along with Mel Barlex. I meet them regularly because I was a member of the Finance and Services Committee in the previous Parliament and a member of the Administration Estimate Audit Committee too. The meetings were not always terribly exciting, but they were crucial.

John Borley told me that they had rightly anticipated that the House might want to sit in September. With a new Government perhaps coming in they could not guarantee that, but the thought was that it could happen and that at a beginning of a Parliament, because business might not happen quite so early, there would be a need for legislation to come through then. As Officers, they rightly predicted that September sittings might be held and they set their maintenance programmes up accordingly. Therefore, there will not be any dramatic effect this year in terms of altering what was already in train and what was already being planned.

My concern is that on these sorts of issues we do not bother to take account of the people who have to do the detailed professional work in building up maintenance programmes that keep this building functioning, not merely as a place of work, but as one of the most important historic buildings in this country—that is important too. We have seen the work that has been done on the cast-iron roofs, which has been crucial in keeping the fabric of this building going.

I know that in the past there has been an awful lot of criticism of how we have managed the parliamentary estate. We encountered major difficulties with Portcullis House and problems with the visitor reception area, and they created major problems for the budget of Parliament. We have run over budget and over time on the visitor reception area, which was an unhappy experience from which we have had to learn the lessons. With the appointment of these new Officers to manage our parliamentary estate, I have seen a much higher degree of professionalism, and a much greater willingness to plan ahead, to look at the options, difficulties and costs involved, and to see how we can develop a forward programme for budgeting, which is crucial. I have also seen the work of the Administration Estimate Audit Committee and how internal auditors now work with it to try to ensure that we have best practice in procurement.

Officers will say two things to us. First, they will say that they need a degree of stability and of advance warning, because it is not sufficient simply to try to pick, on a whim, when Parliament will sit on a year-by-year basis. We need significant and serious forward planning so that Parliament looks, as quickly as possible, at the longer-term arrangements over a number of years and gives the Officers advice about when it will be sitting and when time will be free to carry out essential maintenance work. The second thing that those people will say is that if, having examined the situation, Parliament is bent on having simply a five-week recess year on year, it will not be possible to keep the building in which we work—and that we treasure and have grow to love over the years—in a proper state of repair.

If hon. Members have any doubts about the situation, they should take a trip down to the underground passages under the House to look at the state of the mechanical, engineering and electrical systems, because they are very bad indeed. We know that a massive work programme will be needed. That will need planning, organising and

[Mr Clive Betts]

funding, and it must be cost-effective. If we can shut down the building for only five weeks at a time, it will probably not be possible to carry out the programme.

It is not sufficient that I report these concerns to hon. Members second hand, so it is important that proper reports are made to the Commission and the Finance and Services Committee, with the audit Committee having a look, so that there can be a report to the whole House to inform Members' decisions. We should try to plan our sittings for a whole Parliament, which would also help Members to organise their activities outside the House. If we could achieve all that, we could better approach these issues that are crucial to our working, even though they are quite dry and sometimes turgid matters that might not excite people politically. It is also important that we send a message to the public that if we have to make cuts to the services that they receive—we might disagree about where the cuts should fall and how great they should be—we will take proper account of the money that we have for the House and ensure that we spend it cost-effectively. Unless we carry out proper planning, however, that simply will not happen.

It is absolutely right that, if the Government wish, we should come back in September on the basis of the motion. However, if we are looking at future sittings, planning will be required, as will proper advice from the Officers who run the Palace of Westminster for us. All Members should have access to that advice before voting on such sittings in the future.

7.21 pm

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): I welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, and congratulate you on your election.

The fact that motion 13 has been pulled makes my life a lot easier, and my main intention now is put down a marker to ensure that we do not get something that is almost as bad next week.

Before I talk about the size of Select Committees, however, I should say that we are fortunate to have such an enlightened Leader of the House—I am glad that he has just returned to the Chamber. If it were not for him, in his role as shadow Leader of the House and now as Leader of the House, we would not have made anything like as much progress on a business committee or the strengthening of Select Committees. A less enlightened Leader of the House would have found a reason to kick much of this into the long grass for the convenience of his ministerial colleagues, not least his blood brother, the Chief Whip—I cannot help wondering whether that is a sort a Jacob-Esau relationship.

I am, of course, very glad that the Leader of the House has pulled the motion that would have increased the membership of three Committees from 11 to 16, the ostensive reason for which was that we needed to provide better representation on Select Committees for minority parties. I strongly agree that those parties need appropriate representation, but the argument that an increase in the size of Select Committees is required to achieve that is completely bogus.

The minority parties must have adequate representation on the territorial Committees—I am appalled that they do not—and they should have three Chairs on the other Committees. [Hon. Members: "Seats, not Chairs."] I am sorry—we would have Chairs sprouting everywhere. Those parties should have at least three members of the other Committees, and those places should come out of the Opposition quota. I know that this might be controversial among Labour Members but, by my reckoning, the Labour quota provides for 4.39 people on each Committee. When that number is rounded down, as it should be, it implies four members, although we will all have noticed that the Labour party is getting five members per Committee. The obvious solution is to provide the three Committees cited in motion 13 with a combined quota for the Opposition parties. There are 23 Members representing "others", so their quota comes out as 0.39. When 4.39 is added to 0.39, the result is a figure of just under five, so that is reasonable justification for adopting such an approach.

Pete Wishart: I thank the new Chair of the Treasury Committee for giving way. I totally agree with his powerful point that the minority parties should get three Chairs. However, does he agree that we should be over-representing minority parties to ensure that their voices are adequately heard? Such parties get more seats than they are entitled to in the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, so surely we should follow that example here.

Mr Tyrie: As someone who comes from a large party, I will not rush to argue that the smaller parties should be over-represented, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman and I can make common cause that they should be adequately represented. I advise him not to over-egg things but to take the support that he is getting at the moment to justify increasing their membership—not Chairs—by three across the 24 Committees, albeit without wrecking those Committees by increasing their membership by too much.

The increase in the membership of some Committees to 16 must have been proposed by people who were determined to ensure that those Committees could not operate effectively. Anyone who has worked on a large Select Committee will know that that can be difficult. It is not easy to achieve cross-party consensus on such a Committee, and its members come together less and are less cohesive. I have served on the Treasury Committee twice. The first time was when it was a Committee of 11 and it worked very well. When I returned to the Committee a little under a couple of years ago, however, its membership had increased to 14, which led to several difficulties. Many of its members were unable to participate in the questioning of particular witnesses, and several hearings during which everyone wanted to participate were extremely long. It was impossible to hold a short hearing, and although we got by, it was with difficulty. That was why the Liaison Committee proposed limiting the membership of Select Committees to 11 and why the Wright Committee suggested limiting the membership to nine, although it said that it could live with 11. It was also why the Leader of the House concluded much the same, as we heard from the quotation that was cited earlier.

I note that the coalition agreement of 20 May states:

"We will bring forward the proposals of the Wright Committee for reform to the House of Commons in full".

If that means anything, it must be that a Select Committee's membership will be nine or 11, but not more. I am sure that I speak for all the newly elected Select Committee

Chairs when I say that we should stick with nine or 11, but not more, and I hope that Front Benchers are listening.

7.28 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Madam Deputy Speaker, you are the last of the new Deputy Speakers whom I am able to congratulate on your election and elevation. It is always good to leave the best till last—if that does not get me called early in debates, I do not know what will.

Is it not unfortunate that we have heard no maiden speeches today? I am really missing the kaleidoscope tours of UK constituencies that we have become used to hearing each day, but perhaps a new Member can run to the Chamber and get in.

Although I am probably alone in this, I cannot share the enthusiasm for the Back-Bench business committee and the great reforming zeal of the Wright proposals. There are serious problems for the minority parties. We have already recognised some of the problems that have inadvertently been created, and I am grateful to the Leader of the House and his deputy for trying to address our concerns and for speedily withdrawing motion 13. I, like all my colleagues, am grateful to both of them for ensuring that the question of whether minority party Members can be considered for Select Committees will be addressed.

The hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson) —unfortunately, she is no longer in the Chamber—made a pertinent point about the quota for securing a place on the Back-Bench committee. We just cannot do it. We have only six Members. Plaid Cymru has only three. The Democratic Unionist party is the largest of the minority parties, and the fourth largest party in the House, but it cannot do it. I am glad that there is a genuine attempt to address the matter. Hopefully, we can make sure that we are in the race to get a place if we can increase membership of the Committee to a reasonable size that will allow us the opportunity to participate in the House.

This has not been a good few weeks for the minority parties; things have been really poor. I do not know what is going on. I came back to the House expecting that we would secure more input into the House and better representation, but since coming back we have experienced further entrenched exclusion. Last week, the Deputy Prime Minister got to his feet in the House and announced a new Committee on reform of the House of Lords. There was no consultation with the minority parties—or much consultation with the rest of the parties. We found that there would be no place for minority parties on that Committee. There is now a Political and Constitutional Reform Committee. Constitutional reform is what our parties are about; it is our reason for being here, but there is no place on the Committee for the minority parties.

There is still no resolution on the issue of the Liaison Committee. Fair enough, we do not have a Chair of a Select Committee, but the Liaison Committee is a Select Committee of the House, and arithmetically, we are entitled to a place on it. That was conceded by the former Government, and I hope that it is conceded by those on the Government Front Bench. We need that opportunity to question the Prime Minister on a monthly basis. That opportunity should not be confined to the three main parties of the House. The minority parties have to get on the Liaison Committee.

Then there is the biggest disappointment of all: the Wright proposals. We are to be excluded for all the "good" reasons. We are excluded in the name of democratic reform and making the House accountable—things that we agree with. There will be no place for us on the Back-Bench business committee. It is just not possible that there will be, given that it has eight members; it is not going to happen. I just wish that the Wrightinistas, as I call them—those pioneers of reform, those champions making sure that this place is much more accountable, out there fighting the good fight against the dark forces of the Government Whips—would concede that, and acknowledge that on a Committee of eight, there is absolutely no way of that happening.

Mr Allen: When the hon. Gentleman got to his feet, he had a great deal of sympathy from all parts of the House, but now that he is flailing around, blaming absolutely everybody, he is in danger of losing his friends as rapidly as he made them on this issue. The Wright Committee proposed that on every Committee of the House there be one reserve place for the Speaker to allocate—a Speaker's pick—so that justice could be done. That place might be for the minority parties or, indeed, those with minority opinions within larger parties. That proposal was not brought forward, but that was the doing of not the Wrightinistas, or whatever pejorative term the hon. Gentleman wishes to make up, but the Government and the Front Benchers of the day.

Pete Wishart: I thought "the Wrightinistas" was quite an endearing term. If the hon. Gentleman takes offence, I am sorry about it, but he is being a tad sensitive. He is possibly right that what was suggested by Wright was probably okay, but there have been inadvertent mistakes, such as the 10-Member quota; that was a result of the Wright Committee, and there is a problem with that. Thank goodness that the Front Benchers have decided that they will address that. The hon. Gentleman cannot in all honesty say that the Wright proposals were bulletproof, soundproof and correct in every instance, because they were proven to be wrong in that instance.

The hon. Gentleman is right, but it seems to us that we are caught in the middle of a fight between the Wrightinistas—I apologise to him—and the Whips. It is a fight between the two big boys in the playground. They are battering lumps out of each other, trying to gain ascendency, and all of a sudden they see the little boy sitting eating his piece in the bike shed. That is us—the minority parties. It is we on whom they have decided to take out all their frustrations, we who are losing places on Committees, and we who are being excluded in this House. It just is not right or fair. We should be on Select Committees, and we should be making sure that we make our contribution.

Where we have served on Select Committees, we have made a constructive, useful contribution, as has been recognised by several Members from across the House tonight. We have played a part on cross-party Committees of the House, trying to ensure positive reforms, particularly with regard to expenses. My hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd) served on the Wright Committee, and pointed out some of the inconsistencies and difficulties that emerged. Unfortunately, he was not listened to on those issues.

Mr Cash: I feel strongly that the case that the hon. Gentleman puts is entirely justified. It is incredibly important to remember that according to "Erskine May", the first duty of the Speaker is to protect minorities. That is absolutely fundamental. There is no reason whatever that I can think of why any Member from a minority party, be they an independent, or a member of Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National party, or the Democratic Unionist party, should ever be excluded from full participation in the House.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. He is right. As I said to the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr Tyrie), minorities should be respected. If anything, we should be over-represented to ensure that differing voices are heard. What is wrong with hearing diverse voices in this House? What are people afraid of? Of course we should be on Select Committees and should be part of them. The Government should be listening to this, because our party is not just a minority party, but the party of government in Scotland. Our party is in a minority Government in Scotland, and the party of my hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd is in a coalition Government in Wales. Why do the Government not want to hear those diverse voices in all the workings of this House?

I will tell the House how bad things were. It was not just that we did not have a place on the Scottish Affairs Committee and the Welsh Affairs Committee; when we turned up at the House for our customary little chit-chat with the usual channels, we were told that there were no places for us on any Select Committees, because that is what the Wright proposals suggested. Before the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) gets on his high horse, let me say that that was how the usual channels interpreted the Wright proposals—no places for us on Select Committees, and effective exclusion from scrutiny of Government Departments. That is what was offered to us.

Mr Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: I will, because the hon. Gentleman made such a good intervention last time.

Mr Cash: Sometimes, it is from minorities that major parties develop. That has to do with what is called freedom of speech. When people hear the minority view, they have the opportunity to get that view across to the public. To be excluded is a complete derogation from freedom of speech.

Pete Wishart: I am pleased that I gave way again to the hon. Gentleman, because he is spot on. That is what the issue is about. I hope that the House hears tonight that we have a meaningful contribution to make. My modest little amendment (e) is an attempt to address the issue. It aims to make sure that the minority voice is heard, as the hon. Gentleman says. It is about saying, "Let's see what we can do to get the smaller parties of the House involved and on board."

As I have said, there is no way that we would ever be considered for a place on the Back-Bench business committee; that is just not going to happen, and I hope that that will be conceded. We do not yet know how its members will be determined. I know that it will be through an election, but there will be some sort of mechanism or procedure to ensure that Labour, Liberal and Conservative Members are on it. That is 100% certain; I bet you any money, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there will be one Member from each of those three parties on the Committee. It is also almost entirely certain—again, I bet you any money—that there will be no Member from the minority parties on it. We have to change that; we have to ensure that that does not come to pass.

My amendment suggests that we increase the number of members of the Back-Bench business committee from eight to 16. Why 16, you ask, Madam Deputy Speaker? It is because that always seems to be the magic number at which we start to come into play.

Mr Heath *indicated dissent.*

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head; he may want to intervene. Sixteen is always the number at which there is at least a chance that we will be included. That is why I seek in my amendment to increase the number to 16.

It is good to get more Members involved. What is wrong with that? Why restrict the number to eight? I know that the Committee might get more business done that way, but the term "Backbench business committee" suggests that it should be full of Back Benchers. There should be lots of them involved, from Labour, the Liberals, the Conservatives, the DUP and the SNP. What is wrong with having a reasonable-sized Back-Bench business committee? Restricting membership to eight just does not make sense and I cannot see the reason for it. Surely there are loads of Back Benchers who want to be part of what could be a very exciting and promising Committee.

Mark Lazarowicz: The hon. Gentleman is making a strong case, but does he not accept that a smaller Committee is important to allow business to be conducted efficaciously? As he knows, although there were a large number of Green and Scottish Socialist party Members in the previous Scottish Parliament, they were not members of the Business Committee by right. It is difficult to strike a balance, but I accept that the hon. Gentleman has some powerful arguments.

Pete Wishart: I am not so sure about the hon. Gentleman's contribution. There is a good case to be made for the business committee to be larger and more open, to ensure that we hear a different chorus of voices on the Back-Bench agenda. I see nothing wrong with a bigger committee, and I hope the House supports us this evening.

We went along with Wright—as I said, my hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd served on the Committee—but we believed it was a good thing to do. As the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel) mentioned in her speech, it seemed to be starting from the right premise, taking on the powers of the Whips, making the House more accountable, and making sure that there is a proper Back-Bench voice in the House. We accepted that that was an agenda that needed to be addressed and we went along with it in the hope that we would get some sort of change.

We even accepted in good faith the assurances given by Wright Committee members. I remember intervening, as did several of my hon. Friends, on Tony Wright when these matters were being debated, and he would say, "Don't worry, it will be okay. Don't worry about the fact that it is not specifically mentioned that you will get a place on Select Committees. It will be all right." It was not all right. It has been a disaster. We were given no places at all on Select Committees initially. We have no place on the Back-Bench business committee as it is currently to be constituted. That must be addressed.

We accepted those assurances in good faith, and I ask those who are the fervent champions of the reforms to get out there and make sure that the issue is addressed. They should approach it with the same enthusiasm as those on the Government Front Bench seem to be approaching it, and make sure that it is resolved. We must fix it. It is not good enough that we are excluded. We have to find a mechanism to ensure that minority parties will have a place on the Back-Bench business committee. It is important that the committee is seen to be legitimate, and that it is representative of the House as a whole. As the hon. Lady said, there is no point substituting one Westminster elite for another.

As the committee is currently to be constituted, it will not be representative. The only way that we can change that and make the committee truly representative, to give everybody an opportunity to serve on it, the only way that we will get minority party members on it, is to increase the size. I hope the House supports us this evening in increasing the committee's size. I cannot see any other solution to ensure that we have a place. If any Member has any other suggestions, I may consider not pressing my amendment to a Division, but as far as I can see, I have no alternative but to ask the House to determine the matter on a vote this evening. We need those numbers to ensure that we have a Back-Bench business committee that is representative of the whole House.

7.42 pm

Mr William Cash (Stone) (Con): Congratulations, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your election to that important post.

I begin with the constitutional background to the role of Members of Parliament in general and Ministers in particular. I have said on several occasions over the past few years that one of the reasons why the importance of the House in the public mind has been so reduced is Members' lack of involvement and attendance in the Chamber, which has not been the case during this debate or since the new Parliament commenced. The use of procedural devices such as the guillotine, and the manner in which the previous Government handled Government business over the past 10 years, have been a disgrace. Indifference on the part of Members of Parliament has increased to an extent that I did not think was possible when I entered the House 26 years ago.

However—I say this as one who has a certain scepticism about coalitions—I congratulate the Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader on the speed with which they tabled the motion. I say that with feeling, because if used properly, it has the capacity to improve greatly the involvement of the House and the quality of debates.

People often imagine that we do next to nothing in the Chamber. That is partly because of the failure of parliamentary reporting of what goes on in the House. For those who do not have the parliamentary channel, for example, and who are reliant on the few minutes that are given to "Today in Parliament", it is difficult to have any concept of what goes on here. That is partly due to the fact that Back Benchers have been largely excluded from the briefing processes now available to the media and the machinery that is available to enable Members to be heard by the public outside.

I say that with feeling as one who, if not a serial rebel, has consistently held strong views, if I may say so—for example, on a debate that took place in Westminster Hall this morning on the sovereignty of the United Kingdom Parliament and the European Union. I would be extremely surprised if that makes the "Today" programme, "Yesterday in Parliament" or "Today in Parliament".

The way in which the House is perceived is profoundly affected by the sucking away of the deliberations of the House from the Chamber at a time when the whole of Europe is imploding, the German Government is in a state of implosion, the Greeks are in a state of implosion, unemployment is rampant and the impact of immigration is flowing all over the continent. It is astonishing that, as heard from the outside, matters of such importance cannot get the coverage in Parliament that they deserve.

We heard yet again from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that the Wright Committee proposals will be accepted in full. If I have slightly misunderstood, I am happy to be corrected, but I see that paragraph 177 states:

> "On some business there needs to be an explicit partnership between Ministerial and backbench scheduling: this includes the length of debates on the Budget and Queen's Speech, the timing of Estimates Days and the handling of secondary legislation and European documents on the floor."

One of the things that I noted was excluded from the province of the Back-Bench committee is European documents. If the Wright Committee proposals are to be accepted in full, I cannot see why European documents should be excluded.

I say that for good reason. I have been on the European Scrutiny Committee for 26 years. I doubt whether many other Members have served on a Select Committee for anything like that length of time. As I said in the debate this morning in Westminster Hall, not once, at any time in those 26 years, has any vote ever been passed on the Floor of the House or in a European Committee to overturn a decision in the Council of Ministers, bar one that I can recall, and that was immediately overturned on the Floor of the House. In other words, the very fact that we are committed to the European Communities Act 1972 has meant that we are not allowed to pass any legislation inconsistent with it. So I am puzzled as to why that partnership arrangement, which was described in paragraph 177, has not been included, as far I can judge, in the proposals before us.

However, on the extent of the committee's terms, I again have considerable sympathy with those who have tabled amendments to the proposals to restrict the period for which the chairman and committee members can be elected. Indeed, that is why I have put my name to a variety of them. Despite the responses of the Deputy Leader of the House and the Leader of the

[Mr William Cash]

House to interventions, I cannot understand the real reason behind restricting the chairman and members to election merely for one year—until, perhaps, we consider the review of the committee's operational arrangements. Despite the sophistry that I heard from the Deputy Leader of the House and, indeed, the Leader of the House regarding the length of time, I am still extremely unhappy about the idea that the chairmanship, the membership and the length of time for which the committee is to be given a full opportunity to be seen to operate should be temporary arrangements. The operational restriction to one Session is a very suspicious business.

I know my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House quite well; I have watched him over many years and I would not normally regard him with suspicion. He is very shrewd and intelligent, and he tells me that he can justify a review after one year, but I am not impressed by the answers that we have received so far. The measure just does not stand up, and I know that many other hon. Members feel the same way. It has—to use another expression—a bit of a pong about it.

Some people might use the Back-Bench business committee to advance causes, and that, after all, is what Back Benchers are supposed to do. Members do not just react to Government business; they might want to promote ideas. I do not agree with all the arguments that the minority parties have presented on, for example, aspects of devolution, and there are many arguments on the Barnett formula and all sorts of things where we might have serious differences, but they and Back Benchers generally have a right to be heard.

As I have said on previous occasions, what we need more than anything else in this House is Back Benchers with backbone. During my 26 years in the House, I have been involved in quite a few controversies and I have seen some serious ones develop. Ultimately some Members have seen them through and some have not. I hope that the Back-Bench business committee will not just represent a vague opportunity for people to have their say but that they will actually do something, and that the committee will therefore be used effectively in relation to causes as well as Government business.

Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab): I would never suggest that the hon. Gentleman lacked backbone, and I doubt whether any Member would. Some might accuse him of being a little rigid, but lacking backbone—never. I agree very strongly that if someone were elected for one Session only, they might be put under pressure by all manner of people, and that would deny the committee an independently minded chairman who would fight for the rights of Back Benchers. The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point.

Mr Cash: By way of tribute to the hon. Gentleman, I note how strongly he feels about matters relating to Africa, for example, as I do. We have shared many arguments and discussions on that subject. The question is whether, in that sphere or any other, a person's cause might be affected via a behind-the-curtain attempt by the Whips to undermine them and thereby get them away. I remember the late Gwyneth Dunwoody, who was removed from the Transport Committee, and Sir Nicholas Winterton, who was removed from the Health Committee. Let us not for a minute imagine that the machinations of the Whips' magical powers would not get to work if somebody stepped into the arena and started to make use of the Back-Bench business committee.

However, I really do pay tribute to the Leader of the House, the Deputy Leader of the House and, indeed, the coalition Government, because they have stepped into the arena and, with those proposals, allowed Parliament to become an arena where risk is part of Government business. That is a tremendous step in the right direction, but it will be fulfilled only if the ingredients are allowed to develop and evolve. The termination point on the committee's chairmanship, membership and operation puts square brackets around it, as if the Government are saying, "We think it's a good idea and we do want to give power back to Parliament, but we don't want to give them too much, because we want to put them on notice, and when we put them on notice the Whips get to work."

I say that with respect, because I see my hon. Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Jeremy Wright) and Whip sitting on the Front Bench. We get on well together and have got on in the past at a personal level. The issue is nothing to do with personalities; it is to do with the operation of the Whips Office, which is driven by what the Prime Minister and No. 10 want; and by senior Ministers and Secretaries of State. That involves the interplay of personalities and principles, and questions of compromise and how business is to be put through. Do people who really believe in something, even within their own party, have the opportunity to express their views and to carry them through? That is why European business is constantly before the House, but on the basis of "take note", rather than a vote. In other words, one is allowed to discuss such business and one is tolerated but, even having been right over an extended period—for which one must not of course try to make any claims—one is not allowed to vote on it or to obtain other people's support, because that is beyond the pale.

Natascha Engel: Before the hon. Gentleman is diverted too far down the European track, may I bring him back to his point about the Back-Bench business committee and the influence of the Whips? Does he not fear, as I do sometimes, that the committee could itself become a powerful elite of senior Back Benchers? How can we best guard against that?

Mr Cash: We cannot guard against it at all. The Government have all the powers that they need, and Parliament is sovereign and omnipotent—we are told so. Ministers are appointed by the Crown, and they have the patronage, the salaries, the prestige and the opportunities to direct business and make policy. They are chosen—they are appointed. They are certainly elected to the House, and that is where they get their true reason for existence, because they are elected by the people. As I have said so many times, it is not our Parliament, it is the Parliament of the people, so a Minister is no more important in the sense of election, and that is one of the great virtues of our parliamentary system. It is not like the American system, in which there is an elected President and the separation of powers.

Members of Parliament and members of the Government who are Members of Parliament are in this House; there is no distinction between them in respect of their position as Members of Parliament. If Back Benchers are part of the aggregate of those who are

elected, they must be given the opportunity to participate in the making of policy—that is why I mentioned the word "causes"—and in taking decisions relevant to Back Benchers' business. That is why I applaud these proposals so much.

I understand why ministerial business is excluded in this context, because such business is the job of the Government. We are often told that this Parliament is one of parliamentary government. I do not like that phrase; our Parliament is a Parliament made up of people who are elected, some of whom are appointed by the Crown and some of whom are given the opportunity, through the leaderships of their respective parties and the Whip system, to have the right to promote their ideas and policies and turn them into legislation.

I simply say to the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel) that it is wrong to imagine that too much power can be vested in Back Benchers. Back Benchers are no more or less important than Ministers in terms of their parliamentary engagement and involvement. Ministers are, of course, important, because they have the right to make decisions on behalf of the Crown. However, their importance does not extend beyond that in parliamentary terms.

My feeling about all the proposals is that they are a thoroughly good step in the right direction. Given the sense of uncertainty resulting from their being confined to merely one Session, I hope that their tentative nature will not be sustained. I shall be voting for the amendments in the name of the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen), whom I greatly respect. I am delighted that he is now Chair of the Constitutional Reform and Political Committee—or is it the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee? Whichever way round the name is, I am absolutely certain that he will do a very good job. Other than that, I am delighted that the Leader of the House and Deputy Leader of the House have agreed not to press the last of the proposed motions.

Finally, I turn to Westminster Hall. I have heard from the Leader of the House about the number of days allocated to the Floor of the House as compared with Westminster Hall; it is a mathematical thing, I suppose. If only seven days are to be involved, perhaps the issue will not matter quite as much. However, I am concerned about one aspect. There are no votes in Westminster Hall, but there are on the Floor of the House. I leave the House with this thought. I would not want days on which there should be votes on big issues to end up, by some means that I cannot envisage at the moment, being Westminster Hall days on which there is no vote. Westminster Hall is a good innovation, but some matters need votes on the Floor of the House and we do not want Westminster Hall to be used as some kind of cul de sac into which matters arising from Back-Bench business could be driven when a vote would be inconvenient.

8.4 pm

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): I congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on being the first woman elected to the senior position of the deputy speakership. It is symptomatic of what is a really exciting time. I envy the new Members, whether they are from Beckenham, Sherwood or Brighton, Pavilion. They are entering the House of Commons at a fantastically exciting time. There has, of course, been a change of Government and there is a sense of new politics, if only because of the need for a coalition. Furthermore, we are seeing a number of very significant and serious changes in Parliament. The election of our Deputy Speakers has been one.

Last week, for the first time ever, there was an election by secret ballot of all the Chairs of Select Committees. This week, individual parties will be selecting the Members whom they wish to put on to those Select Committees. In 1832 and subsequently, our forebears kicked off with the liberating effect of the ballot box. The ability of Members to make decisions as their consciences see fit is having remarkable impacts on the House of Commons.

I hope that this burst of activity will not be confined to the first week or so; I hope that we sustain it. In particular, I hope that the new Members take it for granted that the House is their base. I do not mean that they should think that we have done well in the first week and that we can relax—instead, they should say, "No, we've got to go further." Whichever party they come from, I hope that they will seize this opportunity to move things forward. The past week or so has been exciting for Members, and I use the word advisedly.

Sir Peter Soulsby (Leicester South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his recent election to the chairmanship of his important Select Committee. Does he agree that the momentum for change, of which we are clearly a part this evening, must be maintained and that an important part of maintaining it is the setting of a clear timetable, to go on from what we are doing this evening towards the establishment of a House business committee? That would ensure not only that the Government had the opportunity to get their business on to the statute book, but that we as a House had an opportunity properly to scrutinise it as it went through our processes.

Mr Allen: Left to their own devices, Governments and Front Benchers never become more radical. They start with ideas and radicalism, and it is the role of Back Benchers not only to hold them to account but to stimulate them into maintaining their reforming and radical instincts. I do not want this to develop into too much of a love-in, but if we—certainly those on the Opposition Benches—had been able to select a Leader of the House from the Conservative party, it would have been the current Leader of the House. Similarly, had we been able to select someone from the Liberal Democrats to be the Deputy Leader of the House, it would have been the current incumbent.

We have a conjunction of remarkable, coincidental fortune that means that we can take the issue on now—and we should. Now is not the time to be timid. We have free votes on the motions from 9.30 onwards. I hope that Members—above all, new Members—will seize that opportunity. Obviously, I want them to vote with me in my Lobby tonight, but if they do not, they must please vote according to what they feel is important rather than because they are trying to figure out the main chance of getting on to the slippery slope and getting that red box one day. They will be respected more if they use this unique opportunity to take our Parliament further than if they merely look around to see which Whip—unofficially, of course—is twitching in the leftwards or rightwards direction.

There is a fundamental balance—imbalance, perhaps—between Parliament and the Executive. It has been evident throughout my political life, but newcomers

[Mr Allen]

particularly may be able to taste a rebalancing through which, for once, the parliamentary midget is growing and taking on the 800-pound gorilla of the Executive. I hope that the midget has been working out over the past couple of weeks and building muscles, although it should not challenge or frighten the Executive. Governments should welcome a strong Parliament. A strong Parliament is not a threat; it helps to produce better law and better value for money. It makes life better for our citizens. It complements and is a partner to Government, occasionally drawing attention to their defects. Are not we stronger when our defects are remedied? Perhaps I am too optimistic, but in my political lifetime, the moment has come when there is a sense that we can push on and have a Parliament worthy of the name.

Although the subject of business is the Back-Bench business committee, the occasion is far more important than the particular internal committee that we will set up. It is important because, in the past two or three years, not one Member who is not new has not felt pressure and shame about the way in which we have been portrayed—occasionally deservedly so. Now we have a chance to show that Members of Parliament are not as they are described day after day in *The Daily Telegraph* or the *Daily Mail*, but that they bring genuine value to our political life, that they are an asset to our politics and can make a real contribution through Select Committees, on the Floor of the House, through questioning or in Westminster Hall. We need to have the passion returned to our Chamber so that we can do such work. If we can do that openly and honestly, we will win people over. They will say that we are once again worthy of being the British people's forum—not a nice little ancient backdrop to Government statements or simply leather Benches and ornate wood work, but fundamental to what people want to discuss in our democracy.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his election as the Chair ~~of the~~ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee. Hearing him speak makes me think that he is well chosen. He is giving voice to incredibly welcome ideas. As he says, it is an exciting time to be elected to this Parliament—there is a wind of change, and a real step forward in, for example, the election of Chairs and members of Select Committees. I welcome the amendments that would increase the House's transparency and democracy—that is incredibly important—but hope that we can go further. I take comfort from his comments that we are the beginning, not the end of a process. I would like us to learn from other legislatures, too. That might be a radical suggestion, but there are many legislatures that do an interesting job from which we could learn. I therefore warmly commend that the hon. Gentleman consider other things, too.

Mr Allen: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention and welcome her to the House. I am sure that she will contribute not only to environmental politics but to a broader sphere, particularly in the ideas that she has expressed about our democracy. We should have humility and learn from not only other nations but from the operation of the devolved Administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, where—dare I say it?—one can sometimes find a more real Parliament than we have here. Sometimes, one can find genuine debate and exchange, which has been so rare here. However, we can recapture it if we work at it.

The Back-Bench business committee will help us create such a Parliament here. It will help us revert to being the people's forum. Rather than the debates in which we are all interested happening on the "Today" programme or "Newsnight", those interactions and key conversations could take place here. When I woke up the other morning, I listened to "Today", which was considering three main issues: a possible increase in student fees; a report about a possible 3 million unemployed; and a report about abused children and whether there is a way in which to sort out the problem much earlier in their lives. Those are three genuinely important issues, which we all want to discuss. I came to the House of Commons and the whole day went by without a single one of those items, which had been headline news that morning, being debated or discussed. It should be the other way round. If we recreate our Parliament, we will raise the issues and the media will follow behind us. We should all aspire to that sort of House of Commons. The Back-Bench business committee is a small flame that can move outwards and ensure that we do that job particularly well.

Like so many hon. Members, I must say that the Government have done a remarkable thing in introducing the proposals today. Within weeks of a general election, they have moved on the subject. I must be blunt—I do not wish to offend any Labour colleagues, but we dragged our feet. The Wright Committee made every possible effort to conclude the matter. We tried to engage with the most senior people in our party to show that we cared about that and if only for purely political and electoral reasons, demonstrate that we cared about the future of our political system. The new coalition Government deserve credit for, and should be congratulated on, tabling the proposals. That needs to be put on record.

Some 95% of the proposals are what the Wright Committee suggested, but there is a bit of slippage with some. That has happened because, when one gets into government, certain practicalities get in the way. There is a desire to ensure that other priorities are fulfilled, as well as the dead-weight, often of senior civil service bureaucracy, and sometimes of our colleagues in the various Whips Offices, who feel that things must stay exactly as they are because that is how they control things. It reflects the old joke, "How many MPs does it take to change a light bulb?" "Change? Change?!" Sometimes we get a sense from our colleagues of better safe than sorry. If there is a little risk-taking in the Chamber, I hope that Labour Members will make allowance for it and grant it leeway, particularly if people fall flat on their face when it happens. We need to advance our system so that our democracy can prosper.

In the past week or so, we have witnessed the beginning of a sensible conversation. In trying to create a Back-Bench business committee, the interaction between all the different people who are involved—certainly the minority parties, which have been sorely tested by the failure of the usual channels to give them a fair crack of the whip—has been important. Back Benchers have been involved, and Select Committee Chairs, within days of being elected, have shown their muscle and their desire to protect the rights of the House. Front Benchers have also played a positive role—I include my new Front-Bench

colleague as well as other Front Benchers in that. I hope that, rather than proposals having to be withdrawn on the Floor of the House—for which I am grateful; I will deal with that later—the dialogue can take place a little more formally and a little earlier in future. If we can make progress with the conversation, perhaps we can address such matters by consensus rather than by withdrawing stuff on the Floor of the House. It is a difficult task, especially so for two new incumbents, but I wish them well in trying to get the conversation under way.

Let me deal with the amendments. Many are in my name and the names of 32 other Back-Bench colleagues. It could have been 232, and I claim no credit for the amendments, but my name appears first, so I am happy to speak about them. But first, I should like to give a little more perspective on what can be very dry, dusty stuff—the Back-Bench business committee, what is a quorum and how we elect the Chair—and say what the proposed committee is really about. The committee is about taking the chunk of business that all of us accept is the province, property and interest of Back-Benchers, pulling it together and taking a Back-Bench view on how best to use it. Rather than the Leader of the House deciding that we should have a general debate next week on something or other, there would be a process by which all of us, collectively, could decide what that debate should be about. We could decide that tomorrow's debate will be about something that happened overnight or a Government announcement on widows' pensions. The debate could be on the terrible murders in the north-west, how we respond to the BP crisis or whatever, but it should be on a cause that we feel, collectively, should be debated, and that our constituents would like us to debate. They might even want to turn the television on to see us talking about that subject live, rather than see a digest later with John Humphrys, Jeremy Paxman or somebody else.

However, we need to be clear that when we talk about a Back-Bench business committee—the Wright Committee made this absolutely plain—it is not a case of, "Tomorrow, the world!" Some distinguished colleagues on that Committee, including my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel), who spoke about this tonight, made it very clear that the Government have a right to discuss their business. It is part of the House's role to examine seriously legislation that the Government introduce, but at the end of the day, providing they have a majority, they should carry their business. We are talking about that bit of business that is non-legislative but which involves the keen interest of Members of Parliament.

Too often, we see Members of Parliament rattling through lists of things that they regard as important. If I may say, Mr Deputy Speaker, you are one of the greatest exponents of the early-day motion. With the proposed committee, we are almost turning the early-day motion into a motion that we can genuinely discuss at an early day. If there is so much interest in debating a particular topic, it could be on the agenda the next day or the day after that, even if we would need a further mechanism for that. The Government need not fear that their agenda will be taken over, but Parliament could for the first time say, "Our agenda, at least in part, is our possession," and it will be able to decide, on a small number of days, what we will discuss. That is very important—it is one of the key things that the committee will do.

There is a group of amendments on the Order Paper that addresses a questionable aspect of the Government's proposals; namely, the one-year termination. The Government proposal is that members of the Back-Bench business committee will be members for only one year, which is unlike tenures for other parliamentary offices and institutions, which last five years. Chairs and members of Select Committees—there can barely be a Member in the Chamber tonight who is not standing for membership of a Select Committee—will be in office for five years if they are successful, which gives a sense of continuity, and members and Chairs have the ability to learn a subject, and to grow as a Committee with their colleagues.

Let us imagine if we were on Select Committees for only one year. We would already be counting down the time, thinking, "There might be something else on the way. I might want to swap over. Somebody doesn't like me and I don't get on with so-and-so, and the chair is a bit of a pain." The Chair, of course, would be saying, "I've only got a year, but I really want to do something long term with this Select Committee, so let's pick up whatever is in the papers."

There is a more insidious problem. If Members are really good as Back Benchers, they might just cross Front Benchers—the wrong people. They might be so good—they might expose something, or scrutinise and call their those on their Front Bench to account—that instead of being lauded and given plaudits, they go on a list. I have been in the Whips office, and I have had my lists. The vow of silence forbids me from going further on that, but I can tell the House that we were not lining up to give accolades to the Gwyneth Dunwoodys—precisely the opposite. Let us imagine the whispering campaigns that would take place if Select Committee members or Chairs had a one-year tenure, and the undermining that could go on. People would say, "You can get rid of that Chairman and have a go yourself," or, "You're not on a Select Committee. So-and-so is not very good. She or he always creates a problem, so why don't you think about putting your name forward."

I know that colleagues on the Government Bench—the Leader and Deputy Leader of the House—do not intend that. However, much as I wish them longevity, they might not be here this time next year, and some less benign people might be. The latter might propose a review not to strengthen the Back-Bench business committee, but to undermine it. If someone took that chance, we would all greatly regret it, because we have a historic opportunity. This is the one and only time in my long political lifetime in this place that such an opportunity has come to pass. The right hon. and hon. Gentlemen have been incredibly flexible today, so I ask them, before the winding-up speeches, whether they wish to continue to oppose the amendments in my name and those of my colleagues by which we seek to provide the same sort of lifespan and stability that we expect as members or Chairs of Select Committees, so that this new bud can be protected should there be some stormy weather a year out that we cannot predict now.

Perhaps I am being too suspicious—it may be those years in the Whips Office and my brain is still a bit frazzled. We could pass the matter over if there were just one proposal to undermine the committee—the proposal to review the committee after one year. However, there is a second occasion when the committee might be undermined, because its members must be elected after

[Mr Allen]

a year. There is even a third occasion, because the Chair must be elected after a year. With those three proposals we are, as Sherlock Holmes said, starting to develop a pattern. With great respect, I say to Government Front Benchers that there is still a moment when they might ask themselves whether they want to perpetuate that pattern, or whether they could generously reconsider the matter and either allow the amendments to be made, or decide not to promote their proposals.

There is another, rather demeaning aspect, which I was surprised to see included. When the Back-Bench business committee meets, it will have arguments. I intervened, regretfully, on this point in the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire, who otherwise made some very good points. If the meetings are wholly in public, decision-making will be driven underground, because sometimes it is dirty and messy. It can be a compromise, with promises made, so that something else is done in six months' time when people will not know that it is the result of a deal already done. I would like as much of that as possible to take place openly in the business committee, but not necessarily in the full glare of publicity. If decision-making is totally open, people will behave differently, and we may end up with worse decisions.

Sir Peter Soulsby: Does my hon. Friend agree that this is a distinction with which we are already familiar in other Select Committees? Evidence is heard in public, but the deliberations take place in private, for the good reason that that enables us to work collaboratively and informally, and we come to better conclusions as a result.

Mr Allen: We are trying to move to a better place, but we cannot do it all in one go. There is not only a Back-Bench business committee now, but other business committees—the usual channels, which get together in a cabal, and, semi-formally, the Committee of Selection. Let us not pretend that we do not already have a business committee. We do, and it is underground and tolerates no dissent. Furthermore, it allows no Back-Bench influence. We need to strike a balance—I know that my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire was trying to do that. She was not laying out one particular view—neither am I—but we need to try to ensure that the Back-Bench business committee works effectively. If it does not, we cannot get to stage 2, which is a fully fledged business committee, with Back Benchers, Whips and others represented.

Natascha Engel: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election as Chairman of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee. In my speech, I was trying to say that our starting point should be that the Back-Bench business committee should be open and transparent to avoid what he—of all the members of the Wright Committee—most disliked, which is the murkiness of the usual channels. If that is our starting point, we can examine the question of meeting in private or public, but we need to establish how Back Benchers will make representations to the committee to have an influence on the business of the House. Those discussions should be held in public. The decisions that are then taken can be taken in private.

Mr Allen: With good will—and the only reason we are here tonight is because there is good will, and the Government have provided time on the Floor of the House tonight for this debate—we can overcome all those problems and ensure that the Back-Bench business committee works. The prize of making the committee responsible and practical is not just topical and sensible debates in the House, but the next stage, which will mean a fully fledged business committee. If new members can help to achieve that, over the next two to three years, it will be an irreversible step in parliamentary history.

I said that this process might be a little demeaning. When a subject for debate is chosen by the Government—as it always is at present—we do not say that someone must come and explain to us why it has been chosen. We do not, although perhaps we should, get the Chief Whip to the Dispatch Box to explain—

Mr Heath: It happens on Thursdays.

Mr Allen: Yes, but the Leader of the House explains the business on a Thursday. He does not have to get up before every debate and give a little reason or excuse for its subject matter. I accept that I am finding fault in a generally excellent set of proposals, but if I do not do so now, we could be stuck with the proposal that a member of the Back-Bench business committee must give an explanation before every topical debate, general debate and Adjournment debate. That is an onerous task. The Wright Committee expressed the view that every member of the Back-Bench business committee should play a part, so would the most junior member have to stand at the Dispatch Box to give a little trailer of what is to come? Would they be cross-examined by Members about why the committee did not pick an important constituency issue or why it neglected another vital issue? How silly! This is a piece of trivia that we should reject tonight. I hope that the Leader of the House, who has got so much right here, will not hang himself on a vote—whether he wins or loses it—on getting Back-Bench business committee members to explain why a particular subject was chosen, other than at business questions, as he does, where the committee chair would be available, as the Church Commissioner and others are during different question times, to chip in and answer questions, make sensible changes, and respond to requests. We would all like to see that.

Natascha Engel: I really do not understand. How then is the Back-Bench business committee accountable? How is it open and transparent, and how will other Back-Bench Members know how it has gone about selecting the business for the day?

Mr Allen: The Wright Committee went into this in detail. Essentially, we decided that the chair of the Back-Bench business committee would be seated in the House during business questions. The Leader of the House would give the normal business statement, and if someone had a specific question about Back-Bench business, the chair could answer it.

Natascha Engel: How is that different from the usual channels?

Mr Allen: It is very different from the usual channels, who do not say anything—in fact, are banned from saying anything—on the Floor of the House. So this

would make it more open. However, to insist that that person appears three or four, five or even a dozen times a week to explain why one person's topic, rather than those of 50 other people, was chosen would take it, in this case only, to a level of absurdity. That would fly in the face of all the other very sensible provisions in the Back-Bench business motions before us.

Sir Peter Soulsby: Would it not be even more absurd, because it would not be the same person every time? As I understand the proposals, it would be just a committee member making a brief statement, with no debate, no opportunity for questions and, frankly, no purpose.

Mr Allen: Indeed, but I do not want to labour the point, because it is just one piece of silliness in what is generally an excellent effort by Government Front-Bench Members. So I shall not continue on that.

I pay tribute to the Leader of the House for deciding to provide in Standing Orders for 27 days' debate on the Floor of the House. It is not easy to come to the House and say, "Someone else has got it right, and I will take that on board." That has always been the situation—in fact, he was quoted earlier saying it would always be the situation—but he, to his great credit, has taken that step forward and said that he will put it in the Standing Orders. I am sure that I speak for everyone who signed amendment (a) to motion 4 when I say that I am extremely grateful to him for doing that.

That is not all. On Select Committee membership, the response of the Leader and deputy Leader of the House to the newly elected Select Committee Chairs was excellent politics. I am sure that other colleagues will talk about this. Had they been involved a little earlier and been able to delve, holding their noses, into the usual channels, they could have helped much earlier. Instead, we have today's late decision to pull motion 13, which would have driven a coach and horses through the idea that Select Committees should be nimble and have, as standard, 11 members. As the Wright Committee and the Liaison Committee said, there is an optimum number of members on a Select Committee. Having served on many Select Committees, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will know that they start to ramble on, and get frayed at the edges, cliquey and difficult to manage when they get to 13, 14, 15 or 16 members. That is why the Liaison Committee and the Wright Committee said, "Nine is optimum, 11 is maximum," in order to try to put right what was, frankly, a cock-up by the usual channels, which resulted in Committees being bumped up to 16, thereby destroying their credibility and coherence. That is why there was such resistance from the Select Committee Chairs and why almost every newly elected Select Committee Chair signed the amendments requesting that the proposal not go ahead. It is to the great credit of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the House that they listened to those representations, so that we now have a much better situation than we did earlier. Motion 13, which is about membership, will therefore not proceed.

I hope very much that over the next week or so, the difficulty that we were all trying to address—the representation of minority parties on Select Committees—will be addressed sensibly. I hope too that minority parties will have representation on the territorial Committees—the Scottish and Welsh Committees—as they should do and as they are entitled to expect, and that the numbers are brought back to the Floor of the House. *[Interruption.]* I know that the Leader of the House is listening, even though his colleague the Secretary of State for International Development is talking to him—he is listening with one ear, which is his important ear. He will understand that next week, when we bring the motions relating to Select Committees back to the Floor of the House, and particularly those relating to Scottish and Welsh Committees, there should be minority representation as of right. Of course that might require a small increase in the numbers to get through the current problems, but the other Select Committees should remain at no more than 11, so that they can be effective.

The people who devised the system whereby Select Committees are bumped up to get round particular difficulties are people who do not care what Select Committees do. They do not mind if they are rambling, if they do not produce coherent reports or if they have lots of members who do not show up. The job of those people is just to set Select Committees up and get them out of the way, so that they can get on with the other business. That is no longer acceptable in a Parliament that elects its Select Committee Chairs and members by secret ballot. Until other people are elected by secret ballot, those people have absolutely no right whatever to destroy the work of one of our key arms of accountability, the Select Committees in this House.

I congratulate those on the Government Front Bench on withdrawing those proposals to change Select Committee memberships without one word of consultation with the Chairs of the Treasury Committee, the Justice Committee or the Defence Committee. That shows a contempt and arrogance on the part of certain people who are not in the Chamber towards the conduct of the House, and I for one hope that we will never see that again. In putting on record what I hope is an important caveat about the role and rights of minorities in this House—rights that must always be defended, which is something that you said in one of your hustings speeches you were determined to do, Mr Deputy Speaker, and something that I know you will stick to—let me say that it is important that we should continue to ensure that balance.

Finally, I would like to add my thanks to those who have gone before us—we are, as the saying goes, standing on the shoulders of previous generations. First and foremost is Tony Wright, but there were also many other members of the Wright Committee, such as our colleagues Chris Mullin—we can refer to them by name, as they are no longer Members—David Howarth, David Drew and Nick Palmer. I am sure that other colleagues can think of those who also worked incredibly hard—Phyllis Starkey is another—over a short period to produce the Wright report. They were aided by people such as Meg Russell from the constitution unit and many others. We took evidence from the Chief Whips and from academic and media experts to produce the Wright report. However, there are many others who worked incredibly hard. Robin Cook has been mentioned, but there are lots of other colleagues, from all parts of the House, Front-Bench and Back, who would have given their right arms to be here today.

I finish where I started. These past couple of weeks have been some of the most exciting weeks in our recent parliamentary history. Incredible changes have been made: changes to elect Select Committee Chairs and

[Mr Allen]

members; changes to elect, for the first time ever, those who serve in your Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, with the first woman ever to be elected to that position. This is a moment when real change is possible—we have a new Government and, for the first time in our present political system, a coalition—but it is a moment that will not last long. It is a moment that needs to be sustained by our new Members, and a moment that we need to continue tonight by supporting the amendments tabled by myself and 32 Back-Bench colleagues. I hope that as many colleagues as possible will join us in the Lobby to maintain the momentum that the reform of our House of Commons needs if we are genuinely to win back the trust of the British people.

8.45 pm

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election to your new post, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I wish to speak in support of amendment (a) to motion 11, tabled by the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), on providing more days for the discussion of private Members' Bills. There are all sorts of good democratic reasons for doing that. I had intended to expand on them a little tonight but, given the excellent, comprehensive and wide-ranging speeches that we have already heard, I shall merely say that I endorse the hon. Gentleman's comments, as well as those from the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson), on why there should be more days for the discussion of private Members' Bills than the Government are currently proposing.

I have not heard any good arguments against the hon. Gentleman's amendment. The Leader of the House of Commons put forward an argument that the hon. Member for Wellingborough described as consisting of "smoke and mirrors". With respect, I am not sure that I would even dignify it with that description. The Leader of the House's argument seemed to be that it was important to have more days between private Members' Bill sittings to allow things to go on outside the main Chamber. I was not sure what was meant by that. I can only assume that it was felt that that arrangement would allow the Committee stages of private Members' Bills to take place between the different Fridays, and that that would be easier to achieve if there were more time between the sittings allocated for private Members' Bills. If that is the case, it reveals a misunderstanding of the way in which the private Members' Bill system operates. If three successive Fridays were allocated for private Members' Bills, with a Second Reading one week, the Committee stage the next, and Third Reading on the third Friday, the next private Member's Bill in line would simply be debated on the subsequent Friday. As the hon. Member for Wellingborough has suggested, it is hard to see how allowing more days for private Members' Bills would jeopardise the Government's position.

It has been suggested that, if we were to adopt a private Members' Bill system that worked more effectively, fewer days could be allocated for the purpose of dealing with them if a positive outcome could be achieved in the time allowed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said earlier, however, we all know that what matters on private Members' Bill Fridays is not the quality of the measure, or even the number of Members present to support the Bill, but whether the proposer and those on the Government and Opposition Front Benches can find their way round the arcane procedures that are used on such Fridays—procedures that my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda described as "shenanigans". I have had the experience of taking three private Members' Bills through the House over the past six years, so I certainly know how the system works. I know some of the ways of getting round it, but I also know that it is a very unsatisfactory procedure for all concerned.

Addressing the way in which private Members' Bills are taken through Parliament will require a number of procedural changes, and I welcome the commitment from the new Chair of the Procedure Committee that his Committee will look at that at an early stage. One way of allowing private Members' Bills proper time for debate would be to move them from Fridays to Wednesdays or to Tuesday evenings, which would give Members the opportunity to attend the debates in much greater numbers than they are able to do on Fridays.

I take issue with the hon. Member for Wellingborough—I otherwise agreed with much of what he said about private Members' Bills—as it is not satisfactory to say that Members can decide whether or not to turn up on Fridays to consider those Bills. We all have to make such a decision at the moment, but because of our constituency commitments, it is difficult for us, with one or two exceptions, regularly to attend on Fridays—and the further away from London our constituencies are, the less easy it is for us to do so.

I would often like to participate in private Members' Bills debates on Fridays, and they often relate to issues that are important to many of my constituents who understandably expect me to debate them. They are likely to find out, however, not only that I and many other Members are unlikely to be there, but that what they thought was going to be debated on a particular day—and hoped had a chance to get through—is likely to be talked out because of the use of some parliamentary procedure and never reach any further stages. Not surprisingly, members of the public get angry at Members of Parliament and at the political system that allows that to happen.

I believe that Fridays should be recognised and named as a constituency day, on which Members can allocate their time to their constituencies. It should be named as a constituency day so that those out there who want to condemn any absence from Westminster as equivalent to some form of extended holiday can, if they wish, carry out a study to ensure that we are indeed in our constituencies as opposed to sunning ourselves on a beach. Let us make it a regular commitment, with Fridays acknowledged as a constituency day. I hope that the Back-Bench business committee will discuss this proposal at an early stage of its considerations. It could look into the constituency issues more widely, and demonstrate that MPs spending some of their time in their constituencies is essential to our democracy. We cannot represent the views of our constituents in Parliament if we are not regularly in touch with them.

That brings me to the issue of September sittings. On the one hand, I support the proposal to come back in September, as I believe that Robin Cook's initiative when he was Leader of the House was totally justified.

It is hard—indeed, impossible—to justify to the public why we need this long 13 or 14-week gap in the summer, in which we are unable to hold the Government to account unless the House is brought back for a special Sitting. On the other, we have to recognise that we cannot keep adding days and days, weeks and weeks to the parliamentary Session without it having knock-on effects somewhere else in the system.

We have to recognise that Members need to be in their constituencies and we also need to recognise, bluntly, that Members have family commitments. I have an interest here in that I have four children in either primary or secondary schools in Scotland; my children are likely to be on holiday from the end of June and will be back at school in mid-August. I would like to have the same opportunity that colleagues in England have to be at home for a fair part of my children's school holidays, but I will not have that opportunity. Anything that makes it harder for people to combine their role as Members of Parliament with a normal family life is not exactly going to encourage this place to be open and more representative of the public in the way that we all want. I hope that, in addition to considering the procedures for private Members' Bills, the Leader of the House will look at ways to recognise our constituency commitments as an important aspect of all MPs' work and reflect them in the sitting days of the House.

I invite the Deputy Leader of the House to clarify in his closing remarks the Government attitude towards an early proposal to move away from Friday sittings for private Members' Bills and replace them with Wednesday sittings. I certainly gained the impression that the Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader of the House were sympathetic to the idea of moving to Wednesdays for private Members' Bills. There was quite strong support for this across the House, so I hope that the Government will be able to give that proposal at least a favourable and general welcome today. I believe that such a proposal would be welcomed not just by individual Members, but by all those who want to see private Members' business getting the status it deserves.

8.54 pm

Mr Michael Meacher (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): I think we have had a good and thoughtful debate, although it had a rather rickety start. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen), who, in an eloquent and comprehensive speech, spelt out how exciting and important this period is in Parliament's history; and, like others, I pay tribute to the Government for the promptness with which they introduced Standing Orders to allow the establishment of a Back-Bench business committee. There is no doubt that that reflects the good will, commitment and supportiveness of the Leader of the House and his deputy, and I thank them for all that they did in preparing the orders.

The debate marks the culmination of a long struggle that stretches back many years to the formation of the cross-party Parliament First group, which has consistently and effectively campaigned for parliamentary democratic reform under the chairmanship of the former Member of Parliament for Stoke-on-Trent, Central, my very good friend Mark Fisher. We will, of course, continue to owe a great and continuing debt of gratitude to the Wright Committee, chaired so admirably by my former hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase.

Having issued those plaudits—with great sincerity—I have to say that I think the Government's initial ardour seems to have cooled just a tad. A number of modifications have crept in, which, in my view, have undermined some of the original commitment. It is because the combined effect of those slippages has clearly been to weaken the position of Back Benchers that, along with many of my hon. Friends, I have tabled a number of amendments designed to ensure that the Government's initial commitment survives.

The most important amendment relates to a question that has been raised a number of times, and because of its importance I make no apology for raising it again. It concerns the term of membership of the Chair. The order proposes that members and the Chair should serve for only one year after election, but we strongly reject that proposal on the ground that no other parliamentary Committee—including Select Committees—is being treated in that way. The elections to Select Committees, which, admirably, are taking place at this time—for the Chairs, who have been chosen, and the members, who are about to be chosen—are for a full Parliament of five years, and there seems to be no valid reason for diverging from that principle.

The Leader of the House was questioned about the issue, and I noted what he said. He spoke of the importance of accountability—of course we all agree with that—and of the need for new blood to refresh the Committee. Of course I understand that too, but it applies to Select Committees as well. I do not think that the Leader of the House took on board adequately the point made behind him about the question of independence. We believe that members, once elected, should be fully independent. We do not think that they should have continually to look over their shoulders, or feel liable to the Whips or Front-Bench pressure in order to secure repeat elections year after year.

Annual elections give too much power to the Whips and the establishment, allowing them to exert influence on the Chair not because he or she is inadequate or incompetent, but precisely because he or she is too effective. Let me suggest to the Leader of the House, in all friendliness, that annual elections will profoundly undercut the impact of reforms that are excellent in so many other ways.

Another issue—I was not going to mention it until my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North did so and I think he was right—is that the Government are proposing that, before any business starts that has been decided on by the Back-Bench business committee, a member of the committee must make a brief statement of up to five minutes to explain why the committee made that decision. Again—it hardly needs repeating—no one else does that in any other part of the House. No Minister is ever required to do that. If for any reason either the chair or any member of the committee wishes, with permission, to make such a statement, there is nothing to prevent them from doing so. However, to require that to happen in every case, when in most circumstances Members will be well aware of the thinking behind the decision, seems unnecessary, a waste of time or even obstructive.

The Leader of the House will know perfectly well that Members will want to get quickly on to the debate. They will not want to be diverted by what they will

[Mr Michael Meacher]

perceive as superfluous formality. I hope that he will consider whether that proposal should just be quietly dropped.

I recognise that, when the Leader of the House was questioned last Thursday, he went as far as he could, leaning in our direction, by offering an allocation of 27 days. He has now gone further still by agreeing to accept our amendment. I thank him warmly for that. However, always wanting to go a bit further, I think that 35 days would be even better, not least because it is only on the Floor of this House that the votes will take place. The Leader of the House pointed out that the implication of that, to which he is probably quite sympathetic, is that the House might have to sit into August. However, I hope that he will reconsider and be prepared to consult about various alternatives that could achieve the objective of 35 days on the Floor of the House without encroaching into August.

One of those options is the use of more Fridays. In previous years—indeed in previous decades—the House has sat on Fridays to a far greater degree than it does today. I am well aware that, whatever one suggests, it will not please everyone, but I hope that the Leader of the House will genuinely consult to find a way forward that is acceptable and desirable to the majority. The important point is that 27 Back-Bench business committee days in this House should be the bottom line, consolidated by the Standing Order and not dependent on discretion. That is why I am grateful—I am sure that we all are—that he has accepted the amendment.

By and large, this is an excellent set of Standing Orders, for which the Government are to be congratulated. I hope that the Leader of the House will accept that the amendments that we have had to table are not in any way designed to oppose what he is trying to do; they are designed to improve that. I hope that he and other hon. Members will look upon them in that spirit.

9.3 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Heath): We have had an extremely good debate. We have teased out a lot of the issues that relate to the establishment of the Back-Bench business committee and to the various proposals that we have put forward, which are in line with the Wright Committee proposals. There are some areas where the House will wish to take a view. There are others where there is a clear preponderance of voices, at least in the debate, in favour of what we have proposed.

I want to take a little time to deal with the issues that have been raised because they will repay further consideration. I will deal first with the right hon. Member for Doncaster Central (Ms Winterton). I am grateful for her general welcome for what we are doing. She asked some specific questions and she deserves specific answers. She asked whether there would be any impact on Opposition days. The answer is categorically no. The Standing Orders that relate to Opposition days are not to be changed, so there is no change to the present position. She asked me to confirm whether there will be substantive business to address in September and pointed out that we have recently had several general debates—which, in fact, I think the House has welcomed. I think it is equally fair to say to her that we are in the immediate aftermath of the Queen's Speech and it is necessary to get legislation right. One of the commitments we have made as a Government is not to present to the House legislation that is not in a fit state to be considered by it, because we felt that that was one of the failings of the previous Government. Very often there were subsequent amendments at later stages in a Bill's progress simply because the preparatory work was not done. I repeat again, however, that it is our intention to bring substantive business before the House in September, if the House agrees to meet in September, which is subject to a decision this evening.

The right hon. Lady was intervened on by her party colleague the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr Hamilton), who made the valuable point that we need to get the entire parliamentary calendar right. In respect of this evening's motions, we are talking about what we will do in September this year, but I am perfectly well aware that there are Members on both sides of the House who will want not only a degree of certainty about the future calendar of the House, but to express their views and concerns about their family circumstances, such as Scottish school holidays not coinciding with English school holidays. It is right for the House to consider that, and I hope we will be able to consult widely on what ought to be the future shape of the parliamentary calendar and bring back proposals that try as far as possible to accommodate the various different interests of Members of all parties.

The right hon. Lady asked about the costs of bringing the House back in September, and that point was strongly supported by the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts). He has expertise in this area, and I am grateful to him for his comments because he perfectly sensibly set out possible difficulties with a September sitting. I remember the last time we tried September sittings, and I do not think the arrangements behind the scenes lived up to the expectations of the House. In fact, I would go further and say that there was a suspicion that in some cases the maintenance that took place was planned to cause the maximum disruption to Members during that September sitting, rather than the minimum; that was certainly the way it seemed. I accept, however, that this is a difficult and complex building, and that it has to be maintained properly. We must take careful note of the hon. Gentleman's quite proper warnings that if we are going to meet regularly in September, we have to organise House maintenance and other works around that, and that we need proper forward planning to achieve that and we need to do so on the basis of proper advice. Those are perfectly sensible points.

On the specific point about the maintenance contracts, the right hon. Lady will recall that Mr Speaker wrote to all the parties following the decisions in February and March indicating that the House may wish to sit in September and saying that the possibility of September sittings would be taken into account in the organisation of contracts. I hope that that will be the case and that any disruption to those contracts will be kept to a minimum.

On the costs of a September sitting, I should point out that of course it costs the same for Members to sit regardless of the time of year. The total number of days that we are sitting is the relevant factor, not the dates on which we sit.

Mr Betts: As the hon. Gentleman acknowledges, cost is an important issue, particularly with regard to maintenance and forward planning. When he looks

further into this for future years, will he ensure that the Officers are allowed to produce their advice independently and that it goes to the appropriate Committees, and also that all Members of the House have access to the advice that is given about the costs and the advisability of postponing maintenance programmes and not carrying them out properly as Officers advise that they should be carried out?

Mr Heath: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I am not a member of the House of Commons Commission and I do not wish to tread on its toes, but what he says makes perfect sense to me and I shall ensure that that is communicated to members of the Commission.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Is the Deputy Leader of the House aware that radical and far-reaching repairs need to take place in the basement of this place, where high pressure steam calorifiers are located right next door to very high voltage electrical cables? That is so much the case that I understand that in the previous Parliament the House of Commons Commission even considered whether there would be a need to move out of this building. Has he taken that into consideration in these proposals?

Mr Heath: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I can say only that the House of Commons Commission is considering this. As I say, I am not a member of that body, but I would not be putting forward this proposal today—I should remind hon. Members that it is one of the things that the Wright Committee asked us to put before the House—if we felt that there were impossible hurdles to cross this year. However, this matter may be something that we need to consider in future years.

I wish now to deal with the points made by the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone)—they were also reflected in the comments made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Mark Lazarowicz)—about the important matter of private Members' Bills. The hon. Member for Wellingborough rightly drew attention to what I had said on a previous occasion when he tabled a similar amendment. He quoted me, so may I quote myself? That is always an invidious thing to do but as he quoted me, I shall quote myself. He said that I had said that "perhaps there should" be a change in Standing Orders. I stand by that comment—perhaps such a change should be made—because I want us to do a much better job of dealing with private Members' Bills.

We do not do a good job on these Bills at the moment and the process contains procedural hurdles that are absurd, and are seen as such by our constituents. Far too often, excellent measures that are introduced by individual Members do not make it to the statute book, despite substantial support in the House, simply because of the way the system works. I am therefore delighted that the Chair of the Procedure Committee, the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr Knight), has volunteered that his Committee will examine this as an early matter of priority. It is essential that the Committee does so and I hope that it will make proposals. I also hope that the issue of how many Fridays are made available will become redundant because we will have so improved the way we manage private Members' legislation that Fridays are not the crucial factor in deciding whether we make progress.

Mr Bone: Given the comments that the Deputy Leader of the House has just made and those made by Opposition Members, I accept that this is not about the number of Fridays, but about the quality of debate on private Members' Bills and how we put them through this House. Given what the Deputy Leader of the House said, and given this happy frame of mind that we are in tonight, I shall not press my amendment to the vote.

Mr Heath: I am delighted to have satisfied the hon. Gentleman in his quest; we are making progress.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel) for her comments. She has made it perfectly clear throughout that she was a member of the Wright Committee who did not agree with all its proposals. She has taken a proper position. She had a minority view, she has expressed it and she has been consistent in her position. She amplified that a little by raising specific issues in tonight's debate, so I shall deal with them. She asked whether members of the public will be excluded from the meetings of the Back-Bench business committee and indeed whether Members of Parliament who are not members of that committee will be allowed into the meetings to hear the deliberations. The rules that will apply will be the same as those for any Select Committee. I genuinely think that it is not for a Minister of the Crown to tell the Back-Bench business committee how it should undertake its role. However, I hope that it will consider, carefully and early on, how it will manage its business, and in what circumstances it will have open meetings and in what circumstances it will not, in the same way as Select Committees across the House do. She has raised an important issue, and it is a matter that the Back-Bench business committee—if we constitute it—will need to consider.

The hon. Lady asked about the party political make-up of the committee and whether seats would be allocated in the same way as for normal Select Committees or whether the system would be entirely open. As she knows, a formula reflecting the composition of the House is generally used, and it is intended that that formula will be used to determine the make-up of this committee. However, there is an issue of how we accommodate the minority parties in the Select Committee process, and I shall come later to the points made by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart).

The hon. Lady also asked whether a Chair of another Select Committee could stand for election as chair of the Back-Bench business committee or one of its members. Nothing in the proposed Standing Orders would preclude that, but she raises an important point. It would be extraordinarily bad practice if a Chair of another Select Committee stood for election to the Back-Bench committee because their membership would inevitably raise the suspicion that that Member's Select Committee had enhanced access to the business of the House. I would hope that that would not happen, so I strenuously urge those hon. Members who were lucky enough to be elected as Select Committee Chairs not to put themselves forward for the Back-Bench business committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson) made an excellent contribution to the debate. She emphasised the frustration that we did not get the committee up and running before the general

[Mr Heath]

election. The previous Government failed to give us the opportunity to make the necessary changes to the Standing Orders, so I am proud of the fact that, in the first week following the conclusion of the Queen's Speech debate, the House is determining the matter—that represents excellent progress.

My hon. Friend emphasised the need for a minimum of 27 days' Back-Bench business in the Chamber and, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said, we are happy to accept amendment (a) to motion 4 because that was always our intention. She also asked whether further progress could be made, including on the innovative use of time. I hope that we can find innovative ways of using time more effectively, and of course we firmly intend to move to a House business committee within three years. That will mean that we have a totally different way of managing the House's business, which will be a good thing.

I think I have already dealt with my hon. Friend's point about private Members' Bills. She also said that the Wright Committee had further ideas that she would like to see progressed, such as some about public engagement. I agree that the Committee made further excellent suggestions. We have not lost sight of them and hope to come back to them in the future.

Jo Swinson: Given the assurances about private Members' Bills that we have heard from my hon. Friend and from the Chair of the Procedure Committee, I will not press amendment (b) to motion 4 to a Division. However, my hon. Friend has not answered my question about whether Ministers will vote on the membership of the Back-Bench business committee, or whether they will follow the self-denying ordinance that applies to elections for Select Committee Chairs.

Mr Heath: My hon. Friend is right that I did not respond to that question. I will take her points back to my colleagues in government because there is clearly an argument that, as she says, it should not be for the Government to elect those who serve on the Back-Bench committee. That issue is not specifically addressed in the motions, but we ought to listen carefully to her point.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr Tyrie) on his election as Chair of the Treasury Committee. He was absolutely right to say that we are lucky to have such an enlightened Leader of the House. He likened the relationship between the Leader of the House and the Chief Whip to that between Esau and Jacob, although I am not quite sure who is in possession of the mess of pottage. He is right to say that the Government's attitude is to bring forward proposals for modernisation and then to take them forward. It is about not just paying lip service to an idea, but actually making it happen, which is what we are doing this evening.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the representation of minority parties, and of course that was the main thrust of the argument of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire. Wright has something to say on the subject. The Wright Committee report says:

> "Members in individual cases can be added to specific committees to accommodate the legitimate demands of the smaller parties."

I repeat to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and I are absolutely determined to find ways to make sure that the minority parties are properly represented in the Select Committee system. I have to say to him that enlarging the Committees beyond the size that Wright recommended and that the Liaison Committee wanted is probably not the way to do it. We have to find an alternative way of accommodating his request, but my door is certainly always open to him and his colleagues, so that we can discuss the matter further and make sure—with, I think, a degree of dispatch—that something happens.

The hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) made the point that the Wright Committee suggested having an added Speaker's Member on Select Committees. Unfortunately, the Committee did not make that a recommendation; I wish that it had, because it would have made our life a little easier when dealing with this difficult problem.

The hon. Member for Stone (Mr Cash) raised the issue of European business—no surprise there, perhaps—but it is specifically mentioned in the motions as "government business". Indeed, in the second report of the Wright Committee, the draft Standing Order changes specify that that should be the case. Of course, when we have the House committee, we will be able to enter into the sort of partnership arrangement suggested, and we will be able to make sure that those matters are dealt with properly. I have to say that I was a little put off by the hon. Gentleman accusing me of sophistry in my approach to annual elections; I had not said a word on the subject. I must have given him a sophistical look at some stage. I will deal with the issue of annual elections in just a moment.

Mr Allen: I look forward to the hon. Gentleman's remarks on the committee's annual nature, given that every other Committee runs for five years. We started off with the possibility of 10 Divisions tonight, but because of the generosity of Members in all parts of the Chamber, and because of the strength of the replies from the Front-Bench team, we are now down to five Divisions, virtually all of which refer to the question: why should the committee not have a life of more than one year? Why is it on probation? If the hon. Gentleman can give us some satisfaction by saying that he will take the issue away and look at it seriously, and not press the proposal tonight, we may all get home a lot quicker than we would if there were five Divisions.

Mr Heath: I was about to say what a huge contribution the hon. Gentleman had made to the debate not just this evening, but over the past few years in which he has pressed the case for reform. That is appreciated. He, among others, has been making sure that we are true to our word on many of these subjects. We have already agreed that we will accept his amendment (a) to motion 4 on the issue of the 27 days. I will go further: having listened to what he and the right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Mr Meacher) said, we are prepared not to press forward this evening with the proposal for the introductory statement. We hear what they say, and we will accept the relevant amendment on that basis.

As far as the one-year election is concerned, that is a suggestion that puts the Back-Bench business committee into the hands of Back-Bench Members, making it accountable to them. It may be that Members do not

want to have the committee in their hands; they may wish to have a one-off election and not review the matter, but it is right that the House has the decision. That is not a matter for the Government and Ministers; it is for the House to decide whether it believes that the proposal is a useful introduction. I am happy for the House to have its say on the matter.

To recap, we will not move motion 13. We will accept amendment (a) on 27 days tabled by the hon. Member for Nottingham North and the amendments on the introductory statement. Annual election is a matter for the House to decide. On private Members' Bills, I hope we will make rapid progress in improving the situation. We need to address the representation of minorities as a matter of urgency. September sittings are, again, a matter for the House.

We have not in any way resiled from the spirit of the Wright Committee recommendations, but we cannot treat them as holy writ because, as in so much of holy writ, there are occasionally internal contradictions. There are competing pressures. The House would not thank us if we made sure that there were no end of general debates on the Floor of the House, but we had no time, for instance, for Report stage of important Bills. We have tried to be practical about it, and I hope we have succeeded in that intention.

Mr Tom Clarke: I very much welcome the tone of the Deputy Leader of the House and the progress that we have made tonight on private Members' Bills, but given that some of the impediments have come not from here but from another place, can we assume that discussions are taking place?

Mr Heath: I am happy to give that assurance. We need to look at the matter in the round.

It has been a frustrating pathway to reform. Sometimes there has seemed to be little movement, but we have an opportunity this evening, and I am particularly pleased that so many new Members will have the opportunity to participate in the decision. Usually, when we talk about historic days in the House of Commons, the expression is overblown, but I genuinely believe that this evening is an opportunity to change the relationship between the Executive and the legislature. If right hon. and hon. Members believe in Parliament and in a strong legislature, if they believe that a strong Parliament leads to stronger government, they will support the proposals on the table this evening. I commend them to the House.

Mr Speaker: I must now put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on motions 2 to 15 and selected amendments which may then be moved. I will go through the motions in the order in which they stand on the Order Paper, dealing first with selected amendments to each such motion.

Amendment proposed to motion 2: (e), in paragraph (2), leave out from "and" to end of line and insert "fifteen other Members, of whom eight".—*(Pete Wishart.)*

The House divided: Ayes 100, Noes 331.

Division No. 6] **[9.27 pm**

AYES

Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Blackman, Bob
Blackman-Woods, Roberta
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blunkett, rh Mr David
Bray, Angie
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Brown, Mr Russell
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Byrne, rh Mr Liam
Campbell, Mr Alan
Cash, Mr William
Clark, Katy
Clwyd, rh Ann
Connarty, Michael
Crausby, Mr David
Creasy, Stella
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Tony
David, Mr Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Dobbin, Jim
Docherty, Thomas
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Doyle, Gemma
Dugher, Michael
Durkan, Mark
Elliott, Julie
Engel, Natascha
Evans, Chris
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Goggins, rh Paul
Green, Kate
Griffith, Nia
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harris, Mr Tom
Hendrick, Mark
Hilling, Julie
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hood, Mr Jim
Hosie, Stewart
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jones, Helen
Keeley, Barbara
Lavery, Ian
Leslie, Chris
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian
Mann, John
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McKechin, Ann
McKinnell, Catherine
Mearns, Ian
Miller, Andrew
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morris, Grahame M.
Nash, Pamela
Onwurah, Chi
Percy, Andrew
Perkins, Toby
Pound, Stephen
Reynolds, Emma
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, Angus
Roy, Mr Frank
Sarwar, Anas
Shuker, Gavin
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Spellar, rh Mr John
Stanley, rh Sir John
Tami, Mark
Tomlinson, Justin
Twigg, Stephen
Watts, Mr Dave
Weir, Mr Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Williamson, Chris
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wishart, Pete
Woodcock, John
Wright, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil
and
Jonathan Edwards

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Aldous, Peter
Alexander, rh Danny
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Bagshawe, Ms Louise
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bain, Mr William
Baker, Norman
Baker, Steve
Baldry, Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Betts, Mr Clive
Bingham, Andrew
Binley, Mr Brian
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackwood, Nicola
Blomfield, Paul
Blunt, Mr Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Mr Steve
Brokenshire, James
Brooke, Annette
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona

Bruce, rh Malcolm
Buckland, Mr Robert
Burley, Mr Aidan
Burns, Conor
Burns, Mr Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burstow, Mr Paul
Burt, Alistair
Burt, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Cable, rh Vince
Cairns, Alun
Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crockart, Mike
Crouch, Tracey
Curran, Margaret
Dakin, Nic
Davidson, Mr Ian
Davies, David T. C. *(Monmouth)*
Davies, Glyn
Davis, rh Mr David
de Bois, Nick
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
Dorries, Nadine
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Jonathan
Evennett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farron, Tim
Featherstone, Lynne
Field, Mr Mark
Foster, Mr Don
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Garnier, Mr Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gilbert, Stephen
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodman, Helen
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Damian
Greening, Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, Robert
Hames, Duncan
Hamilton, Mr David
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hands, Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, Mr John
Heath, Mr David
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollingbery, George
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Hopkins, Kris
Horwood, Martin
Howarth, Mr Gerald
Howell, John
Hughes, Simon
Huhne, rh Chris
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hunter, Mark
Huppert, Dr Julian
Hurd, Mr Nick
Illsley, Mr Eric
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, Sajid
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kendall, Liz
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lancaster, Mark
Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
Latham, Pauline
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Jessica
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leech, Mr John
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Mr Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lloyd, Stephen
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
Mactaggart, Fiona
Main, Mrs Anne
Maude, rh Mr Francis
May, rh Mrs Theresa
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, Esther
Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Patrick
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, Maria
Mills, Nigel
Milton, Anne
Moore, rh Michael
Morgan, Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Mundell, rh David
Munn, Meg
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Ian
Murray, Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Ollerenshaw, Eric
Opperman, Guy
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, Mr James
Parish, Neil
Patel, Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Pickles, rh Mr Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, rh Mr John
Reckless, Mark
Redwood, rh Mr John
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reevell, Simon
Reid, Mr Alan
Reynolds, Jonathan
Robathan, Mr Andrew
Robertson, Hugh
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rogerson, Dan
Rosindell, Andrew
Roy, Lindsay
Rudd, Amber
Russell, Bob
Rutley, David
Sanders, Mr Adrian
Sandys, Laura
Scott, Mr Lee
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Sir Robert
Soubry, Anna
Soulsby, Sir Peter
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mr Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stuart, Mr Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sturdy, Julian
Swales, Ian
Swayne, Mr Desmond
Swinson, Jo
Swire, Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thornberry, Emily
Thurso, John
Timpson, Mr Edward
Truss, Elizabeth
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Uppal, Paul
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Walley, Joan
Ward, Mr David
Watkinson, Angela
Weatherley, Mike
Webb, Steve
Wharton, James
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, Mr John
Wicks, rh Malcolm
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, rh Mr David
Williams, Mr Mark
Williams, Roger
Williams, Stephen
Williamson, Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wright, Jeremy

Wright, Simon
Yeo, Mr Tim
Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr Shailesh Vara and
Miss Chloe Smith

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after 9.30 pm, the Speaker put the remaining Questions (Order, this day),

Amendment proposed to motion 2: (b), in paragraph 3, leave out "Session" and insert "Parliament".—*[Mr Allen.]*

The House divided: Ayes 171, Noes 263.

Division No. 7] **[9.42 pm**

AYES

Aldous, Peter
Allen, Mr Graham
Amess, Mr David
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bagshawe, Ms Louise
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Baker, Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barwell, Gavin
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Binley, Mr Brian
Blomfield, Paul
Bottomley, Peter
Brady, Mr Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Mr Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Annette
Bruce, rh Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buckland, Mr Robert
Burden, Richard
Cable, rh Vince
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cash, Mr William
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clark, Katy
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, rh Ann
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crockart, Mike
Dakin, Nic
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Durkan, Mark
Edwards, Jonathan
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Engel, Natascha
Evans, Graham
Farron, Tim
Field, Mr Mark
Foster, Mr Don
Freeman, George
Gapes, Mike
Garnier, Mark
George, Andrew
Gilbert, Stephen
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodman, Helen
Gray, Mr James
Hames, Duncan
Hamilton, Mr David
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harris, Mr Tom
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hemming, John
Hendrick, Mark
Hilling, Julie
Hinds, Damian
Hollingbery, George
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Horwood, Martin
Hosie, Stewart
Hughes, Simon
Huppert, Dr Julian
Illsley, Mr Eric
Jackson, Mr Stewart
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jones, Susan Elan
Kelly, Chris
Kendall, Liz
Kirby, Simon
Lancaster, Mark
Leech, Mr John
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Mr Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Leslie, Chris
Lewis, Dr Julian
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lloyd, Stephen
Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Main, Mrs Anne
Mann, John
McCartney, Karl
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
Mercer, Patrick
Miller, Andrew
Mills, Nigel
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morgan, Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Munn, Meg
Nash, Pamela
Nuttall, Mr David
Owen, Albert
Parish, Neil
Percy, Andrew
Perkins, Toby
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pugh, Dr John
Reckless, Mark
Redwood, rh Mr John
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reevell, Simon
Reynolds, Jonathan
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, Angus
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rogerson, Dan
Rosindell, Andrew
Roy, Lindsay
Russell, Bob
Sanders, Mr Adrian
Shuker, Gavin
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Sir Robert
Soulsby, Sir Peter
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stuart, Mr Graham
Swales, Ian
Swinson, Jo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thornberry, Emily
Thurso, John
Tomlinson, Justin
Truss, Elizabeth
Turner, Mr Andrew
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Walley, Joan
Ward, Mr David
Weatherley, Mike
Weir, Mr Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, Mr John
Wicks, rh Malcolm
Williams, Mr Mark
Williams, Roger
Williams, Stephen
Williamson, Chris
Wishart, Pete
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wright, Simon
Yeo, Mr Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Michael Meacher and
Mr Peter Bone

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Alexander, rh Danny
Andrew, Stuart
Bain, Mr William
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, Gregory
Bebb, Guto
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berger, Luciana
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blunkett, rh Mr David
Blunt, Mr Crispin
Bradley, Karen
Bray, Angie
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Mr Steve
Brokenshire, James
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Brown, Mr Russell
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona
Burley, Mr Aidan
Burns, Conor
Burns, Mr Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burstow, Mr Paul
Burt, Alistair
Burt, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Byrne, rh Mr Liam
Cairns, Alun
Campbell, Mr Alan
Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Chishti, Rehman
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Crausby, Mr David
Creasy, Stella
Crouch, Tracey
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Tony
Curran, Margaret
David, Mr Wayne
Davidson, Mr Ian
Davies, David T. C. *(Monmouth)*
Davies, Glyn
de Bois, Nick
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim
Docherty, Thomas
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
Dorries, Nadine
Doyle, Gemma

Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Dugher, Michael
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Elliott, Julie
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Eustice, George
Evans, Chris
Evans, Jonathan
Evennett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Featherstone, Lynne
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Garnier, Mr Edward
Gauke, Mr David
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gilmore, Sheila
Glen, John
Goggins, rh Paul
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Damian
Green, Kate
Greening, Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffith, Nia
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, Robert
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hands, Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, Mr John
Heath, Mr David
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Mr Gerald
Howell, John
Huhne, rh Chris
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hunter, Mark
Hurd, Mr Nick
Irranca-Davies, Huw
James, Margot
Javid, Sajid
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr David
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Marcus
Keeley, Barbara
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
Latham, Pauline
Lavery, Ian
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Jessica
Lee, Dr Phillip
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, Mr David
Lloyd, Tony
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
Maude, rh Mr Francis
May, rh Mrs Theresa
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McCartney, Jason
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McKechin, Ann
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, Esther
Mearns, Ian
Menzies, Mark
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, Maria
Milton, Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, rh Michael
Morris, David
Morris, Grahame M.
Morris, James
Mundell, rh David
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Ian
Murray, Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Ollerenshaw, Eric
Onwurah, Chi
Opperman, Guy
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, Mr James
Patel, Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Pickles, rh Mr Eric
Pound, Stephen
Prisk, Mr Mark
Randall, rh Mr John
Reid, Mr Alan
Reynolds, Emma
Robathan, Mr Andrew
Robertson, Hugh
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Roy, Mr Frank
Rudd, Amber
Rutley, David
Sandys, Laura
Sarwar, Anas
Scott, Mr Lee
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Soubry, Anna
Spellar, rh Mr John
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mr Mark
Stanley, rh Sir John
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Stunell, Andrew
Sturdy, Julian
Swayne, Mr Desmond
Swire, Mr Hugo
Tami, Mark
Timpson, Mr Edward
Uppal, Paul
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, Mr Dave
Webb, Steve
Wharton, James
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, rh Mr David
Williamson, Gavin
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Woodcock, John
Wright, David
Wright, Jeremy
Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr Shailesh Vara and
Miss Chloe Smith

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment (c) to motion 2 made: Leave out paragraph (8)—*(Mr Allen.)*

Main Question, as amended, agreed to.

That the following new Standing Order be made:—

(1) There shall be a select committee, called the Backbench Business Committee, to determine the backbench business to be taken in the House and in Westminster Hall on days, or parts of days, allotted for backbench business.

(2) The committee shall consist of a chair and seven other Members, of whom four shall be a quorum.

(3) The chair and other members of the committee shall continue as members of the committee for the remainder of the Session in which they are elected unless replaced under the provisions of Standing Order No. (Election of Backbench Business Committee).

(4) The chair and members of the committee shall be elected in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. (Election of Backbench Business Committee).

(5) No Member who is a Minister of the Crown or parliamentary private secretary or a principal opposition front-bench spokesperson shall be eligible to be the chair or a member of the committee: the Speaker's decision shall be final on such matters.

(6) The committee shall have power to invite Government officials to attend all or part of any of its meetings.

(7) The committee shall determine the backbench business to be taken—

(a) in the House on any day, or any part of any day, allotted under paragraph

(3A) of Standing Order No. 14, and

(b) in Westminster Hall, in accordance with paragraph (3A) of Standing Order No. 10,

and shall report its determinations to the House.

ELECTION OF BACKBENCH BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That the following new Standing Order be made:—

(1)(a) The election of the chair of the Backbench Business Committee shall take place at the start of each Session on a day to be determined by the Speaker.

(b) Nominations of candidates shall be in writing and shall be received by the Clerk of the House between 10 am and 5 pm on the day before the day appointed for election.

(c) Each nomination shall consist of a signed statement made by the candidate declaring their willingness to stand for election, accompanied by the signatures of not fewer than twenty nor more than twenty-five Members, of whom no fewer than ten shall be members of the candidate's party and no fewer than ten shall be members of any other party or no party.

(d) No Member may sign the statement of more than one candidate.

(e) As soon as practicable following the close of nominations, a list of the candidates and their accompanying signatories shall be published.

(f) Arrangements for the election shall follow those set out in paragraphs (9) to (14) of Standing Order No. 122B (Election of committee chairs), save that in sub-paragraph (11)(e) the opening hours of the ballot shall be between eleven o'clock and one o'clock and in paragraph (12) reference to variation of timings shall be read as applying also to the timings in sub-paragraph (b) and (f) of this paragraph.

(2)(a)The election of members of the Backbench Business Committee shall take place on a day to be determined by the Speaker as soon as practicable after the election of the chair.

(b) Nominations of candidates shall be in writing and shall be received by the Clerk of the House between 10 am and 5 pm on the day before the day appointed for election.

(c) Each nomination shall consist of a signed statement made by the candidate declaring their willingness to stand for election, accompanied by the signatures of not fewer than twelve nor more than fifteen Members.

(d) As soon as practicable following the close of nominations, a list of the candidates and their accompanying signatories shall be published.

(e) The provisions set out in paragraph (5) (a) to (d) and (f) of Standing Order No. 2A (Election of the Deputy Speakers) shall apply to the election of members of the committee.

(f) The ballot shall be counted under the Single Transferable Vote system, with constraints that of those elected: such a number of candidates shall come from each party represented in the House or those of no party as shall be determined and announced in advance by the Speaker, in such a way as to ensure that the committee including the Chair reflects as closely as possible the composition of the House, and (ii) at least two women and two men shall be elected.

(3)(a) Standing Order No. 122C (Resignation or removal of chairs of select committees) shall apply to the chair of the Backbench Business Committee, save for paragraph (2) of that Order; and any election following a vacancy in the chair shall be held under the provisions of paragraph (1) (b) to (f) above.

(b) Where a member of the committee has ceased to be a member of this House or has given written notice to the Speaker of a wish to resign from the committee, the Speaker shall make arrangements for the election by the House of a replacement using the Alternative Vote System as set out in paragraph (11) of Standing Order No. 122B (Election of committee chairs), and may give such directions on the party affiliation required for a valid candidature as are necessary to preserve the balance of parties on the committee as referred to in paragraph (2)(f)(i) above.—*(Sir George Young.)*

BACKBENCH BUSINESS (AMENDMENT OF STANDING ORDERS)

Motion made and Question proposed,

That Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business) be amended by inserting at the end of line 40—

'(3A) Thirty-five days or its equivalent shall be allotted in each session for proceedings in the House and in Westminster Hall on backbench business; the business determined by the Backbench Business Committee shall have precedence over government business (other than any order of the day or notice of motion on which the question is to be put forthwith) on those days; and the provisions of paragraph (2)(c) of this Standing Order shall apply to any of those days taken in the House in the form of half-days.

(3B) For the purposes of paragraph (3A) above, a Thursday sitting in Westminster Hall at which the business is appointed by the Backbench Business Committee shall count as one half-day and a topical debate shall count as one quarter-day.

(3C) Backbench business comprises all proceedings in the Chamber relating to any motion or order of the day except:

(a) government business, that is proceedings relating to government bills, financial business, proceedings under any Act of Parliament, or relating to European Union Documents, or any other motion in the name of a Minister of the Crown;

(b) opposition business under paragraph (2) above;

(c) motions for the adjournment of the House under paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 9 (Sittings of the House), private Members' motions for leave to bring in bills under Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in bills and nomination of select committees at commencement of public business) and private Members' bills under paragraphs (4) to (9) below;

(d) proceedings relating to private business;

(e) any motion to amend this order or Standing Order No. (Backbench Business Committee);

(f) business set down at the direction of, or given precedence by, the Speaker.

(3D) The proceedings to be taken as backbench business shall be determined by the Backbench Business Committee, as set out in Standing Order No. (Backbench Business Committee).'—*(Sir George Young.)*

Amendment (a) to motion 4 made: in paragraph (3A), after "backbench business", insert

'of which at least twenty-seven shall be allotted for proceedings in the House".

Main Question, as amended, agreed to.

That Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business) be amended by inserting at the end of line 40—

'(3A) Thirty-five days or its equivalent shall be allotted in each session for proceedings in the House and in Westminster Hall on backbench business of which at least twenty-seven shall be allotted for proceedings in the House; the business determined by the Backbench Business Committee shall have precedence over government business (other than any order of the day or notice of motion on which the question is to be put forthwith) on those days; and the provisions of paragraph (2)(c) of this Standing Order shall apply to any of those days taken in the House in the form of half-days.

(3B) For the purposes of paragraph (3A) above, a Thursday sitting in Westminster Hall at which the business is appointed by the Backbench Business Committee shall count as one half-day and a topical debate shall count as one quarter-day.

(3C) Backbench business comprises all proceedings in the Chamber relating to any motion or order of the day except:

(a) government business, that is proceedings relating to government bills, financial business, proceedings under any Act of Parliament, or relating to European Union Documents, or any other motion in the name of a Minister of the Crown;

(b) opposition business under paragraph (2) above;

(c) motions for the adjournment of the House under paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 9 (Sittings of the House), private Members' motions for leave to bring in bills under Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in bills and nomination of select committees at commencement of public business) and private Members' bills under paragraphs (4) to (9) below;

(d) proceedings relating to private business;

(e) any motion to amend this order or Standing Order No. (Backbench Business Committee);

(f) business set down at the direction of, or given precedence by, the Speaker.

(3D) The proceedings to be taken as backbench business shall be determined by the Backbench Business Committee, as set out in Standing Order No. (Backbench Business Committee).'

WESTMINSTER HALL (AMENDMENT OF STANDING ORDERS)

Ordered,

That Standing Order No. 10 (Westminster Hall) be amended as follows:—

(1) In paragraph (3) leave out 'Subject to paragraph (13) below' and insert 'On Tuesdays and Wednesdays';

(2) After paragraph (3) insert—

'(3A) Subject to paragraph (13), the business taken at any Thursday sitting in Westminster Hall shall be such as the Backbench Business Committee shall determine';

(3) In paragraph (13)—

(a) leave out 'not more than six' and insert 'twenty';

(b) at end add ', but the Speaker may appoint fewer than twenty days with the agreement of the Liaison Committee'.—*(Sir George Young.)*

TOPICAL DEBATES (AMENDMENTS OF STANDING ORDERS)

Ordered,

That the Standing Orders be amended as follows:—

(1) In Standing Order No. 24A (Topical debates),

(a) in paragraph (1) leave out 'A Minister of the Crown' and insert 'The Backbench Business Committee', and

(b) leave out paragraphs (3) to (8).

(2) In Standing Order No. 47 (Time limits on speeches),

(a) after paragraph (3) insert—

'(3A) The Speaker may announce, at or before the commencement of a topical debate in respect of which he has made or intends to make an announcement under paragraph (1) of this order, that speeches by a Minister of the Crown and any Member speaking on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition shall be limited to ten minutes and he may direct any such Member who has spoken for that period to resume his seat forthwith.'; and

(b) in line 31, after '(3)' insert 'or (3A)'.—*(Sir George Young.)*

PAY FOR CHAIRS OF SELECT COMMITTEES

Resolved,

That this House expresses the opinion that the Resolution of the House of 30 October 2003, relating to Pay for Chairs of Select Committees (No.2), should be further amended by inserting after 'the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee', 'the Backbench Business Committee'.—*(Sir George Young.)*

PAY FOR CHAIRS OF SELECT COMMITTEES (NO. 2)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Ordered,

That the Resolution of the House of 30 October 2003, relating to Pay for Chairs of Select Committees (No. 2), be further amended by inserting after 'the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee', 'the Backbench Business Committee'.—*(Sir George Young.)*

BACKBENCH BUSINESS COMMITTEE (REVIEW)

Resolved

That, in the opinion of this House, the operation of the Backbench Business Committee should be reviewed at the beginning of the next Session of Parliament.—*(Sir George Young.)*

SEPTEMBER SITTINGS

Resolved,

That this House reaffirms the importance of its function of holding the Government to account: and accordingly asks the Government to put to this House specific proposals for sitting periods in September 2010.—*(Sir George Young.)*

Mr Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): No.

Mr Speaker: Far be it for me to suggest that any hon. Member—still less right hon. Member—is behaving vexatiously. I cannot believe it for a moment.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS)

Ordered,

That Private Members's Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 22 October, 12 and 19 November and 3 December 2010 and 21 January, 4 and 11 February, 4 and 18 March, 1 April, 13 May and 10 and 17 June 2011.—*(Sir George Young.*

DEFERRED DIVISIONS (TIMING)

Ordered,

That Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) be amended as follows:—

(1) in line 37, leave out 'half-past twelve o'clock' and insert 'half-past eleven o'clock'; and

(2) in line 44, by leaving out 'one and a half hours after half-past twelve o'clock' and inserting 'two and a half hours after half-past eleven o'clock'.—*(Sir George Young.)*

SELECT COMMITTEES (MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT CHANGE)

Ordered,

That Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended in the table in paragraph (2), by leaving out item 2 (Children, Schools and Families) and inserting in the appropriate place:

'Education	Department for Education	11'

—*(Sir George Young.)*

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, on Tuesday 22 June, the House shall meet at 11.30 am and references to specific times in the Standing Orders of this House shall apply as if that day were a Wednesday.—*(Sir George Young.)*

Private Wheel-Clamping Companies

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(James Duddridge.)*

Mr Speaker: Before the right hon. Member for Doncaster Central (Ms Winterton) starts her speech—*[Interruption.]* Order. Can I please ask right hon. and hon. Members to leave the Chamber quickly and quietly, and to grant the right hon. Lady the same courtesy that they would want if they had the Adjournment debate?

10.1 pm

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster Central) (Lab): I very much welcome the opportunity to debate the activities of private wheel-clamping companies, particularly in Doncaster Central. I also very much welcome the fact that this is, as I understand it, the Minister's first appearance at the Dispatch Box. I am utterly confident that when she hears my arguments, she will make it one of her missions as a Minister to take up the ideas that I am about to put forward.

I first became involved in the issue 14 years ago, when I realised the extent of the misery and distress that rogue wheel-clamping companies were causing, not only in Doncaster Central, but in other parts of Yorkshire—and, for that matter, in hot spots around the country. Just how appalling some of those companies behave has been highlighted by both the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club, which have received literally thousands of complaints from their members. I would like to thank Edmund King—now at the AA—for all the help that he has given me and other Members of the House in our campaign to outlaw unacceptable practices.

The media have also recognised how outraged the public are about the problem. There are countless stories of truly unacceptable practices by some companies. I want to thank the *Doncaster Free Press* for the campaign that it has been running with me to highlight how vulnerable elderly people, young mothers with children and, frankly, people who can least afford it are being stung for large amounts of money. I say "stung" because many such companies use every trick in the book to get round the legislation as it stands.

The *Doncaster Free Press* and I have received endless complaints from local people about a company called Park Rite, which operates in Doncaster. The company has concealed signs covered with minute writing, so that it is impossible to read that a particular location is a private car park, and it charges extortionate fees, often by charging two or three times for the same parking transgression—once for clamping and once for towing away, and then again for storage. There are complaints about the company's refusal to have a proper appeals procedure, using mobile phones that are not answered and demanding cash only. Park Rite accepts no other form of payment, such as cheques or debit cards, which has led to people being frogmarched to cash points, with the clampers standing over them to make sure that they come up with the money.

The *Free Press* and I launched a petition to call on Park Rite to change the way in which it was operating. We were supported by two local companies, Cooplands and Weldricks Pharmacy, and we received a huge amount of support. I had one meeting with the company, to try to reason with it and ask it at least to join the British Parking Association, so that it would need to adhere to the association's code of practice. As far as I am aware, it has not done so. Since then, it has been impossible to pin it down to another meeting. This epitomises the attitude of some of these companies: they are completely unaccountable for their actions, and they leave people frustrated and angry about the way they are treated—or, not so much treated as bullied.

Of course we should not have a parking free-for-all, and of course private landowners need to protect their land, but we all know that that is not what is happening. This is not about keeping car parks free for specific users; it is about luring motorists on to private land to get as much money out of them as possible. It causes endless problems for the local police, who have to spend their time explaining to worried motorists that their car has not been stolen, but that it has been clamped and towed away.

One of my constituents whose car was clamped had just had both his hips replaced. He was told that his car would not be released unless he handed over £100 in cash. Not having that kind of money on him, he had to walk into the centre of town to withdraw the money from the ATM. On his return, he was confronted with a further demand for £55 to cancel a towing vehicle that had been ordered while he was away. He had to go back into town to collect the money. This was on a Sunday night in February, when we were experiencing some of the coldest temperatures for a generation. He said that there were four notices in the car park, all of which were printed in small black and white lettering that would not have been legible in the dark to anyone who lacked outstanding eyesight.

Another sorry tale involves two of my constituents—ladies in their 60s and 70s—who were fined £250 each to release their vehicles. Again, a lack of clear signage was the issue. The women also found that, when they called the number, there was an out-of-date answerphone message telling the caller to read the back of the parking ticket for information on how to appeal. However, the tickets that they had received had no information on clamping or appeals, or information about the time at which the cars were clamped. When they came to see me, they said that they had felt threatened by the man who had clamped them. He was not wearing a uniform and his vehicle was unmarked. They were also told by the man on the telephone that, if they failed to pay the fine by 4 pm, they would have to pay another £100, and that he would not accept a cheque. In her own words, one of the women said of the incident:

> "I am a pensioner, and to be bullied, over the telephone...is very intimidating. The stress and anxiety caused, having to obtain money, hire a taxi and locate the whereabouts of the vehicles left me bereft and traumatized."

Treating an elderly person in this way should not be tolerated.

I have campaigned for tighter control of these companies over several years, along with a number of other Members of this House, some of whom are here tonight. I am grateful to them for their support. We made progress under the Labour Government, first by setting up the Security Industry Authority in 2005, then through the licensing of individual clampers. Unfortunately, that did not solve the problem. It became clear that the only way to guard against rogue practice would be to ensure that the private clamping companies—not just the clampers

[Ms Rosie Winterton]

themselves—had to be licensed, had to conform to a strict code of conduct and had to be subject to an independent and fair appeals process.

That is why the Crime and Security Act 2010 was passed. I want to pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr Campbell), who, as a Minister, pursued this issue relentlessly. It is thanks to him that those measures were included in that legislation. The Act introduced a requirement for clamping companies, as well as clampers, to be licensed. It also introduced a mandatory code of practice and an independent appeal system. The Act has been passed, but now we need urgent action to bring in the regulations. I know that my hon. Friend had a number of discussions about the implementation of the Act with organisations such as the AA, the RAC and the British Parking Association, so the groundwork has been done.

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition Government document stated:

"We will tackle rogue private sector wheel clampers",

which I certainly welcome. I am concerned, however, that the new Government have stated that they are rather averse to introducing any new regulations, so I would be grateful if the Minister gave me reassurances on the following points. First, can the Minister confirm that the Government will definitely introduce the necessary regulations under the Crime and Security Act 2010? Secondly, can the Minister also confirm the timetable for introduction? Thirdly, can she confirm that she intends to set up an independent panel to review appeals against fines, and will it be within the time scale set out by the previous Government—by 2011? Finally, can she say what steps will be taken to remove a wheel-clamping company from the approved operators scheme if it is found to be behaving inappropriately, and how long that would take?

In the meantime, before the Minister brings in these new regulations, which is obviously going to be done quickly, I ask the Minister to ask the Home Secretary to encourage police forces in England and Wales to enforce the existing legislation that outlaws clamping without a licence. I am concerned that some unlicensed or criminal clamping does take place, but is not enforced.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on being the national champion on this issue—this plague that has now spread to my constituency. Is she aware that, just this morning, Farmfoods, a major retailer in my constituency and elsewhere, has distanced itself from the plague of new clampers who have arrived in Retford over the last month—totally unrequested, totally unlicensed, and grabbing money from the innocent?

Ms Winterton: I know that my hon. Friend has campaigned hard on this issue as well. This is exactly the point: unless these regulations are brought in quickly, there is a danger that some of these clamping companies will feel that the foot has been taken off the pedal and that they will somehow have an opportunity to sneak in and increase rather than decrease their activities, when it is a decrease that we all want to see. As I say, some clamping firms may have many operatives, but few licences. The licence is produced by the operative who takes the money, not the one doing the clamping, which is probably technically illegal. If the Minister cannot give me an answer to this question now, will she perhaps come back to me in writing?

Urgent regulations need to be introduced to implement the Crime and Security Act 2010 because the public have a right to be treated humanely. The law must afford people protection. At the moment, drivers continue to be terrorised by a small but active number of rogue wheel-clampers. As I said, this is a particular problem in Doncaster, but I know that many other areas around the country are also affected. We must prevent it from happening in those other areas as well. No time should be lost in the Home Office's making of new regulations to outlaw this behaviour once and for all. I urge the Minister to do so.

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Lynne Featherstone): May I congratulate the right hon. Member for Doncaster Central (Ms Winterton) on securing this debate on wheel-clamping? It is an important debate on a very important subject, and her interest in it is well documented. I am sure that the right hon. Lady's concerns are shared by many Members, if not every Member whose constituents have encountered these abuses. I am sure that what she has told us tonight is familiar to all of us from our constituencies. I know that wheel-clamping and the related activities of blocking in and towing away continue to cause great anger. Some of the most common complaints concern the amount of release fees, inadequate signage, and immediate clamping or towing away. Having been chair of transport in London for nearly five years when I was a member of the London Assembly, I am more than well acquainted with the problems that motorists face. I also know about the pressure on parking places. While safety, traffic flow and the fair rationing of parking spaces—on which there is always huge pressure—are entirely legitimate reasons for regulation, parking controls too often appear to be about revenue-raising, as the right hon. Lady pointed out. Our mission is to ensure that we deliver a solution to the problem.

If we want people to comply willingly with parking controls, those controls must be fair and just. The right hon. Lady used two examples to illustrate how unjust rogue clampers can be—indeed, cruel beyond belief. Her story of the man with the hip replacements having to walk on a cold February night, and then being asked to do it again, seems to show the clampers verging on sadism. She went on to describe an incident in which two older ladies were each fined £250 when, in reality—as is so often the case—the issue was poor signage. Such cases seem to constitute little more than entrapment, in which rogue clampers literally set a trap. They view it as a honey pot, while we, the public, become the cash cow.

Moreover, in my experience, more often than not it is those who try hard to comply with all the rules and controls who get caught out. People who seek to park legitimately and check for signs, but see none and park, are shattered not just by the upset caused by the financial hit from the clamping—which is substantial—but by the actual experience of being clamped when they were being good and trying not to break the rules. We must not let the good guys be the fall guys for rogue clampers.

That is why the coalition's programme for partnership government, published on 20 May, included the commitment that the right hon. Lady quoted:

"We will tackle rogue private sector wheel clampers."

I hope that both what I have said—which was quite strong—and that published commitment by the coalition Government indicate our position, and assure the right hon. Lady that we are on the same side in this debate. I have seen examples of abuses of parking controls on private land in my own constituency, mostly involving poor signage but also involving abusive behaviour on the part of clampers.

At present, the Private Security Industry Act 2001 requires individual vehicle immobilisers carrying out clamping and towing on private land with a view to charging a fee to hold a licence issued by the Security Industry Authority. That has been required in England and Wales since 2006, and was extended to Northern Ireland last year. Licensing of individual clampers is designed to protect the public by ensuring that only fit and proper persons with the necessary skills and knowledge are employed. As I am sure the right hon. Lady knows, to qualify for a licence applicants need to pass an identity check and a criminal record check, and to complete an accredited training course. There are currently more than 2,200 wheel-clampers with a licence. Since the introduction of licensing, over 290 people have had their applications for licences refused because they did not meet the criteria, and 22 licence-holders have had their licences revoked.

The right hon. Lady asked some specific questions about enforcement in Doncaster. She asked me to encourage the Home Secretary to speak to the police, but it is up to individual police forces to decide what their priorities are and what to focus on. The Private Security Industry Act 2001 contained a number of specific offences to deal with people working without a licence and deploying unlicensed staff. The police do enforce that. The Security Industry Authority also has powers to do so, although it tends to focus on companies, rather than individuals. It can revoke licences, and the punishment for individuals not having a licence is up to six months in prison and/or a fine of up to £5,000.

I looked up the performance of police forces. Merseyside is one of the best performing on the issue. In 2007, Merseyside police proceeded against 200 clampers and found 157 guilty. In 2008, the last year for which I could find figures, they proceeded against 54 and found 47 guilty. In South Yorkshire, which includes Doncaster Central, in 2007, no clampers were proceeded against, so none was found guilty. In 2008, two were proceeded against and two were found guilty. I suggest therefore that there is an issue that needs to be dealt with. However, it is not necessarily for the Home Secretary to deal with it. It is beholden perhaps on all Members of Parliament in that area to speak to the police chief to point out that differential figure, which is startling.

On only one operative having a licence, the right hon. Lady is correct: it is a legal requirement for everyone involved in clamping activity to have a licence—not just those who receive the money, but those who put on and remove the clamps. The licences must be displayed and it is an offence not to wear the licence. Those in companies that supply unlicensed workers can face an unlimited fine and up to five years in prison. The police should also be acting on those cases.

Experience has shown, however, that licensing of individuals has had little impact on the behaviours which generate most complaints from the public. That is because most of those behaviours are controlled by the vehicle immobilisation businesses, and are out of the control of the individual clampers.

The Home Office conducted a public consultation last year to gather more information about these abuses. Over 500 people responded. That research showed that the public's main concerns, which had not been addressed by individual licensing, include, pretty much as the right hon. Lady annunciated: inadequate signage, including small size and poor visibility, so motorists do not know that they are not allowed to park or the consequences of overstaying; high release fees, sometimes totalling hundreds of pounds; demanding immediate cash payments and not accepting other forms of payment, such as credit or debit cards; immediate clamping or towing away after a parking ticket has expired; the lack of an effective means of contesting a charge; no place for the motorist to turn when they feel unfairly treated; lack of evidence from the clampers that the motorist had breached parking rules, such as photographic evidence or retention of records; and aggressive or intimidating behaviour by the clampers. Many of my constituents have faced such problems. Some have phoned me in tears because of seriously abusive behaviour.

The Government are committed to tackling the menace of rogue private sector wheel-clampers and are looking at all available options. I have seen articles in the media over the past few days that ask whether and when the Government plan to bring into force the Crime and Security Act 2010, which was introduced by the previous Government. The Act seeks to address these problems by requiring vehicle immobilisation businesses to be licensed by the Security Industry Authority and to comply with the conditions of a code to be set out in regulations. These conditions could, for example, limit the release fee and require the display of signs warning motorists where clamping takes place. It would also allow for an independent appeals system to be set up for motorists who have been clamped.

This new system is not in place, however. The 2010 Act received Royal Assent on 8 April, just prior to the general election, but the relevant provisions have not yet been commenced. I want to make it absolutely clear that the coalition Government response actually tackles the problems caused by rogue clampers. The Act does not necessarily solve all of the problems, however, so I am looking at all available options as quickly as possible, including those not set out in the 2010 Act.

This is the right time to consider our approach before taking any action. We should adopt an approach that is proportionate, and which balances the rights of the motorist to have access to their vehicle with the rights of landowners to use and control access to their property. Clamping should not be used simply as a means of generating revenue from motorists who have no choice but to pay. We have been clear about our commitment to tackle rogue wheel-clampers, and we will do so, but I want to ensure that our response is clear, decisive and effective.

We understand the concerns of Members and others who have made representations about wheel-clamping and want to see action. I agree that we must act. As soon as we have decided on the way forward, we will announce our intentions and we will act.

[Lynne Featherstone]

I thank the right hon. Lady again for securing this important debate.

Question put and agreed to.

10.25 pm

House adjourned.

House of Commons

Wednesday 16 June 2010

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

ALLHALLOWS STAINING CHURCH BILL [*LORDS*]

Ordered,

That the promoters of the Allhallows Staining Church Bill [*Lords*], which was originally introduced in the House of Lords in Session 2009–10 on 25 January 2010, may have leave to proceed with the Bill in the current Session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of bills).—(*The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL (FILMING ON HIGHWAYS) BILL [*LORDS*]

Ordered,

That the promoters of the Kent County Council (Filming on Highways) Bill [*Lords*], which was originally introduced in the House of Lords in Session 2009–10 on 25 January 2010, may have leave to proceed with the Bill in the current Session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of bills).—(*The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES BILL [*LORDS*]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the promoters of the London Local Authorities Bill [*Lords*], which was originally introduced in the House of Lords in Session 2007–08 on 22 January 2008, may have leave to proceed with the Bill in the current Session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of bills).—(*The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

Hon. Members: Object.

The debate stood adjourned; to be resumed on Wednesday 23 June.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Electricity Generation

1. **Mr Russell Brown** (Dumfries and Galloway) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive on future electricity generation in Scotland. [1835]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Michael Moore): The first person I spoke to after my appointment was the First Minister. I have since had further discussions with him and Scottish Ministers, including on the subject of the fossil fuel levy and transmission charging. I remain committed to having constructive discussions with Scottish Ministers.

Mr Brown: I welcome the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary to their new posts. For the Under-Secretary it will be déjà vu, recalling his initial days as a Social Democratic party councillor sitting with the Liberals. On future nuclear electricity generation, can the Secretary of State explain to the House how his position and that of the Energy Secretary squares with the stance taken by the Under-Secretary?

Michael Moore: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his warm welcome. I am sure that as a fellow south of Scotland MP, he is delighted to see the region so well represented in the Scotland Office.

On energy policy and particularly electricity supply, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change and the Government have set out clearly in the coalition programme our commitment to ensuring that under our policy we tackle the twin issues of climate change and a secure, clean and affordable supply of energy. We have set out how we intend to go about that in respect of all forms of energy, and I am sure the hon. Gentleman will support us in developing that programme to ensure a successful and productive future for Britain's energy and Scotland's energy within it.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): In those discussions with the First Minister, did my right hon. Friend take on board the great potential that Scotland has for marine renewable electricity generation? In that context, will he make a commitment to an early visit to the north-east of Scotland to see the sub-sea engineering skills that have been developed in the oil and gas industry, which have so much to offer that marine renewable industry?

Michael Moore: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Yes, indeed we discussed marine and other renewables—briefly, it must be said. There are many areas in which, under the new arrangement whereby we will engage constructively with one another under the respect agenda, we can work productively together. I have already had discussions with representatives of the oil and gas industry, who made the very point to me that my hon. Friend makes about the skills and how those may apply to marine renewables. I would be delighted to come to the north-east of Scotland to further my understanding of those issues and discuss them with him and others in due course.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Is the Secretary of State aware that Peterhead power station pays £29 million every year in transmission charges, whereas a similar facility in London would attract subsidy of about £3 million per annum, and that as a consequence Scottish and Southern Energy is planning up to 50 job losses at the Peterhead plant? Does he accept that the transmission charges regime is discriminatory and is discouraging investment in renewable energy in

the very parts of Scotland best equipped to produce it? When he comes to the north-east of Scotland, as he has just pledged to do, will he agree to meet me and representatives of the management and work force at Peterhead power station to discuss the transmission charges regime and the future of the Peterhead plant?

Michael Moore: As the hon. Lady knows, the transmission charging regime is primarily a matter for the National Grid. It is an issue that others have raised with me and Ofgem. I shall be keen to talk further about it with her and others from the Scottish Government. There have been representations from all sides of the House already—it has been a busy few days—and I look forward to taking forward those discussions in the most appropriate form in the future.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his position. I am pleased to hear what he said about marine renewables, for which Scotland clearly has a massive potential, yet six years after it was set up, the marine renewables development fund still has £42 million lying unclaimed and unused because of the criteria attached to it. Will my right hon. Friend look into the matter and ensure that under this Government the support announced for green energy becomes reality?

Michael Moore: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind welcome. I take on board her observations about the criteria that have been used, and I look forward to having further discussions with her and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change.

Expenditure Reduction

2. **Mr David Hamilton** (Midlothian) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the likely effect on economic growth in Scotland of the programme of expenditure reduction announced on 24 May 2010. [1836]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): Dealing with the deficit and continuing to ensure the economic recovery is the most urgent issue we face. We must tackle the deficit to restore confidence in our economy and support the recovery.

Mr Hamilton: Next week the Under-Secretary and his Liberal colleagues will be making massive cuts throughout the United Kingdom. When he has his first meeting with the First Minister of Scotland, could he explain why, when the Scottish Government have got a substantial increase in the amount of money they are receiving this year, they are overseeing thousands of cuts throughout Scotland? Will he do what I think he will do, which is to roll over whenever the First Minister wants him to?

David Mundell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his, as usual, spirited question. I am sure he will be in agreement with the Scottish Parliament Finance Committee, which called on the Scottish Government to show far greater leadership by discussing in more open and realistic terms the impact that the cuts will have and the options that are available to deal with those cuts.

Mr Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I warmly welcome the Minister to his new post.

It is really important for economic growth in remote and rural areas to ensure that businesses, particularly small businesses, in such areas have access to broadband. What will the Government be doing to ensure that broadband is rolled out to the whole country, including remote and rural parts of Scotland?

David Mundell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his warm welcome. He will already know that the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport has set out his clear objective of turning Britain into a digital economy. The hon. Gentleman specified with clarity the needs of rural areas, for which the Secretary of State and I will continue to fight within Government.

Mr Ian Davidson (Glasgow South West) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the new Ministers on taking office. However, I draw to the House's attention the fact that they are huddled together in one section of the country; I hope that they will, at times, travel out to look at other parts of the country, including my own constituency.

What actions have been taken so far to ensure that any expenditure reduction does not result in a cut or a delay in the aircraft carriers upon which so much of the economy of the west of Scotland, and Scotland as a whole, depends?

David Mundell: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his elevation to the chairmanship of the Scottish Affairs Committee, on which I was pleased to serve with him. I am sure that he will bring his own distinct style to the Committee's proceedings.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, this Government's position on the aircraft carriers is, despite attempts to suggest otherwise, no different from that of the previous Government. There is to be a strategic defence review. The nuclear deterrent is excluded from that review, and it would be wrong to prejudge the review in any other way, other than to say that sea-borne defence is obviously very important to this country.

Commission on Scottish Devolution

3. **Richard Ottaway** (Croydon South) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the First Minister on implementation of the recommendations of the final report of the Commission on Scottish Devolution. [1837]

5. **Miss Anne Begg** (Aberdeen South) (Lab): When he expects to bring forward proposals to implement the recommendations of the final report of the Commission on Scottish Devolution. [1839]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Michael Moore): I have had a positive dialogue with the First Minister on a number of subjects, including the Government's commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Commission on Scottish Devolution. On the question of timing, I have asked officials to work for the autumn introduction of a Bill to take forward legislative proposals, with non-legislative recommendations taken forward on a similar timetable.

Richard Ottaway: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the growing concern at the disparity in public services between England and Scotland? If he wants to retain support for the Union in England, he will have to address this sooner rather than later. Will he set out a timetable to deal with these financial disparities now?

Michael Moore: May I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his new position as Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee? I am sure that that will be a very interesting and challenging role for him to fulfil, and I wish him all the best with it.

The Commission on Scottish Devolution was set up with the remit of ensuring that it reviewed how devolution was working for Scotland, and particularly whether it was serving the interests of the people of Scotland. It was designed to increase the financial accountability of the Scottish Parliament, and thereby the Scottish Government, and also to secure the Union. On two of those three counts, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that it is a very well-focused commission. I look forward, later this year, to introducing the proposals that I have set out; we are determined to get on with that as quickly as possible.

Miss Begg: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new job, and I very much hope he is enjoying it. When he introduces the Bill in October, will the proposals include a measure either to abolish or to keep the Secretary of State for Scotland?

Michael Moore: I congratulate the hon. Lady on her new position as Chair of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions and wish her all the best. Clearly, that will be an important part of Government policy and the Committee will be an important place for debate.

The Calman proposals envisage that at some point in future, a Secretary of State for Scotland will no longer be required. The hon. Lady knows that that was a part of Liberal Democrat policy for a long time, but right here and now the position is important, particularly in delivering that legislation and in focusing on the economy, so it holds.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the fiscal relationship between Scotland and the United Kingdom as a whole is more complex than just the Barnett formula or crude overall spending-per-head figures, and that great care should be taken in any review to consider all aspects of the fiscal relationships between all parts of the UK?

Michael Moore: I agree with my hon. Friend, and that is perhaps a broader discussion we can have with some of our colleagues over the next little while. The Commission on Scottish Devolution looked exhaustively at fiscal relationships and the need to ensure not only greater financial accountability but the ongoing equity and stability of finances. All those strands together mean that we have a good package which, under the proposals in the Bill, will improve Scotland's accountability and the devolution settlement.

Mr Jim Murphy (East Renfrewshire) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to his first Scotland Office questions. Of course, it is a very big day for him: it is his 16th day in office, which is exactly the length of time his predecessor survived in the job. I hope the rest of today goes well for him and that he is still here tomorrow. I have always got on very well with him. In fact, I was delighted, just before the election, to meet a delegation that he led, pleading for the extension of the future jobs fund in his constituency.

On the Calman commission, the right hon. Gentleman has previously argued for the abolition of the Scotland Office. When did he change his mind?

Michael Moore: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his typically generous welcome. I am happy to confirm that we were able to work very productively across party lines in the last Parliament, but may I just correct him on a matter of fact? When I went to see him with that delegation, the focus was on bank lending, on which the previous Government, frankly, did not have a good record. If he wishes me to remind him of the specific issues that were raised by those four companies, I would be happy to do so, but I shall not detain the House on that now.

On the position of Secretary of State for Scotland, I am not changing Liberal Democrat policy one bit—it is eventually to see the position abolished. However, in the course of getting the coalition agreement together, and recognising the exciting opportunity to get this settlement through and deliver improvements to Scottish devolution, I was very happy to support the continuation of the office, not least because the economic legacy of the previous Government, of whom he was a member, is something that we seriously need to tackle.

Mr Murphy: I again welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his position. It is clear that he is one of a minority in the Cabinet and may from time to time find it difficult to have his voice heard—he is, of course, one of the few non-millionaires sitting around the Cabinet table.

Turning to the success of the Calman commission, should there not be an independent commission to look into the abolition of the future jobs fund? Will the right hon. Gentleman support an independent commission, perhaps to be chaired by Sir Ken Calman, on the impact of the shameful decision of a gang of millionaires to turn their backs on the unemployed of Scotland?

Michael Moore: Mr Speaker, you will not be surprised that I reject the right hon. Gentleman's analysis of the situation. Like him, I care very deeply about unemployment, not least among young people, in Scotland and anywhere else in the United Kingdom. The reality, however, is that the future jobs fund was set up on an unsustainable basis. We need to ensure that we get a sustainable basis for the future of youth unemployment support. Those proposals will come forward in very close order. In the meantime, before he sets up too many scare stories, let us remember that existing bids will be honoured under the future jobs fund.

Mr Speaker: Order. We really do need a bit of order in the House. There are far too many private conversations taking place. It is a very unattractive spectacle so far as those outside the Chamber are concerned.

Firearms Legislation

4. **Thomas Docherty** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): If he will discuss with the Scottish Executive the merits of a review of firearms legislation applicable to Scotland. [1838]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): All Members of this House share the sense of shock and disbelief at the tragic events that unfolded in Cumbria on 2 June. The hon. Gentleman must have felt this more than most given his close personal associations with Whitehaven, and I personally offer my condolences to him and to the families that have been so cruelly affected.

In Prime Minister's questions on 3 June, the Prime Minister confirmed that the Association of Chief Police Officers would be supporting a peer review, to be conducted by national police experts, on firearms licensing, the police firearms response and firearms tactics. Firearms legislation is a reserved matter. As the Home Secretary told the House in her statement on 3 June, we will await the police report before we embark on and lead a debate about the gun laws across Great Britain.

Mr Speaker: Order. We must now speed up. Some of these answers are simply too long and it will not do.

Thomas Docherty: I thank the Minister for his kind words and welcome him to his new post. The House may wish to note the support given by Scottish police forces to the Cumbria constabulary in the immediate aftermath of the incident. Will he agree to meet a cross-party delegation from Scotland once ACPO and its counterparts in England and Wales have made their submission to the Home Office, so that we can convey the very strong feelings of the people of Scotland about firearms legislation?

David Mundell: We are all proud of the efforts of officers from the Dumfries and Galloway police force and others in Scotland after the events in Cumbria. I will meet the hon. Gentleman's delegation.

Sir Menzies Campbell (North East Fife) (LD): Perhaps I should declare an interest as the holder of a shotgun licence, for sporting purposes only.

If any question were to arise of separate legislation for Scotland, would the Minister undertake to consider the difference between the sufficiency of existing legislation and the extent to which it is properly enforced? Further, in view of the geographical position of his constituency and that of his colleagues, will he take account of the considerable cross-border traffic in sporting activities involving firearms?

David Mundell: I shall most certainly take into account the issues that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has raised. He will, however, be aware that the Calman commission has recommended that the regulation of air guns be transferred to the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament, and the Government are committed to doing that in the Bill that we will bring forward in the autumn.

Economic Environment

6. **Mary Macleod** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Con): What steps he plans to take to ensure a stable economic environment for businesses in Scotland. [1840]

7. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What steps he plans to take to ensure a stable economic environment for businesses in Scotland. [1841]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Michael Moore): Tackling the budget deficit and creating a fairer and more balanced economy will ensure a stable economic environment for businesses in Scotland.

Mary Macleod: Under the last Government, the Scotland Office's attempts to help to maintain a strong economic environment in Scotland had something of a credibility problem. What is my right hon. Friend doing to dispel the myth promoted by his predecessors that the level of Government borrowing is somehow unconnected to the level of interest rates and taxation?

Michael Moore: The hon. Lady makes an important point. We must not lose sight of the fact that the deficit left behind by the previous Government was £155,000 million. We have to establish our credibility not just with the people of Britain, but with the international financial markets. If we do not, we will see higher interest charges that will bear down on the level of public services that we can afford and affect the pockets of everyone in Scotland, both businesses and individuals. We have to tackle that urgently, and I am determined that we will do so.

John Howell: I am sure the Secretary of State would agree that the crisis in the financial sector was especially detrimental to the economic stability of Scotland. Will he now confirm that the Scotland Office will no longer issue press releases saying that it is taking advice from Sir Fred Goodwin, and will take advice from a more representative group of Scottish financiers?

Michael Moore: The hon. Gentleman is correct to highlight the important place that financial institutions play in the Scottish and United Kingdom economy. I assure him that I will be taking as broad a range of advice on these subjects as necessary. Indeed, I am already making early contact with some of the largest financial institutions in the country, including RBS and HBOS.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): I welcome the Secretary of State to his new job. On a stable economic environment, one of the key issues is business cost stability, and the area that businesses find most difficult is that of fuel and haulage costs. Can he confirm, therefore, that it remains the policy of at least the Conservative side of the coalition to introduce a fair fuel stabiliser or fuel duty regulator to smooth out the spikes in the cost of fuel and bring some cost stability to haulage for businesses throughout Scotland?

Michael Moore: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks. He will understand, I am sure, that I am not in a position to pre-empt, and have no intention of pre-empting, the Chancellor's statement introducing the Budget next week. The hon. Gentleman's representations, and those of others, are among the many being received by the Treasury and the Scotland Office, and I am sure that he will pay attention when the Budget is announced next week.

Ann McKechin (Glasgow North) (Lab): I welcome both right hon. Gentlemen to their new positions in the Scotland Office. Given the unique position of the Scottish media and the Government's disastrous cancellation of

the tendering process for provision of local news on Scottish television, despite the winners having already been announced, what discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport about the threat now posed to news on STV?

Michael Moore: I thank the hon. Lady for her initial comments. An independently financed news consortium was another idea that on closer scrutiny did not have the financial backing to make it sustainable, either through the pilot stage or in a more general process. I have spoken to members of the consortium, and my right hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has spoken to representatives from STV. We will work with them and others in Scotland to ensure that we get the right local news across the country.

Manufacturing

8. **Jim Sheridan** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on the support available for manufacturing in Scotland. [1842]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it a priority to speak to a number of key individuals in the business sector in Scotland to get an update on the main issues affecting them.

Jim Sheridan: The Minister will be aware of the Dyson report commissioned by the Conservative party in March. It contained many important ideas, such as building esteem for science, engineering, and research and development, and investing in high-tech start-ups. It also highlighted the importance of projects such as those for nuclear and offshore wind power, and, from a Scottish perspective, high-speed rail. Will the coalition Government be implementing any of those proposals, and if so, when?

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman was a strong supporter of Lord Myners and will know therefore that the latter said:

"The Government cannot create jobs. The Government can create an environment that is conducive to the creation of jobs".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 June 2010; Vol. 719, c. 625.]

That is the priority of this coalition Government.

Energy

9. **Mr Adam Holloway** (Gravesham) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on Scotland's future energy needs. [1843]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Michael Moore): My colleagues and I are fully committed to ensuring that Scotland is able to continue to play an important role in meeting the UK's aspirations for climate change and security of supply.

Mr Holloway: Can my right hon. Friend give us an assurance that Scotland's energy capacity will remain at the forefront of global renewable advances?

Michael Moore: I am very happy to give that assurance.

Mr Brian H. Donohoe (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): My constituency has three of the five biggest users of energy. Does the Secretary of State agree that the only solution is nuclear power?

Michael Moore: As I said earlier, the Government have set out a clear policy on their energy strategy, and arrangements are in place to ensure that we have diverse sources of supply and security for the future.

Economic Inactivity

10. **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on measures to reduce the level of economic inactivity in Scotland. [1844]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): The Government have already announced their plans for a radical reform of the welfare-to-work system and the implementation of the programme, which among other things will tackle the issue of economic inactivity.

Andrew Rosindell: The Minister will have noted the comments of Lord Myners, who said that it was wrong for the previous Government to create jobs themselves, rather than creating the conditions for business to create those jobs. Will he encourage the Scottish trade unions to take the same attitude?

David Mundell: I am sure that trade unions in Scotland will share the Chancellor's view that we are all in this together.

Jim McGovern (Dundee West) (Lab): May I, too, welcome the Secretary of State to his new post? I am sure he is aware that his predecessor in the previous Government visited my constituency on a number of occasions to see at first hand the importance of the computer games industry in Dundee. The former Chancellor gave a commitment in his Budget to tax breaks for that industry. Can the Minister guarantee that the Government of whom he is now a member will honour that commitment?

Mr Speaker: Order. If the Minister could hear that, he has very good hearing. May I make an appeal to the House? I know that it is in a state of eager anticipation of Prime Minister's questions, but it is very unfair to the Member on his or her feet, and to the Minister. Let us have a bit of order. That is what the public expect.

David Mundell: Like the Secretary of State, I do not want to pre-empt next week's Budget, but I am sure that the Chancellor will have heard the hon. Gentleman's representations.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [2457] **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 16 June.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in paying tribute to the Royal Marine of 40 Commando who died at the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Birmingham on Monday from wounds sustained in Afghanistan, and to the two soldiers from the 1st Battalion the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment who died yesterday. We should send our sincere condolences to their families and their friends. We should also pay tribute to the exceptional work of our armed forces serving in Afghanistan and, perhaps today in particular, to the highly skilled doctors and nurses who work alongside them, as well as to those who treat the injured personnel back in the UK.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Philip Davies: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the millions of people who voted Conservative at the last election in order to make him Prime Minister did not do so in order to see a reduction in the number of people sent to prison or to see those criminals given softer sentences? If he really wants to reduce the budget of the Prison Service, may I suggest that he starts by taking Sky TV away from the 4,000 prisoners who enjoy that luxury in their cells?

The Prime Minister: May I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful suggestion? He knows that I share his views about the need for a tough response to crime. The challenge is going to be delivering that tough response at a time when the last Government left us absolutely no money. What I would say to him is that we have to address the failures in the system: the fact that half of all prisoners are on drugs; the fact that more than one in 10 are foreign nationals who should not be here in the first place; and the fact that 40% commit another crime within one year of leaving prison. That is the record of failure that we have inherited, and it is the record of failure that we have to reform.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to the Royal Marine of 40 Commando who died on Monday and to the two soldiers from the 1st Battalion the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment who died yesterday. We honour their sacrifice, and we remember all our servicemen and women who are fighting so bravely for our country.

Although this morning saw the unemployment claimant count fall, unemployment is still too high. Behind the figures are real people and real concerns. Can the Prime Minister promise that none of the policies that he will put in his Budget next week will put more people out of work?

The Prime Minister: First, I agree with the right hon. and learned Lady that any rise in unemployment is a tragedy, not least for those people desperately looking for work who want to put food on the table for their families. The figures this morning give a mixed picture. On the one hand, the claimant count is down; on the other hand, the International Labour Organisation measure of unemployment is up by 23,000. What I can say to her is that we will bring in our Work programme as soon as we can, which will be the biggest, boldest scheme for getting people back to work, and everything that will be—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should remember why we have had record unemployment in this country: because of the record of failure that we inherited. What I can tell the right hon. and learned Lady is that everything that we do in the forthcoming Budget will be about giving this country a strong economy with sustainable public finances and clearing up the mess left by the person sitting next to her, the right hon. Member for Edinburgh South West (Mr Darling).

Ms Harman: In fact, ILO unemployment is down on last month, and the Prime Minister should welcome that. He has criticised our plans, but the Office for Budget Responsibility says this week that, under Labour's plans, unemployment is set to fall. Will he promise that he will not do anything in his Budget next week that will cause unemployment to rise? We are talking about his policies in his Budget.

The Prime Minister: First, the right hon. and learned Lady is just wrong about the figures. The ILO figures are up, and the claimant count is down—

Ms Harman *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: Yes, they are; if she looks at the figures, she will discover that. She asked about the Budget. I have to say that I am still waiting for the Budget submission from the Labour party—*[Interruption.]* Let me tell hon. Members why. Before the last election, Labour set out £50 billion of spending reductions, including £18 billion of reductions in capital spending, but it did not set out where one penny piece of that money was coming from. So, while Labour Members are looking forward to the Budget next week and asking what we are going to do, perhaps they could have the decency to tell us what they would have done.

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister did not listen to what I said about ILO unemployment, which is that it is down on last month, and he did not answer the question either. He has already cut the future jobs fund, and he will not guarantee to drop policies that would push unemployment up. He talks about the deficit, but how does putting more people on the dole help to get the deficit down?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps the right hon. and learned Lady should consider this statement about the importance of sorting out the budget deficit—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members ought to listen to this:

> "Public finances must be sustainable...If they are not, the poor, the elderly, and those on fixed incomes who depend on public services will suffer most."—[*Official Report*, 2 July 1997; Vol. 315, c. 303.]

Who said that? It was the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), when he used to talk some sense, in the old days.

Ms Harman: As the Prime Minister is talking about new politics and transparency, will he confirm that the Office for Budget Responsibility has forecast that, under the plans that we put in place, unemployment and borrowing will be lower than we forecast in our Budget, not only this year but next year and the year after? Will he confirm that, and will he welcome it?

The Prime Minister: First, should the right hon. and learned Lady not welcome the fact that these things are now independently determined, rather than fiddled in the Treasury? What the Office for Budget Responsibility shows is that the structural deficit is going to be £12 billion higher, and that the growth forecast that the Chancellor of the Exchequer produced at the time of the Budget was a complete fiction.

Ms Harman: I can answer the Prime Minister's question, although, to be fair, he is supposed to be answering mine. Yes, I do support the OBR, but he will not say whether he welcomes the forecast that I set out earlier. It is clear what he is doing: he is talking down the economy and the public finances in order to soften up the public for the cuts that he wants to make. Does he not realise that, in doing that, he is also undermining business confidence? How can that be right?

The Prime Minister: What the right hon. and learned Lady and other Labour Members need to remember is this: never mind talking the economy down, they did the economy down. They left this country with a £155 billion deficit—the biggest deficit in our peacetime history. They are the ones who let the banks go rip. They told us that they had abolished boom and bust, yet they gave us the biggest boom and the biggest bust. They were the ones who told us we were going to lead the world out of recession; our recession was longer and deeper than others. They have not told us about one single penny of the £50 billion that they were going to cut—not one penny. Do you know where they ought to start? Why not start with an apology?

Ms Harman: If the Prime Minister thought that our spending plans were so bad, why did he back them right up until the end of 2008, praising them as "tough"? One minute he is praising them, then he is calling them reckless. This is not so much magic numbers as the magic roundabout that he has been on. We all agree that the deficit needs to come down, but will he promise that in the Budget next week he will not hit the poorest and he will not throw people out of work? Does he agree with us that unemployment is never a price worth paying?

The Prime Minister: The figures were wrong, and the jokes were not much good either. Never mind the magic roundabout, what we are all enjoying on the Government Benches is the Labour leadership election, although it is by day beginning to look more like a Star Trek convention—beam me up! What the right hon. and learned Lady has to answer is this: before the election, her Government set out £50 billion of cuts, but not a single penny was aligned to a single programme—not one pence of the £18 billion they were cutting from capital spending was aligned to one single bit of capital expenditure. Before she starts challenging us about cuts, they should first of all apologise for the mess they have left; second of all, tell us where the cuts were going to come to under their Government; and third of all, recognise that the responsible party, in coalition, is dealing with the deficit and the mess that they left behind.

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): Despite the huge satisfaction felt in my constituency at the Government's decision not to proceed with the second runway at Stansted airport, is my right hon. Friend aware that blight and uncertainty still overhang the communities closest to the airport? Will he look to see if other measures can be taken to provide them with longer-term assurance?

The Prime Minister: First, may I say what a pleasure it is to see my right hon. Friend being able to speak about these issues for the first time in many years. I am sure he will do so often and with great power from the Back Benches. He is right to say that we are very clear in the coalition agreement about Stansted airport. I hope that removes some of the blight and uncertainty; I will certainly bear in mind what he had to say.

Q2. [2458] **Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): During the general election, the Conservative party distanced itself from remarks made by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) when he spoke about Government aid and said that it had nothing to do with Vauxhall. Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to remove the uncertainty not only for Vauxhall but for Sheffield Forgemasters and all the other companies that are waiting for support in properly constructed agreements?

The Prime Minister: Everyone wants to see Vauxhall succeed; it is a very important company, employing many people in this country, not least in the hon. Gentleman's own constituency. As he knows, a £270 million Government loan guarantee to support GM Europe was announced on 12 March 2010. We are reviewing commitments made since 1 January 2010. Projects that are good value for money and consistent with the Government's priorities will go ahead. *[Interruption.]* Let me say to Labour Members who are shouting that we have to be clear that there were spending announcements made by the previous Government before the election that need to be reviewed. To take just one example of one scheme operated by Lord Mandelson's Department—the so-called strategic investment fund: when we looked at the money provided for specific projects, we found that over two thirds of the constituencies involved were marginal Labour seats. So it is right to examine these, but I say to the hon. Gentleman that proper grants properly made for proper reasons will go ahead; fiddled grants for political reasons should not.

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): The 16-year-old son of my constituent, Lorraine Fraser, died after a vicious multiple knife attack incident six years ago. One of the murderers is trying to use the law to reduce his tariff after serving only five years, and another avoided conviction altogether by fleeing the country. Will the Prime Minister agree to look into this case on behalf of my constituent and meet her to hear about her plight and about the excellent work she is doing to defeat knife crime in this country?

The Prime Minister: I hear what my hon. Friend says, and I would be happy to meet him and his constituent. We need to take knife crimes in this country incredibly seriously: there has been a huge increase in the carrying of knives, and we must put a stop to that. On lenient sentences, I am not convinced that the power introduced some 20 years ago to allow the Attorney-General to appeal against lenient sentences is used enough. We need to look at that again and ensure that in cases in which people feel that a lenient sentence has been put in place, there is an opportunity to increase it.

Q3. [2459] **John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The defence contracts for Astute class submarines signed in March were long negotiated and are essential for our security and for thousands of manufacturing jobs in my constituency and across the UK. Will the Prime Minister honour them?

The Prime Minister: First, may I welcome the hon. Gentleman and say that I know how much his constituency depends on the work going on in the submarine yards in Barrow, which I have visited and where I have seen the building of Astute class submarines and the submarines carrying our nuclear deterrent? I know how important that is, but a defence review is under way, and it must include the Astute class submarines—*[Interruption]*. To those Labour Members who are calling out, let me say that the Labour party was itself committed to a defence review. We asked whether it included everything—even aircraft carriers—and the answer came back yes. It is no good Labour Members bickering now that they are in opposition; it is right to have a defence review and that we consider such matters. I know how important submarine building is to Barrow and to the defence of the nation.

Q4. [2460] **Mr David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): Labour Members might revere regional development agencies, but is my right hon. Friend aware of the considerable amount of money wasted by some RDAs, especially on unnecessary expenditure on entertainment? Will he confirm that, to get better value for taxpayers' money, he will take action on RDAs?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right, and I know that a lot of argument and discussion is going on about regional development agencies. The figures about how much money has been wasted, however, should be more widely shared. The East Midlands Development Agency paid more than £300,000 for offices in north America. The Northwest Development Agency shared an office in Newport Beach. One NorthEast spent money on offices in China, Japan, Korea and Australia. The chairman of the South East England Development Agency spent £51,000 on taxis and executive cars in one year alone. We need proper control of costs and spending—there has not been any for the past 13 years, and there sure is going to be under this Government.

Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): May I tell the Prime Minister about my constituent, Nikki Blunden, who is 37, has a son aged four and is dying of cancer. Her consultant wants to prescribe the new drug Lapatinib, which could prolong her life. Last week, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence deemed the treatment not to be cost-effective. Will the Prime Minister stick to his promise not to hide behind NICE, and ensure that the primary care trust funds forthwith this NHS treatment? Nikki Blunden cannot wait; I ask the Prime Minister to act.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for asking that question. My heart goes out to her constituent, Nikki Blunden. We want to see these cancer drugs get to patients more quickly, without the bureaucratic wheels taking so long to turn. That is why we are establishing the cancer drugs fund, and I will discuss with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health how quickly that can be done. If possible, I want it to be done this year rather than next year. If it can be done, it will be, and if drugs can be got to people like the right hon. Lady's constituent—we all have constituents in such a position—I will do everything that I can to make that happen.

Q5. [2461] **Mr Douglas Carswell** (Clacton) (Con): The Prime Minister knows that I am always and everywhere for referendums. However, will he tell the House why he is planning a referendum on the alternative vote, which was not in the manifesto of either coalition party, but not a referendum on European integration, which all three main parties were recently promising?

The Prime Minister: What I can promise my hon. Friend is that we will have such legislation on the referendum lock, so that it will not be possible in future for a British Government to pass powers from Westminster to Brussels without asking the British people first. That is absolutely right. The referendum on the alternative vote was part of the coalition agreement, and he will be free to campaign on whatever side of the referendum he wants. However, the referendum was part of the agreement that put together this Government, who, I believe, are rolling up their sleeves and sorting out the country's problems.

Q6. [2462] **Jim Dobbin** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab/Co-op): About 1.5 million people suffer from involuntary tranquilliser addiction as a result of medical prescribing, and it completely ruins their lives. Will the Government consider investing in cost-effective, supportive, long-term withdrawal treatment programmes to enable them to lead normal lives, come off benefits, and go back to work?

The Prime Minister: Let me praise the hon. Gentleman for his interest in the work that is being done. I know that he is chairman of the all-party group that deals with this extremely difficult issue. The last Government set up a review of addiction to prescription and over-the-counter medicines. We are waiting for the report to be published, and will study it carefully when it is.

Let me make two points. First, I think that there is a problem in our national health service more generally, in that we spend too much time treating the symptoms rather than necessarily dealing with the causes. We could probably reduce the level of painkillers and tranquillisers if we did more—through physiotherapy and other therapies—to deal with the problem in the first place. Secondly, all addictions need proper attention, and proper treatment and therapy, to rid people of their addictions, whatever they happen to be. I am sure that the report will mention that.

Q7. [2463] **Sir Alan Beith** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): Will the Prime Minister respond positively to the uplands inquiry by the Commission for Rural Communities—which reveals the great value and potential of magnificent hill areas such as ours in Northumberland—by stressing the need to ensure that hill farmers have an adequate income, and that there are rented homes, apprenticeships, and services such as broadband to enable young people to stay in those areas?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly look carefully at the report. I have every sympathy with what the right hon. Gentleman has said. Upland landscape is as beautiful as it is because it has been farmed for centuries, and we need to recognise the connection between beautiful landscape and active farming. We want our countryside to be a living, working countryside, not a museum.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned housing. We must also recognise that the top-down target system was not working. Our plans in the coalition agreement to increase the ability of communities, including villages, to decide whether they want to put in extra homes is a good way of helping to keep the pub, the post office, and the local shops and schools open, and I hope we can proceed with that work.

Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I am sure that, even as we speak, the Prime Minister and his team are seeking to make savings and possibly cuts, hopefully without affecting front-line services. May I commend to him one way of saving £7.2 million a day? Bring the troops home from Afghanistan.

The Prime Minister: I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that I just do not agree with him. I think that if we brought the troops home precipitately—if we did it straight away—not only would we let down our NATO allies, not only would we let down the Afghan people, but we would create circumstances in which the Taliban would return, and the danger of terrorist training camps in Afghanistan would come straight back.

I know that what we are doing is dangerous and difficult, and that it is costing us dearly. I am, of course, acutely aware of that. However, I think that we must put our effort and our shoulder behind the wheel of the Obama-McChrystal plan to ensure that it works as well as it can, and accompany that military surge with a political surge. We need to seek a political settlement to get Taliban fighters to put down their arms and reintegrate into Afghan society. That is the way in which to create some stability in Afghanistan—never a perfect democracy, but some stability—in which event our troops can come home with their heads held high.

Q8. [2464] **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Will the Prime Minister join me in paying tribute to all who work for the health service, but will he also examine the circumstances in which patients are often discharged from hospital only to be readmitted very soon afterwards? The assessment for continuous health care has become something of a postcode lottery. Will the Prime Minister examine that as well, to ensure that such care is paid for on the basis of clinical need?

Mr Speaker: That was two questions, but I think that one answer will do.

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker; the one answer that I will give is this. I know that there is a big problem with hospitals discharging patients, sometimes to meet their own targets—including financial targets—without thinking of the longer-term consequences if those patients have to return. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has announced that hospitals will be responsible for patients not just during their treatment but for the 30 days following their discharge, so that we can better link health and social care to ensure that people leave hospital at the right time, in the right way, and for good.

Q9. [2465] **Mr Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow) (Lab): Siemens is proposing to close Trench UK in my constituency and to transfer its production to France and Germany, despite the fact that Trench UK has a full order book, healthy profits and is exporting all over the world. It is a first-class product. Would the Prime Minister meet me so that we can discuss that illogical decision which could lose the UK a jewel in manufacturing?

The Prime Minister: I would certainly meet the hon. Gentleman. I know how frustrating this can be; Siemens is a big investor in my constituency, too. The jobs that he is speaking about are exactly the sort of high-tech, high-skill jobs that we want to keep in this country. Therefore, I will certainly meet him, and we will do what we can in the Budget to ensure that we have in this country a tax regime, support for apprenticeships and support for training that will want to make businesses locate, stay and invest in Britain.

Q10. [2466] **Mr Adam Holloway** (Gravesham) (Con): Every household in Gravesham has inherited a sort of second mortgage of debt. Can the Prime Minister give us some idea of the level of debt per household across the country?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right that every single person in this country is now carrying £22,000 of debt because of the mess that the last Labour Government left us. The fact is this: if we do not do something about it, by the end of this Parliament, we will be paying £70 billion in debt interest. That is more than we spend on schools and more than we spend on defence. It would be a tragic waste of money. That is why, however painful it is, we have to get to grips with the deficit that we were left by the last Labour Government.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Can the Prime Minister explain why the changes to local government funding last week mean that, in Witney in Oxfordshire, people will see an uplift of 1.7%, while children in Brent will see a loss from their education budget of £1.88 million? Can it have anything to do with last week's statement by the Minister with responsibility for local government, the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), who said:

"Those in greatest need ultimately bear the burden of paying off the debt"?—[*Official Report*, 10 June 2010; Vol. 511, c. 450.]

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that we are going to introduce the pupil premium, so that the money follows our country's poorest children to the schools that they go to. That is what is going to happen. That is what he should support and I will look forward to him supporting it when it comes.

Q11. [2467] **Mr Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): As the Prime Minister strives to restore sanity to our national finances, will he give a word of reassurance that the Budget next week will seek to encourage and support those who save and provide for their own future?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right. We have got to make sure that, in what we do, we help those who try to do the right thing, to save and to look after themselves and their families. The first thing that we have to do is keep control of inflation, keep the Bank of England independent and ensure that the Budget supports the tough approach on inflation, which is the worst thing for savers. The second thing that we can do is ensure that we do not discourage saving by having so many people reliant on a means test. That is why we are committed to linking the state pension back to earnings.

There are no easy ways of reducing the deficit. Some people believe that it can be got all from one area or all from another. I am afraid that it is going to be a difficult task. We will do everything we can to take the whole country with us. We will need to have a responsible debate about how we do it, but it has to be done for the good of our country.

Q15. [2471] **Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): In the past week, I have been contacted by students and parents in my constituency who are devastated to have been told that geography and politics courses at Liverpool John Moores university have been cancelled from September, giving them less than three months to make alternative arrangements. What assurances can the Prime Minister give my constituents that cuts to higher education will not affect students?

The Prime Minister: I welcome the hon. Lady to her place. The assurance I can give her is that we are going to increase the number of university places by 10,000 in the coming year, because we want to see higher education expand. The other assurance I can give her is that we are committed to the Browne review that the previous Government set up, on an all-party basis, to look at how we can ensure that higher education is affordable both for the young people going into higher education and for our country as a whole.

Q12. [2468] **Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): Can I praise the Prime Minister for his staunch support of the NHS and its budget, and use this opportunity to invite him to Malvern to open, some time at his convenience this autumn, our brand-new community hospital?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend— *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. It is not against the rules of the House for a Government Back Bencher to support the Government; it is not that odd.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, we all remember you doing that very well. My hon. Friend's invitation is a kind one. The commitment that we have made to maintain health spending is very important. I want to see community hospitals and district general hospitals thrive under this Government.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): May I invite the Prime Minister to take a trip with me next season from Seven Sisters tube station up to the Spurs ground at White Hart Lane? On that journey he will see a proliferation of betting shops. Will he give local authorities the power to deal with the saturation of betting shops, which are preying on working and poor people?

The Prime Minister: That is another great invitation this afternoon. I say to the right hon. Gentleman that there is a balance to strike. Some of the deregulation that took place was necessary in order not to have over-regulation of these sectors, but yes I think that there is a case for allowing local authorities greater latitude to decide on some of these things. We made that point in opposition, particularly on the issue of lap-dancing clubs, over which local authorities should be given more power and influence. The issue now seems to be being taken up more broadly by Labour Members.

Financial Services Regulation

12.31 pm

Mr Alistair Darling (Edinburgh South West) (Lab) *(Urgent Question):* To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to set out his proposals for the future of financial services regulation and for the role of the Bank of England.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): In 1997, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), as Chancellor, established, without any consultation and without telling Parliament, the tripartite system to regulate the financial system. In doing so, he removed from the Bank of England its historical role in monitoring overall levels of debt in the economy. It is well known that the late Eddie George was deeply unhappy with that decision. It is also well known that the tripartite system that the right hon. Gentleman created, and that his successor as Chancellor sustained, failed spectacularly in its mission to ensure stability in the financial markets, and the failure of certain banks cost the taxpayer a vast amount of money. Indeed, British taxpayers funded the largest bank bail-out in the world, and it was only in Britain that depositors queued in the high street to get their money back.

The British people rightly ask how this new coalition Government will learn from the mistakes of their predecessor. The coalition agreement commits us to reforming the regulatory system for financial services in order to avoid a repeat of the financial crisis, and that is precisely what we will do. First, on the structure of regulation, our plan is to hand over to the Bank of England the responsibility for macro-prudential supervision, which should never have been taken away from it. The tools for macro-prudential supervision are the subject of ongoing international discussions. We are playing a full part in that process at European and G20 level, along with the Governor of the Bank and the chairman of the Financial Services Authority. It is already clear that the tools will include capital requirements that work against the cycle, rather than with it.

The coalition Government are also committed to handing to the Bank of England responsibility for the oversight of micro-prudential regulation. It is clear that the central bank needs to have a deeper understanding of what is going on in individual firms. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury will give further details of the institutional arrangements in a parliamentary statement tomorrow. It is important that the institutions involved correctly follow their own internal procedures before those arrangements are made public, and the Governor of the Bank will be talking to the court of the Bank this afternoon.

The coalition Government will also deliver on their promise to establish an independent commission on banking. The previous Government would brook no debate about the future structure of the banks, the relationship between retail and investment banking, and the questions of how best to protect taxpayers and how to ensure greater competition in an industry that they actively sought to consolidate. The previous Prime Minister did not want anyone to challenge his opinions, but we cannot ignore this debate about the future of banking—indeed, I want Britain to lead it. We will therefore establish the commission on banking to investigate those issues. It will be chaired by Sir John Vickers, who is a former chief economist at the Bank of England, was one of the first members of the Monetary Policy Committee and is a former chairman of the Office of Fair Trading. He is a man of unquestioned experience, integrity and independence who approaches this issue with an open mind. I am today placing in the Libraries of both Houses the terms of reference and we await the conclusions of the commission.

Unlike the last Government, this Government are prepared to confront the difficult challenges of the regulation and structure of the banks. We are prepared to learn the lessons of what went wrong, even if they were not.

Mr Darling: I am grateful to the Chancellor for that answer, and I wonder whether I might press him on a number of points. First, he says that the Bank of England will have responsibility for macro-prudential supervision, but he also says that the debate as to what macro-prudential supervision consists of is still up for grabs as it is still being debated internationally. When does he expect those discussions to be concluded?

The Chancellor also says that the Bank of England will have some responsibility for micro-supervision. It has been suggested in some quarters, for example, that the Bank of England, rather than the FSA, might have dealt with whether the Royal Bank of Scotland could take over ABN AMRO. Does he not realise that far from clarifying the situation, this is adding another complication? The risk is that we will have a dog's breakfast of a regulatory system in which no one knows who is making decisions and no one knows who is in charge. Does he not accept that at a time when there is still a great deal of uncertainty in the banking world and a great deal of turbulence, the last thing that we want is a situation in which it is not clear which organisation is responsible for precisely which activity? If both the Bank and the FSA are responsible for regulating institutions, that is bound to lead to confusion and inevitably runs the risk that mistakes will be made.

Will the Chancellor also tell us whether, in relation to the Bank of England's responsibility, he is planning any reform to the financial stability committee or any internal reforms so that a committee will advise the Governor? If that is the case, will the Governor be making those decisions or will a committee do so, perhaps on a wider basis? Will he also tell us whether or not Lord Turner, the chairman of the FSA, agrees with his proposals and whether he is now prepared to serve, in effect, as a deputy under the Governor of the Bank of England?

In relation to the proposal to break up banks, will the Chancellor explain how Northern Rock, which was a very simple retail bank on the face of it, would have been saved from collapse simply by virtue of the fact that it was a retail bank and not an investment bank? Will he also explain how his proposal would have made any difference to Lehman Brothers, which did not take a single retail deposit but was a complex investment bank that collapsed with calamitous consequences? Will he tell us, too, whether the commission that he proposes to set up will consider the break-up of British banks such as Barclays or HSBC? Will he tell us how the uncertainty that will inevitably be caused by the work of the commission will help to rebuild the financial stability that we want? At a time when there is that instability,

[Mr Darling]

does he not think that it would be far better to keep the FSA working on what it is supposed to be doing—that is, the day-to-day supervision and regulation—bearing in mind that some small minor decisions are sometimes very important, especially if they are the wrong ones?

Is it not the case that the proposal was made in the first place because the right hon. Gentleman was looking before the election for a dividing line between him and the then Government? What we have today is something that has been cobbled together, that is ill thought out, that will add to uncertainty and that runs a grave risk that further mistakes will be made with catastrophic consequences in the future.

Mr Osborne: The dividing line is between a Government who want to learn the lessons of what went wrong and an Opposition who have no intention of learning from all the mistakes that they made in office. I find that striking.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about a dog's breakfast. What about the dog's breakfast of the tripartite system that allowed the Royal Bank of Scotland to fail and that allowed Northern Rock to fail? He was the Chancellor at the time and he completely failed to see the growing levels of debt in the economy. He and the institutions that were created by his predecessor completely failed to see what had gone wrong in individual institutions. The thing I find extraordinary—perhaps Opposition Members will reflect on this—is that their shadow Chancellor is setting them against reform of the regulation of banks and reform of the structure of the banking industry. That is what he has just done. What we are going to do is to have an open debate about the structure of banks. That debate is happening in the United States of America, in the newspapers of this country and in parliamentary debates here. The only place it was not happening was in the last Government under his chancellorship.

We think that the sensible approach, in order to resolve these issues—[Hon. Members: "Answer the question."] I am answering the questions—every single one of them. We think that the sensible approach is to set up an independent commission under Sir John Vickers to examine these issues and to take into account the different, strongly held views. For example, John McFall, who was the Chair of the Treasury Committee in the last Parliament, has in recent days put his name to a report that calls for structural reform of the banks. The shadow Chancellor might want to ignore his views, but I want to listen to them and to take them on board as part of an independent commission, and that is exactly what we are going to do.

When it comes to the international context, I think that all of that will enable us to lead the debate. Of course, we have to agree this at an international level, where some of the macro-prudential tools are. As the shadow Chancellor knows, there is a debate taking place in the G20. We hope, in the Seoul summit in November, to have come to firm conclusions on the capital, liquidity and leverage requirements. When we have come to those agreements and when we have international agreement on what those standards should be, we will need a regulatory system here, at home, that is fit for purpose, so that they can be implemented.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): As one of those who strongly opposed the introduction of the tripartite regulation of our financial institutions as soon as it was announced in 1997, may I congratulate the Chancellor on getting rid of the FSA, which has been a major contributor to the disasters in the economic sphere in recent years and which was regarded in the City, throughout the whole of its lifetime, as a thoroughly inefficient organisation?

Mr Osborne: To be fair to the FSA, it has been rather candid about the mistakes that were made when the shadow Chancellor was the Chancellor and when the former Prime Minister was the Chancellor. We have to learn from those mistakes. As I have told the House, we will set out the details of the institutional arrangements in a parliamentary statement tomorrow.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): The Chancellor talks about breaking up the retail and investment banks, but the immediate challenge for the Government is the future of the nationalised banks. Will he consider turning the failed banks into mutuals that focus on long-term returns and not on short-term profits?

Mr Osborne: We need to take some time before coming to decisions on how to dispose of the bank shares that we own in the Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds, and the banks we own, such as Northern Rock, not least because at the moment the British taxpayer would make a substantial loss on many of those share purchases. However, we are prepared to consider lots of options. Sir John Vickers' commission is going to look at competition in the banking industry. It has become incredibly consolidated in the past couple of years and that is not necessarily the best thing for bank customers, as many of us will know from representing businesses that cannot get access to credit. It is sensible to look at what Sir John Vickers and his commission have to say about this.

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): Why was so much of this announced on this morning's "Today" programme rather than here? Who will chair the financial stability committee in a crisis? Will it be, as it should be, the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Mr Osborne: There has been quite a lot of speculation, and as we will see in the coming days not all of it has been very accurate. I cannot account for the speculation, because it certainly has not been coming from my office. I am discovering that it is a feature of being in government that lots of people anticipate one's views before one expresses them.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on becoming Chair of the Treasury Committee and I hope to have the engagement of his Committee in this important debate over the next year. When it comes to the commitment of taxpayers' money, the elected Government, who are accountable to the House, will remain in charge.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The Chancellor will know that the FSA was created following the closure of BCCI on 5 July 1991, and the publication of the Bingham report. Nineteen years later, some of my constituents are still waiting for all their money back. I think the Chancellor knows that I am about to ask the same question I have asked every Treasury Minister over the

last 19 years, so in the spirit of open government, will he do something that the former Chancellor would not do and please publish the confidential parts of the Bingham report so that we can have a proper debate about the issue?

Mr Osborne: I think everyone would acknowledge the work the right hon. Gentleman has done on the issue, over many years, on behalf of his constituents and other people who were so badly affected by that scandal. I was of course present at the exchange between him and the shadow Chancellor about the publication of the secret Bingham report—if I can put it like that—and I have asked for urgent advice about that and for a copy of the report so that I, too, can read it.

Matthew Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con): In a similar exchange in a debate last week, did my right hon. Friend hear the shadow Chancellor say that the former Government did not understand the systemic risks in the banking system? Does he share my surprise that Members on the Labour Front Bench are no longer willing to engage in an argument about putting right the system of banking regulation that so spectacularly failed?

Mr Osborne: I am surprised, and I am not sure whether the shadow Chancellor is committing his party for the rest of this Parliament to be against reform of the structure of banking. I see quite a lot of heads shaking, so perhaps he is not. We shall wait and see. It is worth noting that on 8 June Lord Young of Norwood Green, a Minister at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in the last Government, referred to

"the tripartite relationship that was supposed to identify and regulate the systemic risk in British banking—a relationship that we all know failed somewhat spectacularly."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 June 2010; Vol. 719, c. 630.]

Mr Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): Given the continuing difficulties in the banking sector, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the proposals he is putting to the House today will lead to greater uncertainty and greater blight in the financial services sector, and make it more difficult for banks and financial institutions to recover?

Mr Osborne: No, I do not accept that. We cannot ignore in this House that a debate is raging not just in our country but across the world about the structure of the banking industry and the best way to regulate it. The hon. Gentleman may have decided that he has all the answers and the Labour party may have decided that the system it established 13 years ago was the right system and we should stick with it, but I think we should be more open. We should have a process that brings that debate to a conclusion. Tonight I am going to the Mansion House dinner, as I believe the shadow Chancellor is too. I have sat at Mansion House dinners as shadow Chancellor and listened as the Governor of the Bank of England said something completely different from what the Chancellor of the Exchequer said on the same occasion. We have to resolve the debate, so we have to set up a process that resolves it, and I believe that an independent commission in which everyone can engage, including Members of the House, is the right approach.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): I welcome my right hon. Friend's approach. Does he acknowledge that it is not just the architecture of the regulation but its quality that has conspicuously failed? It may be understandable that the Labour party wants to defend its creation of the FSA, but do Labour Members not acknowledge that it actually failed? For many people, it too often protected the providers of services and not the consumers who were actually investing in them.

Mr Osborne: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The overall objective is to move away from a process of regulation that is simply about ticking boxes to one where more judgment is exercised and people start to ask those such as Sir Fred Goodwin, "What are you doing with your bank? Is it right that you are taking over ABN AMRO?", instead of asking him whether he wants a knighthood.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Can the Chancellor explain who will be responsible under these reformed arrangements for the regulation of derivatives—financial instruments that are obviously sometimes very opaque and complex and could present a major risk to our financial system? Is it the Bank of England, the FSA or the Treasury?

Mr Osborne: The details of the institutional arrangements will be set out in a parliamentary statement tomorrow. As I said, it is right to allow the institutions involved to conduct their internal procedures, such as speaking to the court of the Bank. I know it is a completely novel idea not to bounce every institution in the country into the decisions the Government take, and actually to allow a proper process to take place, but I happen to believe that that is the right approach. The serious issue of the regulation of derivatives is the subject of intense international debate to try to create a better regulated system—or indeed to provide regulation where none existed—and to provide some central clearing operations for derivatives so that we can avoid some of the systemic risks that built up in recent years.

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): Does the Chancellor agree that the previous Government's idea of regulating our banks was to have a midnight cocktail party, where they twisted the arm of the chairman of Lloyds Banking Group to take over HBOS?

Mr Osborne: Indeed, my hon. Friend is right: certainly, if the accounts are true, that was the approach taken by the former Prime Minister. I am not sure whether he did so with the knowledge of the former Chancellor, but I guess that we have to wait for the flurry of memoirs to find out.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): This weekend, there was an advertisement for a pay-day cheque service that had an interest rate at the bottom of the screen of 236%. Given that the Chancellor is about to make changes to the FSA's consumer protection function, does he think that 236% interest is fair, and if it is not, what will he do about it?

Mr Osborne: The OFT will shortly publish a report on high-cost credit that will address some of these issues, and the hon. Lady is absolutely right to be concerned about them. One of the things that I hope will flow from the institutional arrangements that we

[Mr George Osborne]

are putting in place is a stronger voice for the consumer to ensure that particularly the most vulnerable people in our society are protected from exploitation.

Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con): Will the Chancellor assure the House and the country that he will never display the sort of complacency so aptly demonstrated by the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), who said in 2007 that we were entering a golden age of prosperity in the City of London?

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is right. I was sitting in the Mansion House when the former Prime Minister, with great prophecy, announced that we were embarking in the summer of 2007 on a new golden age for the City of London. Unfortunately, as with everything else that was golden that the previous Prime Minister touched, that turned to lead.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): What systemic risks specifically created the collapse of Lehman Brothers, and how does the Chancellor intend to regulate the top 10 large investment banks and protect the British economy against such collapses?

Mr Osborne: The risks around Lehman Brothers are well documented.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): What are they?

Mr Osborne: Suddenly, the hon. Gentleman is interested in the regulation of Lehman Brothers, but there we go.

The risks were pretty clear. No arrangements were in place for winding up a large and complex financial firm. That was one concern. No arrangement was in place that would allow a global firm to avoid dying nationally in the way that it did. It was heavily exposed to, for example, the derivatives markets and other things. That had not been spotted either by the British regulator or, of course, the American regulator, which was in the lead. We need to investigate precisely that kind of issue, not just here in Britain, but across the world. That is being done in the international councils on which we sit. But surely, whether with Lehman Brothers, the Royal Bank of Scotland, HBOS or Northern Rock, we must learn the lesson of what went wrong. Again, I find it breathtaking that, at the beginning of the Parliament, the Labour party has set itself against changing the system of regulation. [Hon. Members: "No we haven't."] Labour Members may say that, but that is exactly what the shadow Chancellor did about 53 minutes ago.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): My understanding is that the credit rating agencies are not subject to any proper UK regulation at the moment and that some action is being taken at EU level in that regard. Does the Chancellor see any place in the new arrangements for UK regulation of the credit rating agencies, which, of course, bear a large responsibility for what happened in the sub-prime crisis?

Mr Osborne: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the role of the credit rating agencies. Of course, all sorts of organisations and products received triple A ratings that they should never have received. That triple A wrapper basically made them immune to investigation by the firms that were buying those products. Certainly, we need to improve the regulation in the domestic sense—here in Britain—but that is also the subject of decision at a European level, and the la Rosière proposals on European supervisory agencies will consider in particular the role and regulation of credit rating agencies.

Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend commit to ensuring far greater scrutiny of EU regulation concerning financial matters than the previous Administration ever did, to make sure that it helps, rather than hinders, our banking system?

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend makes a very good point that we must get the European regulation right, and the United Kingdom has a particular role as the location of most of the wholesale financial services in Europe. We therefore bring some insights to the table, which not all other members of the European Union can do. I am clear that we must do that. It will be under discussion at the European Council later this week and, I suspect, in pretty much every ECOFIN meeting for the rest of the year.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): As a part of these reforms, will the Bank of England consider unemployment when determining interest rates?

Mr Osborne: The Bank of England has an inflation target, and I am not proposing to change the inflation-targeting regime.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me before I have made my maiden speech. For the record, this is not it. *[Laughter.]*

Given the gravity of the situation in which the last Government have left the finances, does my right hon. Friend the Chancellor agree that it behoves all parties to work together on this? Will he confirm whether he has received any positive contributions from Opposition Members, or whether, as it appears to Conservative Back Benchers, they are now reclined into abject criticism?

Mr Osborne: Well, it was a very good maiden intervention by my hon. Friend. I find it strange that the Labour party does not want to engage in this debate. One would have thought that the Labour party was interested in how banks will be regulated, in how we learn from the mistakes and what went wrong, and in the structure of banking in the future, but the shadow Chancellor has set it against that. However, individual Back-Bench Members of the Labour party will probably be more interested in this than their Front Benchers. Of course, by setting up an independent commission and, indeed, by having the debate in the Treasury Committee and on the Floor of the House, those contributions will be heard.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): The Chancellor says that he is keen to learn the lessons from the economic problems that happened. Is one of those lessons that he was wrong to say that the Government should have let Northern Rock fold?

Mr Osborne: What I said about Northern Rock was that we should have found a way to have a Bank of England-led reconstruction of that firm. The previous Government then introduced legislation in Parliament that would have allowed that to happen in the future. That is exactly how they proposed to handle future bank failures. *[Interruption.]* The shadow Chancellor says that we voted against it. We did not vote against the Banking Act 2009, by which he introduced the procedures for a Bank-led reconstruction. He continues to shake his head. I seem to remember that I went to his office in the autumn of 2008, pledged my support and delivered on that support.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): As someone who worked with the FSA before I was elected and had to plough through many long consultation papers and then try to help business to understand them, may I perhaps suggest to the Chancellor that the people who are working at the FSA are not the right people to be transferred to the Bank of England and that, in fact, we need people who understand the risks and working in the City of London, rather than those who have just read textbooks about that, as many of the people in the FSA appear to be?

Mr Osborne: Of course, it is important that we have the right people doing regulation. The FSA made mistakes, and it has been very candid about them. Lots of institutions made mistakes in the build-up to the crisis—including, of course, the British Government. The people at the FSA have worked incredibly hard in the past couple of years, and I should put on record my tribute to the work that they have done. As for the institutional arrangements that we will put in place, there will be a parliamentary statement tomorrow.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Will the changes that the Chancellor envisages have any impact on the bonus culture at the FSA? I understand that it cost us a record £22 million and reached 84% of its staff last year, at the very time when it was calling for curbs on bank bonuses.

Mr Osborne: I remember that at the time I, too, was surprised by the FSA's decision. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to say this, those questions are best asked once we have made clear what the new institutional arrangements are. Then we can get on to the pay and rations.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Does the Chancellor agree that it is surprising to hear Opposition Members talk about Northern Rock as a shining example of micro-regulation, when the FSA's own report into Northern Rock said that the ARROW process gave it far too low a ranking and that that such decisions would have been better taken in the home of the lender of last resort?

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend makes a very good observation. Let me make a broader observation, if I may. She has enormous experience of the financial services. There are Members on the Opposition Benches with real experience as well, including the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), who used to work in the Bank of England. I would like that experience to be brought to bear in the process over the next year. We have decided not to resolve the issues in the Treasury, in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and in No. 10 Downing street, as we could have done. We have decided to have an open commission to which all Members can contribute and with which they can all engage. I think that is a better way to make policy.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Has the Chancellor taken the opportunity to review the *Official Report* of the Committee stages of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 when the FSA was being set up? If so, does he recall that the constant cry from the Conservative Benches in those days was for lighter-touch regulation? Will he take the opportunity to say unequivocally to the City that, as far as his party is concerned, the era of lighter-touch regulation is over?

Mr Osborne: My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) was clear about the risks of creating the tripartite system when he was the shadow Chancellor who opposed that legislation. When it comes to light-touch regulation, let me quote what the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, said in 2006:

> "I will be honest with you, many who advised me, including not a few newspapers, favoured a regulatory crackdown. I believe that we were right not to go down that road".

I am afraid that the regulatory approach taken by the Labour Government when they were in office completely failed, and we will learn the lessons of their mistakes.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): Does the Chancellor agree that the Opposition, who sold the gold so wisely and then bought euros, prophesied a golden age and then brought the economy, like a ship, on to the rocks, are not qualified to give us financial advice and seem to have such a poor memory?

Mr Osborne: I agree with every word that my hon. Friend said.

Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): May I declare an interest, as I am regulated by the Financial Services Authority? Does the Chancellor agree that boom and bust is part of the human condition, we will never get away from it, and the best that regulation can do is ameliorate extremes, not stop boom and bust altogether?

Mr Osborne: I am not sure whether the Labour party in opposition will keep its promise to abolish boom and bust, but it proved pretty disastrous in government. All of us welcome the fact that my hon. Friend will no longer be regulated by the FSA, and instead will be regulated by the Whips Office.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Despite some high-profile casualties, does my right hon. Friend recognise the importance of building societies and mutuals to the financial services sector? What steps does he propose to take to encourage that sector to increase?

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is right that building societies and mutuals have an important role to play in the future. We want to strengthen them and support those who want to create mutuals. We will set out the details of how we will do that in the next few weeks.

Speaker's Statement

1.3 pm

Mr Speaker: In accordance with the Order of the House of yesterday, I will now announce the arrangements for the ballots for the Chair and members of the Backbench Business Committee.

The ballot for the election of the Chair will be held in the Division Lobbies from 9 am to 11 am on Tuesday 22 June. Nominations may be submitted in the Lower Table Office from 10 am to 5 pm on the day before the ballot, Monday 21 June.

The ballot for the election of the members of the Committee will be held in the Division Lobbies from 10 am to 12 noon on Tuesday 29 June. Nominations may be submitted in the Lower Table Office from 10 am to 5 pm on the day before the ballot, Monday 28 June.

A briefing note with more details about the elections will be made available to Members in the Vote Office and published on the intranet.

Opposition Day

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

Industry (Government Support)

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

1.5 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes the need for a clear deficit reduction plan, and that such a plan must have at its heart measures to foster growth and create the conditions for a strong business-led recovery; believes Government has a crucial role to play in fostering economic growth and in creating a better-balanced economy; supports strategic decisions to back key sectors such as digital, life sciences, low carbon manufacturing and civil nuclear power; congratulates the previous Government for supporting businesses through the downturn and laying the foundations for the UK to be globally competitive as the country makes the transition to a low carbon economy; expresses serious concern that the Government's decisions risk removing key support for business and industry at a critical moment in the economic cycle; further believes that cutting investment allowances will pull away vital support for manufacturers seeking to invest and grow; further notes that the Government's scaling back of the regional development agencies at a time when recovery is fragile will impact on investment vital for regional economies; and regrets the coalition Government's decision to place a question mark over a number of vital industrial support decisions taken by the previous Government.

Let me make it clear at the beginning of the debate what I said during our initial exchanges at oral questions a couple of weeks ago—deficit reduction is important and I do not say that every decision to reduce expenditure is wrong. The Secretary of State and I both fought the recent election on policies to reduce the deficit. But the Opposition believe that this must be done in a way that supports economic growth, and not in a way that undermines it. It is critical to our future that fiscal consolidation is done in a way that supports rather than undermines growth.

On the timing of deficit reduction, I am still saying what the Secretary of State and I were both saying back at the time of the election, but he is now saying something very different. Just a week before polling day he said that

"it would be foolish to rush into significant cuts now which take the economy down even further, which lead to an even bigger deficit problem".

Yet just days later, the Secretary of State was signing up to his part of £6 billion of cuts in this financial year—cuts that mean 10,000 fewer students going to university than under the published plans, and £300 million being taken out of the regional development agencies this year.

Robert Flello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): Such cuts will hit my constitueney and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent North (Joan Walley) and for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt). The cuts will hit places such as Stoke-on-Trent particularly hard—areas that have struggled to come forward from the 1980s. The impact will be devastating.

Mr McFadden: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Before the election we were told that £6 billion could be taken out in efficiencies, but the announcement proved that that was not the case, and that the cuts will have a real effect on constituencies such as his, mine and many others around the country.

What could be the reason for the volte-face on the timing of deficit reduction? There may be cynics on the Opposition Benches who might think it had something to do with the election result or with the fact that the Liberal Democrats were in coalition talks with the Conservatives, but the Secretary of State leads us to believe that that was not the case at all. He said it was all about events in euroland, but to paraphrase Frankie Valli, "Greece" was the word, although I have a feeling that in the present coalition the Secretary of State does not go into work in the morning singing, "We can be who we are".

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the uncertainty about the future of Advantage West Midlands, for example, is creating problems for small businesses locally? Does he also agree that if the Government set up a green investment bank—the sooner, the better—that could go a long way to helping industry in the west midlands?

Mr McFadden: That policy was in our manifesto, and we believe it would make an important contribution to economic growth.

Our argument today is that if we want a successful economy in the future and if we want to rebalance our economy and support strong manufacturing and powerful regions, a focus on deficit reduction alone is not enough. It is not enough just to have a plan for the deficit. The Government also need a plan for growth; and for that to work, we have to understand that they have an important role to play in supporting industry and creating the right environment for success.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that a potential blight is being put on companies such as Airbus and Vauxhall near my constituency, where grants signed by the previous Government to help to support the growth of manufacturing industry are now being reviewed by this Government? That is damaging the long-term potential for growth, and decisions should be reached urgently so that we end that blight and get a move on in creating jobs.

Mr McFadden: The review of industrial support decisions has indeed created damaging uncertainty that should be brought to an end in a positive way as soon as possible.

The Labour Government knew that we had to play our part if rhetoric about rebalancing the economy and making the most of the shift to low carbon was to lead to new industries and new jobs. That was not, as some Government Members have sought to portray it, some kind of irresponsible bail-out plan concentrated on failing companies. It was a strategy about supporting key national capabilities in the industries and jobs of the future, ensuring that we had strong regional economies, and having the right tax measures in place to foster investment in new plant and machinery and to support research and development here in the UK.

Jim McGovern (Dundee West) (Lab): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware of how crucial the computer games industry is in my constituency, not only for the number of people the industry employs but for the students who study at the university of Abertay. The previous Government made a commitment to tax breaks for the computer games industry; does he agree that that commitment should be honoured?

Mr McFadden: The creative industries, including those that my hon. Friend mentions, are absolutely critical for our future economy. As with other areas, I believe that Government have a role in play in ensuring that the creativity of those industries flourishes here in the UK.

Of course, our future economy will be market-driven, and success depends on motivated individuals, great ideas, and enterprising and thriving companies. Our point, however, is that there is a critical role for Government when market gaps occur—a job to do in supporting investment that can pay dividends many times over in future. Let us remember that this is something that many Governments around the world are doing. Do we really believe that if the new Government elected here turn their back on this approach, other Governments who are also trying to attract new industries and new jobs will do the same? I do not think so.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): This week, One NorthEast, the regional development agency in the north-east of England, confirmed a grant of £7.3 million to INEOS Bio to construct Europe's first advanced bioethanol—ethanol from waste—plant in my constituency. That will create 350 construction jobs and 40 permanent skilled jobs, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend agrees that that is another fine example of why One NorthEast should continue its good work with the level of funding that has given it the power to help the north-east's economy to diversify so successfully.

Mr McFadden: I absolutely agree. That sounds like exactly the kind of project where Government, through the RDA, and business can come together for the benefit of the local area.

Our concern is that the new Government do not understand the role of Government in fostering new industries or may even be ideologically opposed to it, believing, as the Secretary of State has said, that

"one of the most important jobs of Government...is actually to get out of the way".

Getting out of the way would have done us little good when we were trying to get Nissan to build its battery plant and LEAF electric car in the north-east. It would not have helped us when were extending a loan guarantee to Ford to make the next generation of low-carbon diesel engines here in the UK. It would not have helped us when we were trying to support world-class aerospace at Airbus and Rolls-Royce. It would not have assisted in our ambition for the UK to move into the world premier league in the nuclear supply chain through the loan for Sheffield Forgemasters. Nor would it have done any good when we were trying to attract manufacturers of the next generation of off-shore wind turbines to make their products here in Britain.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Is not Airbus a perfect example not only of how hundreds of millions of pounds have secured and created thousands of jobs,

[Mark Tami]

but of the fact that that money is repayable, and has been repaid, and that royalties are paid on every aircraft sold, which means that this is also a very sound investment for the Government?

Mr McFadden: My hon. Friend makes a good point. A lot of industrial support is in the form of loans or loan guarantees. The depiction that the new Government have attempted to create of the indiscriminate giving of grants that were not in the public interest is absolutely not true.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of last week's Centre for Cities report, which highlighted the growth, or lack of growth, in the private and public sectors over the past 10 years? Some 69% of the 1.2 million jobs added to city economies over the past 10 years were public sector positions. In my constituency, the growth rate in the private sector fell by 10% over that period, which meant the loss of 4,600 jobs from the private sector while the public sector grew by 7,600 jobs. My city was the fourth worst in the country; the city of Stoke, represented by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Flello), was the worst. May I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that if that is the result of 10 years of massive spending in the public sector, it is simply unsustainable to carry on losing that number of private sector jobs, and that our job is to re-stimulate the economy and the framework for growth in the business sector?

Mr McFadden: The answer will be shorter than the question. I am aware of that report. However, my point is that if we want to stimulate private sector investment through some of the companies that I have mentioned, Government have a role to play. Simply walking away will lead to fewer, not more, private sector jobs.

Robert Flello: Returning to the subject of RDAs, a firm in my constituency wishes to bring the manufacture of ceramic products back into Stoke-on-Trent from abroad, but it is unlikely to be able to pursue that ambition because Advantage West Midlands is now unable to confirm its support. The ceramics industry is trying to bring jobs back into Stoke-on-Trent, and it is quite capable of doing so, but not without a little extra support.

Mr McFadden: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Sometimes a bit of investment from the public sector can lever in significant extra investment from the private sector.

I want to turn to the criticisms of the approach that I have set out that have been made by the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister in recent weeks. They have made specific accusations, saying that the projects were agreed in a hurry and were politically motivated. Indeed, the Prime Minister repeated that allegation a short time ago at Prime Minister's questions, when he spoke of fiddled grants for political reasons. Last week, he alleged that we had spent tens of billions of pounds on industrial support. I have to say that it is no wonder that he is sharpening his public spending axe if that is his grasp of the amount of money that we were spending on industrial support.

Let me deal head-on with the accusation about rushed and politically motivated largesse. These projects were not agreed in a hurry. We negotiated for months with the car companies, with the wind turbine suppliers and with Sheffield Forgemasters. All those projects were subject to careful scrutiny by officials and to the usual value-for-money criteria used in decisions of this kind. In the last Parliament, time after time, I stood at the Dispatch Box opposite and was criticised by some of those who are now Ministers sitting in front of me—not for going too quickly on industrial aid or for being rash about it, but for dragging my feet.

In a report published as long ago as July 2009, the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, which was chaired at the time by the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Peter Luff), who is now an Under-Secretary of State for Defence and a ministerial colleague of the Business Secretary, said that it was

> "profoundly disappointed that to date not one single penny has been advanced through the scheme"—

the automotive assistance scheme—and added:

> "We hope that this will change rapidly."

That is the same scheme that has funded Ford and General Motors, so let us have fewer accusations that there was a huge rush in the run-up to the election to spend money profligately.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend quoted what I intended to say. I was a member of the Committee that produced that report, and when I represented it in a debate on local radio, I repeated the accusations that appeared in our report.

Mr McFadden: I am pleased to hear from my hon. Friend and I wish him well in his new role as the new Chairman of that Committee.

Gordon Birtwistle (Burnley) (LD): May I welcome the former Minister's conversion to a balanced economy? In that past 13 years, the previous Government virtually destroyed manufacturing industry and hung their coats on the financial industry, so this country went down. My constituency has lost hundreds of jobs in manufacturing industry because of the economic policies of the previous Government.

Mr McFadden *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. So that I do not interrupt the flow of the right hon. Gentleman, I should say now that there have been a number of interventions whose eloquence—this is the fairest that can be said of them—has been matched only by their length. Interventions do need to be a bit shorter.

Mr McFadden: The hon. Gentleman sums up the problem with the attitude of the Liberal Democrats. They are determined to say that we are no longer a strong manufacturing country, but I have news for him: we are the sixth biggest manufacturing economy in the world.

Matthew Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr McFadden: I am going to make some progress but I will give way later.

I was speaking about the timing of the previous Government's decisions, but I also want to address the accusation that the political representation of this or that area was a motivation for our decisions. Not only is that complete and utter nonsense, but the fact that the new Government see it that way speaks volumes about how they see the Government's role in supporting industry. Our country was faced with a choice of Rolls-Royce manufacturing here or in Singapore, Nissan could have gone to Portugal, and nuclear components could have been made in Japan or Korea. Are the Government really saying that when faced with those alternatives, their first reaction would be not to ask how to secure the investment and the jobs for Britain, but to reach for the electoral map to see who the local MP is? What a dismal view of the Government's role in supporting UK industry.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's robust point. The Prime Minister said that all that money was sent to Labour marginals, but that did not work, did it? If we want a strong manufacturing sector, will the three and a half pro-Europeans in the DBIS ministerial team—the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) is the half—keep British manufacturing ahead of that of France? That is their responsibility.

Mr McFadden: My right hon. Friend makes a strong point, but I want to make progress.

The previous Government's decisions were neither rushed nor politically motivated, and our manufacturing industries deserve a better future. The Government say that they are reviewing the projects to which I referred. We have already had a welcome confirmation of the Nissan decision, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson) for pressing the Government so effectively on that, but damaging uncertainty still exists, so let me ask the Secretary of State some specific questions.

What is the position on the loan guarantees to GM and Ford? What is the position on the loan to Sheffield Forgemasters? The director general of the CBI visited that plant the other day and said:

> "It is hugely exciting to see such impressive technology and innovation being developed on this scale, here in the UK. The size and quality of the products being developed at Forgemasters is outstanding and this expansion programme builds on that by making a real investment for the future."

That was the verdict of the CBI. The previous Government decided to back the expansion of Sheffield Forgemasters not because we wanted to give aid to one company, but because we wanted a greater national capability in the nuclear supply chain, which is critical for Britain when many countries are building more nuclear power stations.

The Secretary of State must confirm the Government's position on that, because I must tell him that there are a lot of rumours going around about their attitude and response, and that if the loan does not go ahead, it will mean he is behaving exactly like the banks that he criticises for not supporting industry. We said that we would support industry, and it is time that the Government's position on that loan is cleared up.

Matthew Hancock: The right hon. Gentleman has talked a lot about growth and the need for a growth strategy. Is it still the Labour party's position to put a tax on jobs in the middle of the recovery?

Mr McFadden: The proposals we made on the tax to which the hon. Gentleman refers would have kicked in next year. If I were him, I would not be so cocky about tax just a week before his Chancellor comes to the Dispatch Box to tell us his tax proposals.

To return to my specific questions, will the new Government go ahead with the port development competition that was so pivotal in attracting offshore wind suppliers to the United Kingdom? Will the new Government stand by the support to Airbus and Rolls-Royce, which was mentioned by my hon. Friends? The Government have already caused damaging uncertainty by placing a question mark over those projects. If they abandon them, all their words about manufacturing and rebalancing the economy will rightly be seen as worthless.

Mark Tami: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr McFadden: No—I have already given way to my hon. Friend and I want to make progress.

Support for industry is not just about specific interventions, but about having the right measures in place to foster investment and innovation, and I want to ask the Secretary of State where we stand on some of the key measures in that area, such as capital allowances, which the Government provide to encourage investment in new plant and machinery. The allowances are vital to manufacturing companies, particularly when we want them to be moving to lower carbon production. For those reasons, we doubled investment allowances in our last Budget, which meant that the new allowance—of £100,000—covers some 99% of capital investments made by companies every year.

The new Government, however, are pledged to cut those allowances to pay for their planned cut in corporation tax, a move described by the Engineering Employers Federation as "a disaster". It has said that if those plans went ahead:

> "Any business would have to think twice about investing in the UK."

Before the election, the Chancellor said that that plan would involve the removal of allowances amounting to £3.5 billion, which would otherwise support manufacturing. Can the Secretary of State confirm that it remains the Government's policy to cut investment allowances for manufacturing industry?

Another issue is supporting research and development. We are all agreed that we want research and development, and the manufacturing associated with it, to take place here in the UK. For that reason, the previous Government introduced the idea of a patent box—a corporation tax rate of just 10% on future profits made from patents. When we announced that policy, Andrew Witty, chief executive of GlaxoSmithKline said:

> "The patent box is exactly the sort of active, long-term and creative support that we need from the government to ensure that the UK remains an attractive place for highly skilled sectors such as pharmaceuticals."

When the Secretary of State was asked about that a couple of weeks ago, he did not answer, but I want to give him another chance to do so today. If the new

[Mr McFadden]

Government believe so much in a lower rate of corporation tax, will he now tell the House whether they support that proposal for an extra-low corporation tax rate for that part of the economy engaged in research and development here in the UK?

On innovation, can the Secretary of State tell us where we stand on the Hauser report and Labour's plans for innovation centres to help the crossover of ideas between academia and industry?

Let me say a word about the regional development agencies. These were introduced by the Labour Government a decade ago because we had seen the success of the Scottish and Welsh development agencies. They have, for the most part, performed well, with independent evaluation showing that for every £1 spent, regional economies benefited on average by £4.50. I know that the Secretary of State agrees that every part of the country should share in future economic growth. Before the election, he said that

"efficiency has become the new politically correct word for sacking people and cutting services".

But one of his first acts, together with other Departments, was to take £300 million out of the RDAs, so I know that he will not claim that that was about efficiency. Will he admit that that will have a real impact, with business support cut, projects cancelled and delayed, and—as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Flello) said, less private investment levered in to those projects?

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): Earlier, the right hon. Gentleman accepted the need to control the budget deficit. Is there any area in which he thinks public spending should be reduced? Can he share just one such area with the House?

Mr McFadden: The previous Government set out many proposals, including some £900 million over the next few years in the expenditure of the Department in which I was a Minister. We also said that we would save billions more than that on public sector pay and pensions, and we set out many other proposals. I do not stand here as someone who says that there should never be cuts. My point today is that cuts must be made in a way that supports a strategy for growth, not in a way that militates against it. That is why I raised the issue of industrial support and regional development.

Apart from the Budget, what about the future of the RDAs themselves? Government policy on this is in a total mess. We have had statements that they will be abolished, that they will be replaced, and that their replacements will both be different and look the same. Can the Secretary of State tell the House today exactly what the position is and how he is going to make a judgment on this? He talks of business and local authorities deciding in particular regions. How will that be done? Will it be one vote per council or one vote per business? Will it need a 55% majority? If it will be up to the region, how will he make the judgment on this important issue?

Lorely Burt (Solihull) (LD): RDAs are important, but does the right hon. Gentleman concede that the performance of some RDAs has been patchy—to put it kindly? Does he agree that we can still deliver support for business in a cost-effective way, but more flexibly using local enterprise partnerships? One size does not fit all in all areas of the UK.

Mr McFadden: I know that the hon. Lady cares about these issues, but I have to disagree with that point. Until the situation is clarified, businesses in various regions do not know with whom they will be working, and a damaging lack of confidence is emerging about how projects that cross local authority boundaries are to be managed in the future.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): The right hon. Gentleman has mentioned research and development, but one of the pressing issues in industry today is apprenticeships. We have been promised 50,000 new apprenticeships, but does he agree that they must lead to relevant qualifications at the end of them, so that apprentices are not just going through the process for the sake of it? They need to be relevant to the industry and to the companies involved.

Mr McFadden: When we were in government we brought apprenticeships back from the near-death state that they were in and made them once more a mainstream part of the labour market. They are valuable, and we increased the number available many times in our time in government. I agree that they are very important in providing opportunities for young people.

We sought this debate because we believe that while it is right to cut the deficit, it is not possible to go forward, as we come out of the recession, on the basis of tax and spending plans alone. Since the election, the Government have been determined to paint a picture of unremitting doom and gloom about the next few years in an effort to manage public expectations about the cuts that they are planning. Of course the situation we face is challenging—I do not deny that—but we do not believe that Britain is broken. We believe that we can have a strong industrial future if we have a clear plan for growth alongside the plan for deficit reduction.

Austerity alone will not shape our economic future. The Government should see their role as being ambitious for Britain, as well as one of managing public expectation about the cuts with which they have seemed to be obsessed in recent weeks. The Government should be ambitious to make the most of the transition to low carbon; to make the most of our excellence in creative industries and the information economy; and to build on what we have done in education and science and ensure that our economy benefits from it. As an MP who represents a manufacturing constituency, I also think that we should be ambitious to ensure that Britain makes things as well as provides excellent services. The Government are fond of talking about manufacturing in terms of decline. The truth is that the output and value of manufacturing have remained constant over the last decade up to the period of the recession, which is a tremendous achievement for our manufacturers as it was achieved in the face of the greatest wave of globalisation that the world economy has ever seen. We are in a stronger position than the Government make out.

The new Government have shown much about how they see things by making inaccurate statements about the amount of money that we spent on support for

business, the speed at which the decisions were taken and the political motivation behind them—as I say, it had nothing to do with who represents the constituencies in which our manufacturing is located. The country and the economy deserve better than that. We are clear about the Government's role in shaping the economy of the future. We have an opportunity before us, because we stand on the brink of a second industrial revolution as we move from a high-carbon economy to a low-carbon economy. We should be ambitious about seizing the opportunities that that represents, and that requires an active role for Government and a proper plan for growth. That is why we have tabled this motion today and that is why we raise these issues today. I commend this motion to the House.

1.37 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from "power" to the end of the Question and add:

"welcomes the Government's £150 million investment in a further 50,000 apprenticeships and their £50 million to support the college building programme that was in chaos under the last Government; further welcomes the extra 10,000 university places on offer for 2010-11; notes with concern the wasteful, ineffective policies pursued by the last Government regarding industrial support, and commends the Government's plans for local enterprise partnerships that will deliver better value for money and support long-term growth objectives; recognises the need for a review of all projects approved since 1 January 2010 to evaluate their worth to the economy and taxpayer; welcomes Government support for entrepreneurs by reducing bureaucracy and increasing flexibility for both employees and employers; and believes the Government has made a strong early start in providing the conditions for long-term low-carbon economic growth and rebalancing the economy.".

I have introduced many Opposition day debates and it is a pleasure to be able to respond to one. I know that hon. Members attend such debates for different reasons. Some come to make party points, and that is quite right—it is an Opposition day. Some come for constituency reasons, and I will have something to say later about some of the very specific projects that have been mentioned. I want to put those in context, so hon. Members need not feel that they have to intervene at any moment—

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Vince Cable: Let me finish my introduction; I will come to specific projects later.

In relation to taxation, the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) knows that I am not in a position to pre-empt the Budget, but if he reads the Chancellor's speech to the CBI a few weeks ago, he will see that it fully acknowledges that not only do we wish to see lower rates of business tax overall, but we understand the importance of capital allowances in manufacturing.

In my days in opposition, I tried to engage constructively and find common ground, and we have approached today's motion in that spirit. It includes some excellent statements, to which we are happy to subscribe. I shall start by working through some of those areas that appear to be common ground. The motion states that the

"Government has a crucial role to play in fostering economic growth and in creating a better-balanced economy".

That is absolutely right, and we totally sign up to it—it is exactly what the Government are about—but it pre-empts the obvious question: why is the economy so unbalanced to start with, and who was running the Government who led it to be so unbalanced? By unbalanced, most of us mean that one sector, and one part of the financial services industry—the City and big banks—became too dominant, while the rest of the economy, including trade in goods and services, and in particular manufacturing, was allowed to decline relatively. That is the imbalance we are talking about.

It is worth putting that in context, however. My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Gordon Birtwistle) made this point from a local context a few moments ago. The share of manufacturing in the British economy shrank from just over 20% in 1997 to just under 12% in 2009. Of course, that is a historical trend, but I remember in the 1980s when people were concerned about deindustrialisation. It is worth noting that the rate of decline in manufacturing over the past decade was three times as fast as it was in the 1980s. Manufacturing employment during the period of the Labour Government, when this imbalance grew, fell by 1.7 million—that is the population of Leeds, Sheffield and Glasgow combined. That demonstrates the decline in manufacturing. Furthermore, the number of manufacturing companies fell by 12% over that period. That was the imbalance created when the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East and his colleagues were in government.

Mr MacShane: I welcome the Secretary of State to his job, and he will recall that I reviewed his memoirs very positively, which added considerably to sales. He is right about the decline, but the same decline is reflected in America, Spain, France and Italy. However, one part of manufacturing as important as the rest is steel, which is an industry that I represent in Rotherham. May I bring steel industry employers and workers to talk with him? Steel requires a complex matrix to do with energy, electricity prices and trade. We had a very good relationship with the right hon. Gentleman's predecessors, and I ask him whether, at his own convenience—there is no great hurry—I and some steel people could meet him to talk about these issues.

Vince Cable: That was a very constructive intervention, and I would be delighted to meet the right hon. Gentleman's constituents. I met steelworkers before the election—indeed, I went to Redcar, which is now represented by a Liberal Democrat, and met the Corus workers there—and I would be very happy to meet any steelworkers whom the right hon. Gentleman wishes to bring.

Joan Walley: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his new post. My intervention, along with that of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Flello), is made in the spirit of trying to find a constructive way forward. In his speech, will the Secretary of State take account of the existence of heartland areas that have been over-reliant on manufacturing? One such area is Stoke-on-Trent, where we have large inequalities and where we need to do all that we can for manufacturing. Someone in his Department needs to be answerable purely for the ceramics area. We are desperate to meet with him to ensure that we can go forward with the regional development funding, irrespective of who administers it, in partnership with the Government in order to get what Stoke-on-Trent needs.

Vince Cable: I would be very happy to meet the hon. Lady and her colleagues. Her colleague the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Flello) spoke up a few moments ago on behalf of the black country—

Joan Walley: Stoke-on-Trent.

Vince Cable: Indeed. It is part of a conglomeration, but he spoke up for Stoke-on-Trent in particular. I met the chamber of commerce from that area; it came up with some excellent ideas, and I would be happy to meet it and the hon. Lady again. Clearly, this part of the country is deprived and needs special attention, and I am happy to give it.

I return to the question of how the imbalances arose. Of course, there is a trend, but it was aggravated by bad policy. I shall remind Labour Members, not all of whom were here during the period, of some of the big developments that occurred and which produced this excessive decline in manufacturing and the excessive dependence on the banking sector. Five or six years ago, I and other colleagues were warning from the Opposition Benches about the bubble that was developing in the property market, the reckless bank lending that was fuelling it and the instability that it was going to create. We were dismissed at the time as scaremongers, but of course the bubble did burst, with the disastrous consequences that we are now paying for.

Going further back in time—probably to before the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East was a Member of the House—a very important report was commissioned by the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown). The Cruickshank report set out graphically how the British banking industry simultaneously was pursuing short-term profits while being dependent on a Government guarantee, and was also severely damaging British small-scale business because of the lending practices being adopted. At the time, we urged the Government to act on that report, but nothing was ever done.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Gentleman talks about the past, but does he agree with the chief executive of the Cumbria chamber of commerce who said it would take the region back to the economic dark ages if we were to scrap the Northwest Regional Development Agency?

Vince Cable: I am happy to come to RDAs shortly. We have a view on them, and I have been asked specific questions by the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East about them. The hon. Gentleman will also have heard me speak specifically about the north-west at Business, Innovation and Skills questions a couple of weeks ago—but I shall return to that.

Mr Michael McCann (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman said that, when on the Opposition Benches, he urged the Government to take action against the banks. What were his friends in the Conservative party asking for back then?

Vince Cable: The Chancellor of the Exchequer made a very good statement earlier, setting up the commission that will look at the structure of banking. Indeed, we are working together on improving the very poor performance of the banking sector in terms of credit to small and medium-sized lending. The record of the Labour party is terrible in that respect, and we will improve on it.

It is clear that the last Government had an industrial policy. I cede that point. We have to go back to the seminal moment when the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, made one of his famous factory visits—to the headquarters of Lehman Brothers in London—and announced:

"I would like to pay tribute to the contribution you and your company make to the prosperity of Britain".

The consequences of that policy are with us today, in the costs of the collapse, the recession that followed and the enormous problems that we have inherited. That was the industrial policy; that was the imbalance of which hon. Members complain.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I welcome the activist approach towards banks that the Secretary of State is outlining. He will be aware that the House has debated the situation of former workers at Longbridge who are still waiting for money from a trust fund promised to them in 2005. At the moment, that seems to be being held up by an argument between Lloyds Banking Group and the Phoenix Four. Will he get involved to try to ensure that they finally receive the money that they deserve and which they were promised so long ago?

Vince Cable: I was in Birmingham last week, and people affected by that problem have approached me—indeed, the city council also raised the matter with me—and I have asked for it to be investigated. It is a complex legal problem, but clearly it needs looking at.

I shall proceed to the second statement in the motion with which we agree. The Labour spokesman was explicit, forthcoming and realistic about cuts. The motion reads:

"That this House notes the need for a clear deficit reduction plan".

It is now going to get one, because on Monday we launched the Office for Budget Responsibility. We now have believable and independent growth numbers on which to construct a budget strategy, and next week the Budget will spell that out in more detail.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know that he is viewed, in his own party at least, as an economic Nostradamus. Does he seriously expect us to believe that the Office for Budget Responsibility report told him something of which, even with that huge brain of his, he was previously unaware? Most serious financial journalists are saying that the report showed that the previous Government's forecasts were accurate, so is he seriously telling the House that it led him to a policy so totally different from the one he had been campaigning on for all those months?

Vince Cable: That was starting to morph from an intervention into a speech. It did not require a great genius to see the fallacies in the bubble economy that was being created, and I was one of many people who saw the problem. However, the hon. Gentleman is getting to the issue of my position, which was also raised from the Opposition Front Bench, so let me deal with the question of cuts, the timing and what the sensible response is. The motion refers to a

"critical moment in the...cycle,"

and talks about recovery being fragile, and it is fragile. There are risks in both directions. If there are rapid cuts in public spending, they of course run the risk of having an impact on growth; we all understand that, but there is the risk on the other side that if we did nothing or delayed taking action, there would be a serious crisis of confidence in the economy because of the sovereign risk crisis that is rolling around Europe.

I was specifically challenged to say why I had changed my mind on the subject, and I will tell the hon. Gentleman when I changed my mind. Before I entered this Government, I spoke at some length to some of the key decision makers in the UK, including the head of the Treasury, and we also had advice from the Governor of the Bank of England. Their advice was unequivocal: in the circumstances that we entered, we had absolutely no alternative but to act decisively and quickly. I always made it clear in opposition that we had to act rationally. We had to take account of growth on the one hand and sovereign risk on the other. Those factors had to be balanced. We have balanced them, and we came to the decision that early action was essential in the light of the circumstances that exist. That was objectively based on the evidence in the economy.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman also met the permanent secretary at the Treasury and the Governor of the Bank of England before the election, so I am still not clear how his mind was changed between the election campaign and when he became the Secretary of State. Can he clarify what it was between those dates that made him change his mind?

Vince Cable: I do not know whether the hon. Lady was reading the newspapers when she was campaigning for election to this House, but there was a major sovereign debt crisis emerging in Europe. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, come on!"] Well, I am sorry, but the gasps from Opposition Members suggest how utterly and completely out of touch they are with the realities of financial markets. We are talking about a very serious crisis, and the Government had to respond to it, as other Governments are doing now.

I congratulate the Opposition spokesman on being honest enough to acknowledge, in a rare departure from tradition, that he had been forward in accepting the need for cuts. Those on the Benches behind him who are so anxious about early cuts need to be aware—the Institute for Fiscal Studies pointed this out—that the previous Government were already engaged in a fiscal tightening of £23 billion for this financial year. We are now being accused of making cuts in the current circumstances, but the previous Government were planning that too.

That was on the record, and it was not just a theoretical abstraction; rather, many of us saw it happening. It happened in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East was responsible for. Lord Mandelson was the first Minister to put his Department forward for early cuts, which was why, in the run-up to the election, I attended a meeting of further education college lecturers in my constituency, 70 of whom were going to be made redundant. The reason for that was that those early cuts, introduced by the right hon. Gentleman, were working their way through to the front line of teaching. I then went to one of the leading science laboratories in my constituency, where 40 members of staff were being made redundant because of cuts made by the right hon. Gentleman and Lord Mandelson this financial year, so please let us not have any more of this pious nonsense about early cuts.

Mr Hanson: Whatever may or may not be the case with regard to early cuts, one decision that the previous Government did make was on contracts signed between 1 January and the election involving Vauxhall at Ellesmere Port, Airbus, Sheffield Forgemasters and many others. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House when he is going to decide whether those grants can proceed, in order to end the blight on those industries?

Vince Cable: If I get fewer interventions, I will be able to get to that point shortly. I am trying to develop the argument and respond to the perfectly valid points that the Labour spokesman made.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Vince Cable: Okay; once more.

Andrew George: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I appreciate that he is concerned about interventions, but given that he is saying that his response has been rational, as I believe it has been, he will be aware that my part of the world—Cornwall—is the poorest region in the UK. By the Government's own admission, it receives less than the Government say it deserves in health funding and for many other public services. The Government rightly propose to abolish the RDAs, but what impact will that have on the poorest regions in the UK, if match money is not available for the convergence programme, for example, and those regions—the most impoverished and the most in need of investment—carry a disproportionate burden of the cuts?

Vince Cable: I am heartily relieved that my hon. Friend did not ask me an awkward question about the retail ombudsman, but he is right about Cornwall: it has special problems. As it happens, it has not been well served by the RDA. The South West of England Regional Development Agency covered areas such as Bristol and more prosperous parts of the country, which received an undue share of its attention. In the new structure, which I shall describe shortly, his county, and its county council and businesses, will be in a much better position to advance their cause.

Mr George Mudie (Leeds East) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Vince Cable: I have taken a lot of interventions. I am always generous, but may I come back to the hon. Gentleman?

I want to pursue the issue of cuts. I have dealt with the issue of immediate cuts; however, the question is where they were going to lead. I know that we have gone quite far in the modernisation of the House, but we have not got as far as PowerPoint projections, so I am a bit limited in what I can show. However, the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East will be familiar with the work that the IFS did before the election

[Vince Cable]

showing where cuts were going to appear in different Departments, had the Labour party been returned to power. I have here one of its charts, which shows what would have happened to the Department that I now lead. It shows a projection of cuts in the order of £4.4 billion, or 20%. That is what the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues were planning.

Mr McFadden *indicated dissent.*

Hon. Members: You were.

Vince Cable: Indeed they were, although I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman can quite make up his mind whether to apologise or deny.

The IFS is an independent body—it has nothing to do with the Government—and I am talking about what it anticipated. It would be useful to contrast the scale of the cuts that the right hon. Gentleman and Lord Mandelson and his friends were planning to make in their area of government with what we have already done. In the first week of office we had to find cuts, and we found £830 million—we got £200 million back in recycled money and we have made a cut of £630 million. That is a large sum of money, but it is about an eighth of what we know a Labour Government would have taken out of my Department's spending. *[Interruption.]* We can quibble about the number, but very large cuts were being planned by the Labour Government, had they been returned to office. Let us be clear about that.

It would be useful to know what Labour was planning to do. The right hon. Gentleman objects to cuts in RDAs and cuts in industrial support, and he objects to the fact that student numbers are not rising by as much as he wanted, but where are the cuts going to come from? All from the science budget? All from FE colleges? I do not know. Perhaps he is too embarrassed to stand up and tell his colleagues on the Benches behind him what he was planning to do, but I would like to know, because we are in the middle of a very difficult spending exercise. I would like his advice, so perhaps I can set up a private meeting with him and Lord Mandelson, so that they can tell me what they were going to do. I would find that instructive.

Mr Mudie: Many of us have admired the right hon. Gentleman's pragmatism and judgment over the years, yet we remember what he said during the election campaign about the danger of clearing the structural deficit within the lifetime of this Parliament, which is a policy of his coalition partners. The Office for Budget Responsibility has now indicated that the structural deficit is much worse, yet the Chancellor is sticking to the same timetable. If the Secretary of State worried about that approach during the election, will he share with the House his worries about the deeper and worse situation that we now face, and the effect that it will have in pushing us back into another recession and increasing unemployment steeply?

Vince Cable: Of course there are dangers, and I spelled out earlier the twin dangers that we have to balance very carefully. Lest the hon. Gentleman imagine that I have suddenly developed an enthusiasm for strict public sector discipline, I suggest that he read the pamphlet that I wrote the best part of a year ago, in which I made the case for dealing with the structural deficit rapidly and in a radical way. That is entirely compatible with the strategy that we are now adopting.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Vince Cable: May I just finish this point?

It is clear that the Opposition's response in the motion to the budget cuts and to the issue of imbalance is really not very serious. Let us examine a couple of other fragments from it. It talks about the "business-led recovery" that they seem to want. I wonder how many people are aware that 21,000 new regulations affecting British companies were introduced in the past 10 years—that is six per working day. How on earth were the previous Government hoping to achieve a business-led recovery when businesses were being prevented from growing? A survey published today by Infotec shows that one in 10 British entrepreneurs were contemplating leaving the country for tax and regulatory reasons. That is the legacy that we now have to address.

The motion also states that the previous Government were

"laying the foundations for the UK to be globally competitive".

During their period in office, the competitiveness league tables—which are generally accepted—showed that this country fell from seventh to 13th. So that is what they meant by laying the foundations for us to be competitive.

Let me now turn to the vital industrial decisions about which several Labour Members are quite rightly exercised. A significant number of projects were signed up to before the election. Some were good; some were questionable. Many of them raised issues regarding value for money, affordability and other factors. Quite rightly and prudently, we are carrying out due diligence on those projects; we are working our way through them.

I can make one announcement today, however. It is right and proper that we should examine the decisions taken by the previous Government since 1 January, to ensure that they offer good value for money and are in line with the Government's priorities. That is entirely legitimate. This need for re-examination is something that the automotive industry, in particular, understands and accepts. Equally, however, it has urged us to reach our decisions quickly, given the time that has already elapsed in considering the loan guarantee projects.

The Prime Minister confirmed this week that the Government's support for the Nissan electric vehicle and associated battery plants would go ahead, and I am today able to announce that the Government have confirmed that a loan guarantee of £360 million will be offered to Ford, and one of £270 million to General Motors Vauxhall. This confirmation is, of course, subject to appropriate pre-conditions for our support being met, and to final decisions by the companies. We understand that GM is considering its next steps in the light of progress in obtaining funding from Germany, and I believe that it might not wish to proceed with our offer. However, the offer has been made and it is now confirmed. That is all I can say today. Decisions will be announced shortly on other specific projects.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): The Secretary of State mentioned the due diligence being conducted on particular projects. The Prime Minister has referred to Lord Mandelson going round the country with a massive cheque book, handing out hundreds of millions of pounds, two thirds of which he said went into Labour marginal constituencies. Will the due diligence also involve taking a close look at where that money is being spent, particularly where those Labour marginal seats are now held by members of the coalition parties?

Vince Cable: Yes, indeed; we are looking at all the projects in a completely practical way. As I said, some of them are good, and some of them are not. It is as simple as that.

Mark Tami: The Government are obviously fond of reviews. We are about to have a defence review, which will involve the 400M military transport aircraft project. That will have an important effect on all wing production in the UK. How long does the right hon. Gentleman's Department think that review will take? Clearly, those companies could make the choice to site the work elsewhere, which would have a dramatic impact on the work force in this country.

Vince Cable: That was not part of this exercise. The A400M is clearly a very important project, and we are looking at it using the same kind of criteria—value for money, affordability—and decisions will be made on that, but it was not part of this review.

Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I, too, have received the news from General Motors that it might choose not to proceed, because of the current situation. However, if GM is to succeed as a business—as the Prime Minister said he wanted it to—it is important that we should have confirmation from the Government here and now that they will be ready to come back to the table and talk to the company, especially in relation to the next-generation vehicles such as the Ampera.

Vince Cable: Of course we are happy to talk to the company any time, and my door is open, but if the hon. Gentleman is saying "Can we have more money?"—

Andrew Miller: I did not say that.

Vince Cable: Well, the hon. Gentleman said that he wanted to support a new-generation project—

Andrew Miller: Oh, come on!

Vince Cable: The hon. Gentleman is showing some indignation. I am so used to hon. Members asking for more money, and I am sorry if I have underestimated him—*[Interruption.]* Okay, if it is simply a question of encouraging a valuable new project, I would be delighted to do that, and I hope that he will arrange an appointment.

Andrew Miller: The company is to make a statement in three quarters of an hour. Will the Secretary of State retain his current position and confirm that, should General Motors want that loan guarantee, it will remain open to the company to pursue it?

Vince Cable: I cannot negotiate across the debating Chamber on the basis of announcements that are being made outside this place. It would be ridiculous to ask me to do so. I am, however, happy to keep in close contact with that project and with the people involved. It is clearly an important one, and we have confirmed today that we were willing to support the continuation of the loan. That is all I can say, but I am happy to talk to the hon. Gentleman and others about how we can take this forward constructively.

Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Vince Cable: I have taken an enormous number of interventions; I will take one from the hon. Gentleman later.

Before I leave the car industry, I must point out that these projects were part of an assistance scheme for the industry, and I think that the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman would acknowledge that they were time limited. Other projects have already made applications, which are being properly considered, but we cannot have a situation in which the car industry, or any other, assumes that it can come to the Government for money, just because it has an interesting project.

It is worth underlining the point that, in large parts of the British car industry, brilliant companies have got through the recession without Government support. My first visit as a Minister was to the Bentley factory in Crewe—*[Laughter.]* Hon. Members might laugh, but that factory provides thousands of highly skilled jobs and a high-quality product. It is a subsidiary of BMW. It was very badly hit by the recession—it lost half its output—but it kept going. The management took a big pay cut, and the workers joined them, accepting that they had joint responsibility for the company. The company survived; it is now flourishing—it has some of the most sophisticated technology in Britain—and it did all that without a Government guarantee.

Lorely Burt: Land Rover, in my constituency, is another brilliant example of a company that has weathered the economic storm. It is now surging forward, and it is investing in research and development. I welcome the decision on GM and Ford, and we should all be concerned about having a level playing field in relation to the UK economy and those in other parts of the world. Can we use R and D investment and capital investment in advanced manufacturing plants such as these to provide at least a level playing field in relation to other countries, and to secure investment for the United Kingdom?

Vince Cable: I know that my colleague takes a close interest in these matters. She has represented the interests of Solihull and the factory extremely well over the past few years. I am very happy to talk about her proposal, but I want to emphasise the fact that the automotive assistance scheme does not have a permanently open door. Applications have been made, and they will be dealt with on their merits.

I was giving examples of car companies that have flourished and coped with the recession without coming for Government support. Before I went to visit Bentley, I went to another factory, Cosworth—one of several Formula 1 manufacturers in this country, using very

[Vince Cable]

high technology. It was flourishing, providing highly skilled manufacturing employment and was not dependent on Government support, like many others. It is not just the specialist producers either, as mass producers—Honda, for example—are also relevant. Honda took a big hit during the recession and the work force accepted part-time working and cuts in pay in order to keep the company together. They did so, and the company did not come forward asking for specific Government assistance. That will now be the pattern.

We have made it very clear—I made it clear in a speech—that we are willing to do what we can to support growth in the British economy, and we will do it by helping build up competences, skills, research and development and so forth, but we are not in the business of handing out money to individual companies. Quite apart from the merits of the proposal, there is an issue of affordability in the financial climate in which we now operate.

Let me start to conclude by clarifying some things that we want to do. We believe, like the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East, that the Government have a role. I do not believe in laissez-faire. The Government have a role; there are many market failures; there is, of course, an important role for Government in this field. It has to be cost-effective, however, and it has to be affordable. Let me summarise some of the things we are starting to do, having been in office for only a month.

The first element is skills. One of the first decisions made by the Government when they came into power was to fund 50,000 apprenticeships. That compares with the 200,000 built up under the last Government over 10 years.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): It was 250,000.

Vince Cable: I am sorry, 250,000. We introduced 50,000 within three weeks. There is a very strong commitment—*[Interruption.]* We have introduced the funding to support those apprenticeships, which is now being taken up through the National Apprenticeship Service.

Mr Lammy: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Vince Cable: Let me finish the point. A very rapid move was taken to introduce high-quality apprenticeships—exactly the kind of thing that manufacturing industry requires—from a low base, which we have inherited.

Mr Lammy: Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that there is a big difference between suggesting that we need 50,000 apprenticeships and actually finding the businesses to come forward and offer them?

Vince Cable: The money has been made available; that is the key point. We know from the National Apprenticeship Service that there is a great deal of interest in this programme and those places will be taken. It is a big advance on the level we inherited. Let me emphasise that, unlike the previous Government, we do not believe that we can fund these things out of thin air. We have funded it by changing our priorities. We have made a decision to cut back on the Train to Gain programme in order to fund these additional apprenticeships. That was based on priorities and on a critical review by the National Audit Office of how the Train to Gain programme operated under the last Government. We discovered that a quarter of all training places would have been funded by the companies anyway, that the programme was paying for the accreditation of skills where those skills already existed and that it was paying for expensive middlemen rather than establishing direct links between businesses and colleges. We now have not just more apprenticeships, but a better mechanism.

Secondly, we want to support further education colleges, which are the basis for post-16 education and training among those who do not go to university. One of the Government's initial steps was to create a £50 million capital fund, more details of which will be announced tomorrow by the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes). It is worth remembering the Labour Government's record in respect of FE capital—

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Huge investment.

Vince Cable: The hon. Gentleman says huge investment. I do not know what Department he served in, but the responsible Minister had to make a profound apology to the House for the complete catastrophe created by the Learning and Skills Council when it invited colleges to come forward with capital works projects. Bids were put in and then approvals followed for 10 times the value of the money available, so that many of those projects had to be cancelled. Colleges across the country are now living with the legacy costs of that. We are now putting in place a firm programme, properly costed, which will deliver serious capital investment to the FE sector.

I was asked what would happen to the regional development agencies. It is very clear from the coalition agreement that RDAs will be replaced by local enterprise partnerships. The right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East asked perfectly valid questions about how that transition will be managed and how the enterprises and local councils will work together. My colleague, the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk), will come forward in due course with proposals explaining how that will happen.

Lest we fall into the idea of believing that all RDAs made a remarkable contribution to the British economy, it is worth reflecting on some of the comments made by the Public Accounts Committee and then the National Audit Office. What we learned from that analysis is that the RDAs absorbed something like £10.6 billion in their lifetime. They did create some employment, that is for sure—at £60,000 per job. That was the cost—much more than twice the average wage, and at a time when there was a labour shortage in the economy and people were coming in from overseas. I repeat that £60,000 was being paid through the RDAs into creating employment. I do not deny that many of their activities were useful, but equally many were not. At Prime Minister's Questions, the Prime Minister detailed some of the more absurd excesses, and I could have added a few more—the £50,000 party for the South West of England RDA in

Center Parcs, champagne receptions in Cannes and many others. Some serious work was done, but it was very costly, raising very serious questions of cost-effectiveness. We now want to create a structure that reflects the real interest of enterprise and local councils.

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): For clarification, the right hon. Gentleman is saying that the regional development agencies are going, so does that mean One NorthEast will be abolished?

Vince Cable: Well, it will certainly change. We are leaving it to local people to decide. This is a very original concept for Labour Members, who are used to everything being centrally driven. We believe that very often the best initiatives come from the bottom rather than the top—I know the hon. Gentleman may distrust that, but we do not know what is going to come out of the north-east consultation. It may be—

Phil Wilson *rose—*

Mr McFadden *rose—*

Vince Cable: Let me finish my point. The north-east councils and local businesses might prefer a structure like the one they already have—it is for them to decide—and there will be a process by which any proposals can be evaluated. In other parts of the country, a different route will be chosen. As I have said, the Minister of State will set out in due course how that transition will be managed.

Mr McFadden: I genuinely seek clarification because I am confused by what the Secretary of State is saying. A few minutes ago, he said that the RDAs would be replaced, yet in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson), he seemed to say that it was a kind of maybe rather than a certainty. This is a really important issue to get clear. Is it true that all RDAs will be replaced, or could that be affected by the consultation that the right hon. Gentleman talks about? To take the example of One NorthEast, if it were the view of business and local authorities—I would like to hear how that will be determined—to retain that RDA, would the Government accept that? It is important to clarify this matter.

Vince Cable: For the avoidance of all doubt, they will be replaced, but the structures that emerge could have a regional scope if that is what local people want. That is the answer. The process will be set out in due course. All that needs to be said for the moment in clarifying our position is that the RDAs will be replaced. They did not give consistently good value for money. We need another approach, another structure, and partnerships of local business and councils. That is what this Government will now put in place.

Phil Wilson *rose—*

Vince Cable: I will move on. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman appears to be grumbling from a sedentary position. If he feels passionately about the particular structure that operates in his area, there will be plenty of opportunity for him to talk to his local councils and his local businesses. This has to be enterprise-led, not bureaucrat-led or politician-led; it is an enterprise-led initiative. He has to get together with those people and come up with constructive initiatives for his own area.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): As someone who represents a constituency in Yorkshire and Humber, may I welcome the moves to abolish the RDAs, which in my area have been driven by the interests of West Yorkshire at the expense of East Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire? As we move towards whatever replaces them, will the Secretary of State confirm that local, sub-regional identities and economies will be respected, and that local people will have a real input?

Vince Cable: That is exactly the point. In parts of the country, the sub-regional approach may be more sensible, and we want to create a framework in which that will happen.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Vince Cable: I will take one more intervention, from the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), and then conclude.

Mr Lammy: This is sounding a bit like an episode of Bird and Fortune. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the RDAs will be replaced, but local people can determine to replace them with what they had before?

Vince Cable: The right hon. Gentleman misunderstands completely. [Hon. Members: "Oh."] He is confusing two different things: one is function, and the other is geography. They are different things. The RDAs will not continue, under any definition of our policy as it emerges through consultation—they will not perform the same range of functions as they do currently. If local people wish it, they might have a regional form, and that will emerge in due course. I think that enough has been said about the matter. I know that the right hon. Gentleman has struggled to take it in, but I think that where we are heading is abundantly clear.

John Hemming (Birmingham, Yardley) (LD): To explain the point to the Opposition, geography varies around the country. The west midlands has a number of city regions, and it would be positive development if each had a local enterprise partnership. We do not know whether Coventry is in or out of greater Birmingham, but we want a city regional basis. The north-east, however, might like a regional approach. My right hon. Friend will agree that the Opposition do not understand the concept of geography and boundaries, and believe in enforcing the same rules across the country, rather than leaving such matters to local people.

Vince Cable: That is absolutely right. The basic problem—and the reason that it is taking some time to explain the matter to the Opposition—is that the Opposition believe that the status quo must be protected because they invented it. There will, however, be fundamental changes.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Vince Cable: I have taken enough interventions.

To conclude as I started, we need private sector-led growth to offset the very difficult cuts that will have to be made in the public sector to restore financial sanity. Some initiatives will require direct Government intervention,

[Vince Cable]

but many will not. For example, we are committed to removing the burden of regulation, which mushroomed to alarming proportions. One key step that must happen, and that failed miserably under the previous Government, is to ensure an adequate supply of credit for small and medium-sized businesses. We must have a tax system that is friendly to business, that encourages companies to come here and that is simple. Most fundamentally, however, business wants the Government to clear up the mess in the public finances, as all the business associations make absolutely clear. I do not know how many of the business associations the right hon. Member for Tottenham has talked to, but, with regard to his comments about a business recovery, the business associations make it absolutely clear that they cannot develop business in Britain unless the mess in the public finances is sorted out. They need confidence, certainty and an assurance that the cost of capital will not escalate because of the crisis in finance. That is the priority, that is what we are working on, and that is how the recovery will take place.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. I remind hon. Members that Mr Speaker has put an eight-minute limit on contributions to this afternoon's debate. A very large number of Members want to take part in the debate, so it would help them all to get in if hon. Members were able to make their contributions in less than eight minutes.

2.24 pm

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new post. I know that he is committed to industry and manufacturing, even if that did not come out fully in his presentation today. I also thank him for his kind note on my election as Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, and I look forward to his coming to our Committee and to talking to him about his future plans for industry and manufacturing.

As a long-standing member of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, and as a Member of Parliament representing a constituency with an economy that is heavily manufacturing-based, and which is adjacent to the constituency of the now shadow spokesperson, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), I had many discussions with local manufacturers in the depths of the recession. Yes, they wanted our public finances cleared up, but the Secretary of State did not mention two other things that came through loud and clear: first, they wanted the level of demand in the economy to be sustained, as they depended on that to sell their products; and secondly, they wanted a range of individual schemes designed and tailored to support weaknesses within the industry, to preserve their future.

Mark Tami: Does my hon. Friend agree that a lot of those manufacturers, and especially the smaller ones, feared a double dip more than anything else? They just about survived this recession, but if it happened again, tens of thousands of businesses would go bust?

Mr Bailey: I agree completely. Many companies made the point vigorously that if they went down now, future tax revenues would be lost, and the prospect of us going into a deeper and further recession would be much greater. The previous Government's short-term measures to sustain local manufacturing were therefore essential.

I looked at what the coalition document says about the coalition Government's commitment to manufacturing. I was disappointed to find that the only reference to manufacturing was in the section on business:

> "Our aim is to create the most competitive corporate tax regime in the G20, while protecting manufacturing industries."

Although that is laudable and welcome, it is hardly the most robust commitment to sustaining our manufacturing industries. The previous Government's measures to sustain demand and provide selective support, such as the car scrappage scheme, contributed to the current deficit, which, we are told, it is essential to eliminate if our manufacturing industry is to survive. However, the fact is that without incurring that debt our manufacturing industry would not have survived and would be in a far weaker position.

The title of the debate on the Order Paper is "Government Support for Industry". The first thing the Secretary of State could do to support industry would be to say to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister, "Stop making apocalyptic utterances about the state of our public finances." I am happy to say that the report of the Office for Budget Responsibility on Monday demonstrated that our public finances were very much as reported by the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, and in no way conform to the current Chancellor of the Exchequer's scaremongering portrayals. That is a serious matter, as it not only has implications for investment in industry and the public services, but for the public climate, which might be very damaging to our industries. Literally millions of public sector workers feel that they could be affected by decisions about investment in our public services. As a result, they are likely to decide to save rather than spend, which will reduce demand and potentially precipitate that double-dip recession.

Dr Therese Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): I understand the passion felt by the hon. Gentleman on behalf of public sector workers in particular, and I think that it is shared across the House. Does he not recognise, however, that the debt interest payments that we shall soon be making will affect every worker, and every non-worker, in the country?

Mr Bailey: I am committed to public sector workers, but I am equally committed to those in the private sector. My point is that unless we sustain our private sector in manufacturing industry, it will be far more difficult to pay off our debt in the long term. We need to sustain our base. That, I think, is a better strategic position, and it is the position taken by the last Government.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): On Monday I visited a firm in my constituency which employs 25 people and has a turnover of about £1 million. It largely contracts its work from the public sector. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the cuts agenda will affect not only the public sector, but the private sector as well?

Mr Bailey: Yes. The days when the economy could be divided between the public and the private sector are long gone. Engagement between them is subtle, sophisticated and often mutually supportive. The livelihoods of millions of workers in the private sector could be affected by decisions about public investment, but public utterances fail to take that into account.

Let me say something about individual schemes. Although it would obviously be unreasonable to expect the Secretary of State to present a comprehensive plan for support for manufacturing industry, I should have liked to hear a greater indication of the priorities that he would identify in his new role. The fact that the Government have begun by calling into question a range of initiatives taken by the last Government to support strategic industries does not augur well for the future. The argument that some of the grant and loan guarantees provided through either the automotive assistance programme or the strategy investment fund were in some way politically motivated prior to the election is a canard.

Before the election I was a member of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, which was chaired by a Conservative and which operated on an entirely cross-party and consensual basis. It criticised the then Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East, for taking too long to implement some of the loans and grants under that scheme. I debated publicly with the Minister at the time and was vigorous in my criticism of him, and I shall be vigorous in my criticism of the current Secretary of State for trying to imply that there was anything political in that process. In my view, the delays were due to an exaggerated consideration of due diligence and other complicating factors.

There are two helpful things that the Secretary of State could do. First, he could ensure that his colleagues do not damage demand, public confidence and industry by their public utterances. Secondly, he could resolve not to call loans and grants into question and create doubt and uncertainty in areas where they have been allocated by implying that they are there for a political purpose, because that would inevitably lead local people to believe that they are likely to be withdrawn following the change of Government. It would be playing political football not only with the livelihoods of individuals but with the strategic significance of the companies involved, particularly Sheffield Forgemasters.

I am running out of time, but let me make one more point. There was considerable debate about the regional development agencies. Yes, it is fair to say that there were some patchy performances, and yes, in the new climate there will be reductions. However, I hope that when the Minister winds up the debate, he will give a commitment that if RDA functions are to go to local deliverers, the funds that they are currently scheduled to receive will go with them.

2.36 pm

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye so that I can make my maiden speech. I am grateful for the courtesies that the Chamber shows to new Members when they make their maiden speeches, but, being a doctor, I am reminded of the occasion on which I stood outside the human dissection room. I feel like that now: rather anxious, rather excited, and perhaps too eager to get stuck in.

It is customary for new Members to pay tribute to their predecessors. My predecessor, Andrew Mackay, served in the House for 29 years, representing Birmingham, Stechford for two years between 1977 and 1979, Berkshire, East from 1983, and Bracknell from 1997. It is fair to say that his reputation for constituency work was outstanding. His will be a tough act to follow, and emulating it presents a challenge that I hope to meet.

The name "Bracknell" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word Braccen-Heale, which means "bracken-covered secret place". It was first mentioned in a boundary charter in 949 AD. A thousand years later Bracknell was designated a new town, and ceased to be a secret place. Its has grown significantly since then, and has managed to attract many companies: Honeywell, General Electric, Cable & Wireless and 3M, to name but a few. But Bracknell is not just good at business; it is also a regional centre for culture, and South Hill Park is within its confines.

The theatre at South Hill Park is named after Oscar Wilde. He is reputed to have stayed locally, and may have named his most famous stage character, Lady Bracknell, during his stay. Like, I fear, many present and former Members, I have a past in amateur dramatics. I can assure the House that I did not take the role of Lady Bracknell, but I did take the role of Jack Worthing in the same play. Members may recall that that character had two names, Ernest in town and Jack in the country. I can assure the House that I will be Philip in all places, but that I will always remember, when speaking, "the vital Importance of Being Earnest".

My constituency includes two other towns, Crowthorne and Sandhurst, and the delightful village of Finchampstead. Crowthorne is perhaps best known for being the site of Broadmoor hospital and Wellington college. Sandhurst, of course, has the Royal Military Academy, but in addition it has a remarkable series of events and community activities under the banner of Sandhurst Pride. Finchampstead is a delightful part of the world. It is famous for its association with Tudor royalty, who hunted there, and is also the site of a remarkable community centre, the Finchampstead Baptist Centre. It provides wonderful views of the Hampshire countryside from Fleet Hill.

Let me now talk about a topic that is allied to this debate. Next week we shall all be in the Chamber to listen to the Budget statement, and to hear about the dreadful finances of the country. Of course we need to make some decisions very quickly to deal with not just the deficit but with the debt, but I believe that we also need to make decisions about the future balance and direction of the economy so that we can secure greater stability, sustainability and strength, an emphasis on a creation of wealth that is real rather than transitory, and more energy-related and knowledge-related independence from friend and foe alike. That is why I want to mention the space industry, which I think merits Government support. As I look around the Chamber, I suspect that there are quite a few BlackBerrys in operation. I look at the cameras and delude myself into thinking that millions have tuned in to watch my maiden speech. Both forms of communication need satellites. Someone had to make the decision to put the satellites up there, and we are really good at making them.

[Dr Phillip Lee]

The space industry is a growing area. That is why it is vital for UK prosperity. There is a multitude of economic opportunities. The industry has grown four times the average since 2000. It adds £6.5 billion to the UK economy annually. My own company, Tektronix, in Bracknell makes sophisticated measurement gear for satellites. The key point is that the industry is growing. Why is it growing? It is because we are the best at it. We have to be the best in this global economy. We also need to anticipate the direction of technological demand in the world.

It is not just about the economy. The industry also benefits education. It inspires innovation. It inspires generations of scientists and engineers. In one poll of engineers, almost 40% cited it as the reason that they went into their chosen career. It also helps us with the environment, an issue that I am very interested in. It allows us to assess man's impact on the natural world. It also offers solutions, one example being the transfer of data into space, getting rid of terrestrial-based masts that are so energy dependent.

The industry is also strategic. It underpins critical parts of infrastructure. It allows Government to have intelligent ways of formulating transportation plans. It is hugely important in defence, of course, and it aids our ability to wield soft power in the world.

Space is indispensable; that is basically what I am saying. It is an open goal for us. We should be shooting at it repeatedly. The sky is not the limit when it comes to the space industry. It offers a new economy, a green economy that offers real returns, and a niche market that depends more on knowledge than on labour, which is relevant when competing with China, India and Brazil.

I am often asked why I stood for election to this Chamber and moved away from being a doctor to being a Member of Parliament. To my mind, people who come in here should want to make this country a better place. I want to put Britain first. I do not want to be part of a Government who manage decline. One way of doing that is by having a strong high-tech sector. Government's role is to reduce tax and regulation and thereby stimulate an increase in scientific knowledge.

I have no idea how long I have in this House. That is up to the people of Bracknell constituency to decide, but when I leave I hope that I will have contributed to putting the "Great" back into Great Britain.

2.43 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I am thrilled to be able to welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) on his very fine maiden speech. Humour is welcome in the Chamber, especially today in such a serious and important debate, and I am pleased to be able to contribute to it.

People often talk about the north-east of England as the industrial engine room of Britain, or at least they used to. The 1980s put an end to that, unfortunately. A whole generation of workers were left without jobs by a Conservative Government who did not even see fit to try to reskill them, and told them that their "unemployment was a price worth paying". That is fine and well when you are not the one paying it.

We were not "all in it together" when I was growing up in poverty in the north-east in the 1980s, just as again we will not be all in it together if the Prime Minister and his Lib Dem hatchet men wield their axe with impunity, as the north-east and our constituents will once again suffer the most. It took time—13 years of a Labour Government in fact—to put my own region, the north-east, back on the map as the place to be if someone wants to do business, to innovate and to manufacture—so much so that, just as the north-east led the industrial revolution of the 19th century, it is also now leading the new green revolution of the 21st century.

I want to talk about the successful industries in my constituency and the wider region that are fine examples of that. It is clear that there are three reasons why we have a success story to tell. The first is the tenacity, skills and determination of the work force. The second is the co-ordinated work that has been done by the RDA, One NorthEast, and the ongoing commitment to the region by major manufacturers such as Nissan. The third is the support of the Labour Government for the steps taken to establish the region as a green economic zone.

Members do not just have to take my word for it. The North East Chamber of Commerce said only last week when talking about the north-east and exports that

"this simply emphasises the importance of continued Government support for new and existing exporters, even in the face of large scale public sector cuts."

Therefore, I am hoping that today the Minister will be able to assure me that my constituents are not going to lose the level of strategic support from the Government and from One NorthEast, in particular, that our economy needs to stay strong and to carve out its own niche in the economy of the 21st century.

I was delighted to hear in Prime Minister's Question Time last week that Nissan will still receive the grant—the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills confirmed it today—which will enable it to build the new LEAF car at its Washington plant in my constituency. I was also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson) for using both her opportunities two weeks running at PMQs to raise that issue not only on behalf of me and my constituents, but on behalf of all right hon. and hon. Members in the north-east. She was able to force an answer from the Prime Minister at the earliest opportunity. This issue has major implications for all north-east Members, as we all have constituents who rely upon Nissan for their jobs, businesses and livelihoods.

The motor industry creates over £1 billion a year in value for the north-east economy and the 260 companies in the sector are estimated to employ 26,000 people across the north-east. The production of the Nissan LEAF will bring investment of £420 million to the economy and will maintain about 2,250 jobs at the plant. However, Nissan is not the only low-carbon motoring success story in my constituency. When Tony Blair visited my constituency in February 2007 and opened the Smith Electric Vehicles new production facility in Washington, he said:

"This will be a company that will really make its presence felt not just in the North East, but actually throughout the world".

I am very pleased to say that he was not wrong. The company has worked with major car manufacturers such as Ford on concept vehicles, and has repeatedly secured business from companies such as Sainsbury's

and TNT. The company has weathered the recession, and is now making further inroads into Europe, with new product launches all the time.

There can be no doubting the importance of low-carbon vehicle engineering and its central role to the economy of Washington and Sunderland West. It is estimated to contribute over £500 million to the wider regional economy. Without Nissan, we would have struggled to attract businesses in the supply chain, many of which have set up a manufacturing base in the north-east. The company is estimated to provide around 13,000 manufacturing jobs in total in the supply chain. Although I am pleased that the Government will go ahead with the grant to Nissan, I cannot help but wonder why they ever thought about taking it away in the first place. The grant for Nissan to produce the new LEAF in Sunderland was delivered thanks not only to the company's commitment to the region, but because One NorthEast pushed for ultra low-carbon vehicle manufacture across the region.

A cursory look at the latest edition of *The Sunday Telegraph* makes it clear that plans are afoot to scrap all nine regional development agencies. That has been confirmed by the Government today. That is despite us being told just a few weeks ago that where RDAs work they would remain. In yesterday's edition of *The Journal*—today we have had it clarified—I read that the RDAs will be scrapped but that a new body will be formed in regions where they can be justified, such as, I would imagine, the north-east. What is the point of that—dismantling one body that is doing the job perfectly well and replacing it with another, just so that it can have a different name? Talk about bureaucracy and wasting time and resources.

Whenever I speak to local politicians, business leaders and entrepreneurs in the north-east, I am told the same thing, which is that One NorthEast is working well as it is. During my time serving on the North East Regional Committee—that is another thing that the coalition Government have decided to scrap—I heard glowing reports in our evidence sessions from a diverse range of individuals and organisations about the valuable work of One NorthEast. The only reason that I can see for it to be scrapped is an ideologically driven one; this is about a commitment to making cuts, regardless of whether or not those cuts are needed.

The case I am making is not just bluster from those of us in the north-east who believe that the region needs a strong voice, because PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates that for every pound invested by regional development agencies the return for the economy is £4.50—I reckon that the differential is even greater for One NorthEast. We know, too, that One NorthEast has played its part in the creation of more than 160,000 jobs. It is also vital to note that when jobs have been lost in the north-east, One NorthEast has led the response and taken the initiative to get people back into work as soon as possible. Therefore, the Government are not only taking away a proven job-creation scheme at a time of public sector cuts, but scrapping one of the most effective means of support that newly redundant workers have.

There is no reason why we cannot continue to improve the long-term prospects of the region's manufacturing base, but it seems clear that removing the strategic level of planning and support that One NorthEast provides would be counter-productive. I wanted to say a lot more today, but our time has been curtailed so I shall merely say that I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

2.51 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) on a truly outstanding maiden speech.

This Parliament will be overshadowed and dominated by the budget deficit and the consequent need to make cuts in public spending, but we should never forget that it is a Labour deficit and that these will be Labour cuts. The speeches made today by Labour Members have displayed a total inability to recognise that we have a serious budget deficit and that action needs to be taken as a result. The only comments made by those on the Labour Benches—I suspect that this will be the same throughout this debate—have been in support of more public spending. They do not appear to have recognised that that is not sustainable any longer.

We need to examine what businesses in our constituencies want. I think that we are all agreed that, as the motion says, we need

"a clear deficit reduction plan, and that such a plan must have at its heart measures to foster growth and create the conditions for a strong business-led recovery".

What do businesses want? First, they want access to bank lending. The coalition agreement clearly states:

"We will develop effective proposals to ensure the flow of credit to viable SMEs. This will include consideration of both a major loan guarantee scheme and the use of net lending targets for the nationalised banks."

So the Government are going to address the issue of ensuring access to bank lending for businesses.

The vast majority of businesses in my constituency want to see red tape cut and the burden of regulation lifted from businesses. The coalition agreement clearly states:

"We will cut red tape by introducing a 'one-in, one-out' rule whereby no new regulation is brought in without other regulation being cut by a greater amount".

It continues:

We will end the culture of 'tick-box' regulation...We will end the so-called 'gold-plating' of EU rules, so that British businesses are not disadvantaged relative to their European competitors...We will give the public the opportunity to challenge the worst regulations."

Small and medium-sized businesses in my constituency have been crying out for all those things for many years.

Businesses want a simplified tax system. The coalition agreement clearly states:

"We will find a practical way to make small business rate relief automatic."

It continues:

"We will reform the corporate tax system by simplifying reliefs and allowances, and tackling avoidance, in order to reduce headline rates. Our aim is to create the most competitive corporate tax regime in the G20, while protecting manufacturing industries."

Again, that is very much welcomed by the business community.

What will also be welcomed in a business-led growth approach is the following coalition Government intention:

"We will make it easier for people to set up new enterprises by cutting the time it takes to start a new business. Our ambition is to make the UK one of the fastest countries in the world to start up a new business."

That is excellent.

I shall now discuss the regional development agencies. I must say, as the Member for Banbury, which is on the edge of three geographical regions—the west midlands,

[Tony Baldry]

the east midlands and the south-east—that RDAs have been of almost no use to my constituency. They have been inflexible, rigid and expensive. The creation of local enterprise partnerships—joint local authority-business bodies introduced by local authorities to promote local economic development—will ensure much more flexibility. My local district council is currently in negotiations with another district council, which lies in another geographical area but is contiguous to us, and the new arrangement will give us a lot more flexibility. It also goes with the grain of what local people want.

It is also excellent news that this Government will try to encourage more green industry and green-collar jobs and the creation of a green investment bank in my constituency. We hope that we will see the start of a new eco-town at Bicester, because things can be built upon green-collar jobs.

We are therefore going to see access to money, a reduction in the regulatory burden and the other thing that most businesses in my constituency want: improved and enhanced skills. An excellent start has been made with funding for 50,000 apprenticeships having already been made available. In addition, the Government are going to seek ways to support the creation of apprenticeships, work pairing, and college and working training places, as part of our wider programme to get Britain working. I am going to ensure that my constituency gets as many of those apprenticeships as possible, because it is incredibly important to enhance the skills base.

We will not be able to spend or tax our way out of the current situation. What we must do is have a business-led recovery, which also means having an export-led recovery. I very much welcome what my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell said about the space industry, but this country can take the lead in exports in all sorts of other areas. Only a very small amount of what we produce goes to China. We need to tackle the huge markets that exist in the world, and China is just one example. Since the election, I have started to establish a north Oxfordshire export club in my constituency, so that everyone in the constituency can share advice and collaborate to see how we can collectively help to promote exports and to try to ensure that a far larger part of our output goes overseas. It is those exports—the hard cash earnings that we get from exporting goods overseas—that will help to pay for the recovery here.

This Government have a positive agenda that is going to help a business-led recovery. They are doing and proposing to do the sorts of things for which businesses in my constituency have been crying out for a very long time, and I wish the Government well in their endeavours.

2.58 pm

Julie Hilling (Bolton West) (Lab): I cannot begin to explain what an honour and privilege it is to be making my maiden speech as the new MP for Bolton West. Of course, I follow in some august footsteps. William Tyson Wilson was elected as the Member of Parliament for Westhoughton in 1906, as one of the first 29 Labour MPs. Do not worry, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not going to talk about every one of my predecessors, although it would be good just to mention Baroness Ann Taylor, who came from Johnson Fold, one of the big estates in my constituency and was the Member of Parliament for Bolton West for nine years from 1974.

Anyway, back to William, who, like me, came from the trade union movement and was particularly passionate about education. One of his greatest achievements was the introduction of school meals, because he recognised that children could not learn and flourish if they were hungry or undernourished. My immediate predecessor, Ruth Kelly, also made a real difference to education. She was involved in schools throughout the constituency, but it was as Secretary of State for Education that she made real changes. She oversaw the healthy eating agenda and introduced the extended schools programme, now often known as "Kelly hours".

Ruth represented Bolton West at the highest level of Government for much of her career, including a long stint in the Treasury, and as Communities Secretary and, latterly, Transport Secretary. She was the youngest woman ever to sit in Cabinet and somehow found time to become mother to four children. Ruth championed the cause of hard-working families and I wish her well in her new career.

The constituency of Bolton West has had many boundary changes over the years, but I am delighted with the last one, which has brought the town of Atherton, which has been my home for the past 24 years, into Bolton West. The constituency also has the town of Westhoughton, where the residents are called "keawyeds"—I had better translate that; it means "cow heads". Legend has it that a cow got its head stuck in a five-bar gate and because the farmer could not get the cow out, he sawed its head off. People thought that that was just because he was stupid, but it was not at all—it was because the gate was worth more than the cow. The cow now has pride of place on the badge of Westhoughton high school. The town has also just been named as one of the best shopping centres in the county.

Atherton and Westhoughton share a piece of tragic history. In December 1910, 343 men and boys perished in the Pretoria pit, which was situated between the two towns. The centenary of this disaster will be commemorated this year with the installation of a monument.

We also have the village of Blackrod in Bolton West. I hoped to find out that that was the ancestral home of Parliament's Black Rod, but no such luck. Wikipedia does not have too much to say about the village of Blackrod, except that it has a dialect

"very far removed from Standard English."

We have the town of Horwich, which was once a major centre of train building at the loco works—sadly gone—but is now the home of the Reebok stadium and Bolton Wanderers. We also have several parts of Bolton itself: Smithills, the home of the haunted coaching house; and Heaton and Lostock, probably the most affluent part of the borough and home to many footballers.

The whole of Bolton West has a proud industrial heritage, particularly in coal mining and textiles: the pits and the mills, which were largely destroyed during the last Tory regime. However, we have companies that have managed to change and develop and to be part of a diverse local economy, including companies such as the Richard Threlfall Group, a family firm which has been trading for 175 years. The firm started making machinery for the textile industry and continues to supply valves—although now to the oil industry—and manufactures silicon products. Companies such as Web Dynamics, which manufactures technical textiles, are

able to succeed and thrive due to the support from the regional development agency and Government grants. It has become a world leader in the development of insulation.

We have Watson Steel Structures, which is providing the steelwork for the Olympic stadium and has also given birth to Wenlock and Mandeville, the two mascots for the Olympic games. Two of our local companies recently won regional apprenticeship awards—the Green Team and MBDA. MBDA is a shining example of a company dedicated to work force development. All employees are encouraged to undertake training to fulfil their potential and it has the most amazing apprenticeship programme. The company really concentrates on the personal development of its apprentices as well as their industrial skills. This means that it has young people who are a real credit not only to themselves but to MBDA—they are confident and capable. Half the apprentices are female and as part of their programme they go into schools to encourage other girls to make a career in engineering. MBDA has received widespread recognition, not least from the previous Labour Government, for its outstanding record and I only wish that every company could follow its example.

Companies like those and others in my constituency have developed and thrived because of the support they have received from the Labour Government, the Labour council and the regional development agency. Work-based learning through apprenticeships, the union learning fund and graduate training programmes have made a real difference to their ability to compete in these challenging economic times. I am disappointed that the Government are cutting the future jobs fund but I hope that they will continue to support the union learning fund, a fund that enables trade unions and employers to work in partnership to increase the skills of the work force and that is particularly effective at getting to hard-to-reach groups. Cuts to the future jobs fund, cuts to the regional development agency and cuts to Government support for industries in Bolton West will not help the budget deficit. They will simply mean that there are more people out of work and more businesses closing.

I was a youth worker during the last Tory Government. I worked with unemployed young people in the '80s and '90s when we had generations of them with no jobs, no hope and no future—young people whose lives were so damaged that some of them never recovered. I hope that the Government have learned from the past and that they do not let this situation happen again.

I am ambitious for my constituency. I believe it is a tragedy that young people who live on my estate of Hag Fold do not believe they can become brain surgeons, solicitors or teachers. If only we could overcome the poverty of aspiration it would make a huge difference to the lives of many people in Bolton West.

I have spent the majority of my working life as a youth and community worker and as a trade union activist. Six years ago I went to work for the trade union movement. My last job was for TSSA—the Transport Salaried Staffs Association—the union for people in travel and transport. So hon. Members can see that I have spent all of my adult life fighting for people with disadvantage or in difficulty. I shall continue that fight and hope I can be a real champion for the people of Bolton West. I hope that I can do justice to the faith placed in me by them.

3.5 pm

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con): I must congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) on his excellent maiden speech, with which I agreed in every respect. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton West (Julie Hilling) on her excellent maiden speech, which was entertaining as well as informative.

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate on support for industry, but we cannot debate support for industry in a vacuum. I do not want to dwell on the past, but none the less we want to learn from it. A lot of the Opposition's schemes for supporting business when they were in office had a rather half-hearted effect, at best. Many of the schemes, such as the capital enterprise fund, were only subscribed to by 50%. The trade credit insurance fund, which had an original budget of £5 billion, only had a take-up of less than £20 million. Apprenticeships have been hard to fill. A lot of the problems with these schemes are caused by low awareness among industry, eligibility criteria that are far too complex and rule out far too many worthy applicants, and a bureaucracy that small enterprises simply cannot cut through.

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. I am surprised by what she says about apprenticeships, because in my constituency of Leeds West, the number of apprenticeships has gone up from 70 to 210 in the last decade. At Leeds college of building, 400 people started on apprenticeship programmes supported by businesses this year—more than they have ever had before. I am very surprised that she says that people are not taking up places.

Margot James: There is a big problem with apprenticeships for a lot of people in my constituency. The college funds NVQ level 2 and 3 training programmes and more and more students are trying to stay in college because they simply cannot get the apprenticeships outside as the employers are too hard up to provide them.

Andrew Percy: I am a former schoolteacher, and I am sure my hon. Friend will agree with me that what has happened in education over the last few years is that the gap between the best-performing and the worst-performing schools has widened, the number of children from poorer backgrounds going on to decent and good universities has fallen and more people are leaving school with poorer qualification levels and poorer standards in basic literacy and numeracy than did before the previous Government came to power.

Margot James: I thank my hon. Friend for that excellent intervention. I was going to go on to make that point myself, but I shall leave it to Sir Terry Leahy, the chief executive of Tesco, to make the point for me. He employs 41,000 people under the age of 20 in a total work force of 280,000. He said at the end of last year:

"Sadly, despite all the money that has been spent"

on education,

"standards are still woefully low in too many schools. Employers like us...are often left to pick up the pieces."

That is one of the many problems that industry faces.

[Margot James]

Let me go back to the points that I was making that follow on from the apprenticeship schemes. Stourbridge has a great many small to medium-sized enterprises. Indeed, in the metropolitan borough of Dudley, of which we are part, 90% of companies employ fewer than 50 people. It is all very well for business leaders to support regional development agencies, as some of them have in the past, but smaller companies cannot cut through the thicket of bureaucracy and have not benefited from them in any large number. In my constituency, where so much industry is classified as SME, that is a real problem.

Support for industry cannot exist in a vacuum. I must contest the Opposition's claim, in their motion, about

"supporting businesses through the downturn".

I have already made the point that a lot of the measures that the last Government took under the umbrella of support for industry had a very limited effect at best when set against the disastrous macro-economic policies that they pursued. The macro-economic environment is really what affects business, not this scheme and that scheme.

Stealth taxes were a cardinal sin of the last Chancellor but one, and in my constituency they had a disastrous effect on industry. Empty property relief was abolished and that had a very negative effect. That, the rise in business rates and the spiralling cost of energy and fuel are the things that really make a difference to business. Business was really let down and was not supported by the last Government, so I strongly contest the wording of the motion. The point on education has already been well made thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy).

What business needs, first and foremost, is for sanity to be restored to the public finances. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made that very clear in his response. A robust deficit reduction plan that will enable us to keep interest rates low is one thing that will support industry far more than this support programme and that support programme. I congratulate the Government on promising us—presumably we will hear more detail next Tuesday—a simpler and lower corporate tax regime, as that is crucial. Tax and regulation are two sides of the same coin, and I also applaud the regulation proposals of the new Business, Innovation and Skills team. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) mentioned the one in, one out regulation rule that is going to come in. I am hopeful that it might even develop into a one in, two out rule over the next couple of years, and I set that as an aspiration for the new BIS team. I was also delighted to hear the Prime Minister announce this week a review of health and safety regulations, which have got out of hand. They are a burden not just on the private sector but on the public sector.

I make a plea for the protection of our science base and our research and development base, so I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Universities and Science is present. I will pay tribute to the last Government in one respect regarding the science base. The shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), mentioned the new patent box tax incentive for drugs and biotechnology products that are researched in the UK. That tax break of 10% in corporation tax is a very useful and proper incentive that might help to stem the tide of research and development that is, tragically, going overseas, despite our having one of the best science and research bases in the world. The last Government belatedly came up with a solution and I very much hope that our Government will continue with that support.

I support the amendment to the motion, particularly in relation to the skills agenda. I am delighted that we will be giving additional funding for apprenticeships to drive business more in the direction of taking them up, as that is badly needed. I am also pleased to see at least some rescue of capital funding for the further education college sector. Stourbridge college in my constituency made a fantastic bid, and was encouraged so to do by the old Learning and Skills Council. It spent a lot of money pursuing that bid in quite a proper manner only to find at the death that all its plans had to be put on hold because the old LSC had over-committed its budget by at least four times. Stourbridge college is pursuing some of those plans, and I wish it all the best. I hope that I can find the right corner of the BIS Department to lobby for our college to get some of the additional £50 million in capital funding that is being made available.

The new skills agenda, the diversion of money from Train to Gain into apprenticeships and the diversion of money from RDAs into local enterprise partnerships will enable small firms and students in my constituency to access that funding directly, to operate under a lighter inspection regime and to get on with the job of training our young people so that they are fit for business. That is what I really applaud about the skills agenda, and I support 100% the amendment to the motion.

3.16 pm

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Julie Hilling) on their excellent contributions, and I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech today, particularly during the debate on industry.

I worked in a traditionally heavy industry—the coal industry—which, although it is now struggling for its very survival, is very strategic in terms of security of indigenous energy supplies for electricity generation in the UK. Coal still produces, on average, 33% of the electricity generated in the UK and at peak times it is not unusual for the coal that we burn to produce up to 50% of the nation's electricity requirement. Sadly, as a nation we are now a net importer of energy, importing up to 40 million tonnes of coal and burning approximately 60 million tonnes per annum. Clean-coal technologies, particularly carbon capture and storage techniques, need to be implemented without further delay if we are serious about saving the planet from its own demise.

The Houses of Parliament have many traditional and historic protocols, one of which allows me to pay tribute to my predecessor, Mr Denis Murphy, who represented the people of Wansbeck for more than 13 years. He was a hard-working Member of the House, who at all times worked with passion, diligence and dedication for the constituents of Wansbeck. On behalf of those constituents, I should like to place on the record my heartfelt thanks to Denis and take the opportunity to wish him and his

family the very best for the future. I am proud to follow in the footsteps of Denis Murphy, Jack Thompson and other Wansbeck MPs such as the much-revered Northumberland Miners Association leader Thomas Burt, who became the first ever coal mining MP in 1874. When he retired in 1918 he was the Father of the House, following a long and distinguished career that lasted for more than 44 years.

I have worked in the coal mining industry, having been a coalface worker from an early age before graduating to that fine old school of moderacy, the National Union of Mineworkers, of which I was the elected national president up until the general election in May. I can think of no finer people to represent than those in my constituency and the miners of the UK, and I can think of no finer privilege than representing them in this House—a challenge that I greatly relish.

Wansbeck has been heavily dependent on the coal mining industry, with more than 70,000 miners being employed at one time. It was once the epicentre of the great northern coalfield, which proudly contributed to the industrial revolution from the 18th century onwards. Many people paid the ultimate sacrifice as a result. Many women were widowed and too many children were orphaned. However, as safety and health regulation was strengthened, with the implementation of the Mines and Quarries Act 1954 and the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, employee safety in the industry became the envy of the entire world.

At this juncture I must stress that if recent reports are correct and the Government are looking to repeal and dilute hard-fought-for workplace safety and health legislation, which will accurately be portrayed by the general public as an attack on hard-working, decent people, I and my colleagues will campaign vigorously and oppose any such draconian measures. My experience shows clearly that the weakening of any such legislation results in the amplification of the strength of the employer at the expense of protection for the employee, increasing the current imbalance in fairness at work that many people experience. Health and Safety Executive statistics do not lie. In 2008-09, 180 people were killed at work and 132,000 had injuries reported under RIDDOR—the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995—and there were a further 246,000 reportable injuries.

There are many challenges ahead for the people in my constituency. The heady days of the coal industry have passed, but the benefits and experience that shaped our area are still evident—the dignity, the honesty, the sincerity, the good grit and determination of both young and old shine through, even in what might be described as the dark and difficult times of the not-too-distant past.

We shall make the best of our opportunities. Like other areas, we demand high standards in public services. We want schools that we are proud of and hospitals that we can rely on. We want safe streets, free from crime, and employment for all ages, with acceptable wages, terms and conditions. Above all, we want a community built on a spirit of social justice that is both equitable and fair.

Only this week, a report published by the National Cancer Intelligence Network stated that lives could be saved if people from poorer backgrounds were as healthy as the rich. People in my area are not only more likely to suffer from late diagnosis of cancer but also from inequalities in the treatment offered. That is not acceptable. This is 2010, not the early 1800s. We will not tolerate such behaviour from those in power, and nor should we be expected to do so.

There are many wonderful areas in Wansbeck, ranging from Bedlington to Ashington, Cambois and Morpeth, but there are also many problems. Sadly, Morpeth and its residents were victims of horrendous flooding in September 2008, when there was a month's rainfall in 12 hours and more than 1,000 properties were affected. I am working with the Environment Agency to ensure that the proposed flood alleviation scheme is delivered in full and at the earliest possible date.

There are many fine projects in Wansbeck. The centre of the constituency is Ashington, followed by Bedlington and Newbiggin. For our area to progress and to emerge successfully from the days of heavy dependence on the coal industry we must attract new business and maintain our existing major employers, such as Rio Tinto Alcan. Our area is also heavily dependent on public sector jobs, and the Government must recognise that any attack on the public sector will have a catastrophic affect on constituencies such as mine. Opportunities for young people in employment and education must remain a top priority, while we allay the fears of the elderly and infirm and reassure them that their future is to be cherished, free from fear.

Finally, I thank Members again for their forbearance over the last few minutes. I look forward to many lively but constructive debates in this historic Chamber and hope to emulate the many great speakers from both sides in the mother of all Parliaments.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) may have been here for 40 years, but he should surely not be in the Clerk's chair, unless perhaps he is looking for another job.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his enthusiasm, but it is up to me to decide whether it is appropriate for a Member to sit next to the Clerk. I hope the hon. Gentleman will bear that in mind for future reference.

3.24 pm

Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con): I congratulate Members who have made their maiden speech today—my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) and the hon. Members for Bolton West (Julie Hilling) and for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery). I am glad I made my maiden speech last week, because they have raised the bar even higher. I wish them all the very best in their future careers in the House.

I am glad to be speaking in this debate on the best way for the Government to support industry. There is one thing on which I think all Members will agree, and it is the most important factor—that the recovery of our industrial sector is linked to the recovery of every other part of our economy. That will repair the broken economy bequeathed to us by the former Administration.

To help industry, before considering anything else, we have to fix the fundamentals of the economy. Britain's prosperity has traditionally been built on the foundations of sound public finances, low and simple taxation and

[Sajid Javid]

light, flexible regulation. Over the past 13 years, Labour progressively shredded each of those principles. The previous Government saddled our country with a budget deficit of more than 12% of gross domestic product—the largest in Europe—and a national debt approaching £900 billion, a staggering increase of more than 160% in 13 years.

As a result, we have no choice but to make cuts in both public borrowing and public spending. If we do not, we shall no longer be able to sell enough Government bonds to fund the deficit, resulting in a catastrophic economic crisis. It really is that simple. At this point, we cannot even plan to reduce our total debt stock; at best, we can only hope to add to it less fast.

Let us be clear: these are Labour's cuts. As we make them, we must of course make sure that we protect the most vulnerable in society.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman makes the point that the cuts are Labour's. Earlier this year, the OECD said that only the action of the previous Government prevented a recession from becoming a depression. Does he disagree?

Sajid Javid: A few weeks ago, the OECD, the G7 and the International Monetary Fund said that we had no choice but to make the cuts, so I think they would agree with what I have just said.

We cannot rely on a benign global economic outlook as we approach the cuts. I believe that the international financial markets are at their most fragile since the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008; the euro's troubles are only just beginning; the largest emerging economies in the world are about to raise interest rates, so demand will fall, which will affect global demand; and investor appetite for sovereign debt, including our own, is rapidly diminishing.

If we are to get our economy moving again we have no time to lose, so I look forward to the emergency Budget statement that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will make next week.

To help industry, we need to get the banks lending again. I have met many people in Bromsgrove who tell me that it has never been so difficult to get a loan. Drawing on my 19 years' experience of working in the City, I believe that bank lending will not recover until the banks are forced to admit the true state of their balance sheets. Right now, the markets just do not believe that our banks are being truthful about the problems that they face. In turn, the banks are not getting the capital that they need, so they are instead squeezing existing customers, as well as not lending.

As well as a thorough review of financial regulation and regulators, we need an independent audit or a stress test of each British bank, eventually leading to a private sector recapitalisation of weaker institutions that are identified. In that regard, the report that was recently issued by the Future of Banking Commission—of which, I believe, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills was a member—has made some worthy suggestions.

Also to help industry, we need a dramatically different approach to business regulation, as many of my hon. Friends have said today—an approach that is radically different from that of the previous Government. Many business men and women say that the sheer cumulative volume of regulation makes their lives so difficult. People who need to be dealing with customers and products are instead too busy complying with regulators, and many regulations are simply not necessary to keep businesses honest and safe.

Nick de Bois (Enfield North) (Con): The word "regulation" is often bandied around. Although many people hear it, they do not appreciate its full impact. Does my hon. Friend agree that, in the small business sector alone, nearly one full-time employee a year is needed to deal with the growth in regulation, particularly over the past decade—equivalent to a cost of about £11 billion a year—and that there is no greater signal for turning back the clock? I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Margot James) that it is perhaps time for a one-in, two-out policy on regulation.

Sajid Javid: Absolutely, and I think that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills said earlier that 21,000 new business regulations have been introduced over the past 13 years—six every working day of the last Government—but such talk of regulation also applies as much to EU regulations as to domestic regulations. Much of what comes from Brussels is often unnecessary, badly thought through or just ignored by other member states when it suits them. So we need a new approach to EU regulations that helps British industry and business and not one that undermines them.

My constituency of Bromsgrove was once a very proud manufacturing hub, supplying much of the west midlands industrial complex. Much of that industry has now, sadly, disappeared. Some hon. Members may remember one of my predecessors, Sir Hal Miller, who was a passionate advocate of industry in the west midlands, especially the motor car industry.

In recent years, a large "closed for business" sign has been hanging over our country. Whether down to punitive taxation, excessive regulation or inadequate incentives, the effect was always the same: to repel new businesses and discourage existing ones. Having run a private equity business, I cannot stress highly enough how destructive those misguided policies have been. Consequently, I support the amendment, and it is hugely reassuring once again to have a Government who recognise the urgent need to re-open Britain for business.

3.32 pm

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): First, I congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your election and the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) and my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton West (Julie Hilling) and for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) on their witty and wise maiden speeches.

In 1981, I was one of the organisers of the people's march for jobs—500 unemployed men and women from the ages of 16 to 60 who marched with dignity to London, such as the mother and her son from Whaley Bridge and the 150 people who joined the march from Birmingham and the midlands. They were the victims of a Conservative Government who stood back and said that unemployment was a price worth paying. That was an error of historic proportions, which severely

weakened our manufacturing base, with catastrophic consequences still being felt to this day, including in the poorest parts of my constituency—Birmingham, Erdington.

All that stands in stark contrast to the wise decisions that were taken by a Labour Government in the depths of an unprecedented global economic crisis to embrace industrial activism. Short-term measures were taken such as the scrappage scheme on the one hand and strategic investments in Sheffield Forgemasters, Nissan, Airbus, General Motors and others on the other hand. As a consequence, the scrappage scheme alone created 400,000 jobs, with tremendous benefits for the supply chain in the automotive industry. Those strategic investments have built firm foundations in areas of growth: the nuclear industry and renewables, aviation and the car industry. Nissan is a classic example, with £20 million of public investment levering in £420 million of investment by the company, 50,000 new cars and 60,000 batteries—a good deal for Britain.

We now have the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne). He is the Private Frazer of Downing street. "We're doomed. Doomed," is his daily refrain. "Labour mismanaged the economy," is the moan that we constantly hear from Ministers. It could not be further from the truth. By 2007 we had reduced borrowing and debt to beneath the levels that we inherited from a Conservative Government. Then, in a global economic crisis, we borrowed to invest, to boost the economy and the order books of the companies in my constituency, such as those in the machine tool industry—companies such as Dana, Guhring and Micro. All those benefited from the wise and brave leadership given by our Government.

Mr Brian Binley (Northampton South) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman explain why, when Labour came to office, Northampton was 440th in the long list of areas of low unemployment. We rose to 132nd in that list under Labour. What do the people of Northampton have to thank a Labour Government for, in that respect?

Jack Dromey: A Labour Government in the most difficult times did not do what a Conservative Government did in the 1980s—abandon people to their fate. The Labour Government stood on the side of ordinary people and took the necessary strategic long-term decisions to rebuild our manufacturing economy.

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman. We are both Members of Parliament in the west midlands, and he waxes eloquent about public investment being the only panacea for the problems that we have in the west midlands. There is an organisation that he will know about called Advantage West Midlands. I am sure the shadow Secretary of State also knows about it, because he appointed the board when he was a Minister. I have business men in Tamworth queuing up to tell me how inefficient and how ineffective that organisation is. One of them is a former Labour councillor who went to AWM, asked for investment, did not get it and lost his business—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Interventions should be short.

Jack Dromey: I will come to the truth about Advantage West Midlands in a moment. The truth is the opposite of what has just been said.

What we are hearing is the politics of the alibi, camouflaging an ideological objection on the part of the Con-Dem alliance to what its members call big government. It fails to understand the critical role of Government in boosting manufacturing in Britain. Of course it is true that good companies are those that help themselves. I have been involved in negotiating ground-breaking deals in the nuclear industry, the food industry, dockyards and the defence sector—ground-breaking deals that have transformed what were failing companies, working with the employers by way of a change and investment agenda.

I know from my experience in the real world of work, not the world of the trading floors, that time and again, with good employers, we have had to go to central Government, local government and the regional development agencies. Only last year I was involved in an exercise together with Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Government with a leading food manufacturer. Had it not been for partnership, we would not have got the investment, which in turn levered in further investment from the company, securing the future of 500 jobs in an area of high unemployment.

Gordon Birtwistle: Can the hon. Gentleman explain to me where the 400,000 jobs came from, as a result of the car scrappage scheme? He gave a list of machine tool manufacturers. How many are based in the UK and manufacture in the UK?

Jack Dromey: First, the reference was to 400,000 cars. Secondly, the companies are British-based world class manufacturers of machine tools who, when I was at their exhibition last Friday and met many of them, said with one voice, "For us to succeed, we look to support from and partnership with Government." Those are precisely the companies that were rescued from the brink by the car scrappage scheme.

The lesson from experience in the real world of work is that industry best flourishes in partnership with Government, with a framework provided by good government, and sustained and strategic investment underpinned by a determined national will. One need only look at Germany's enduring strengths in manufacturing, which exist precisely because there is that national will. I am proud of the fact that a Labour Government embraced industrial activism. Now is absolutely not the time to pull back from that, because it would be an error of historic proportions. The decisions we make now will decide whether we grow or decline in the future—whether we condemn another generation to no hope. It is therefore essential that we invest to grow and act to rebalance our economy, which had become too heavily dependent on the finance sector.

That is why, for manufacturing, capital allowances matter because they incentivise investment in machinery and plant. That is why, for manufacturing, the patent box matters, with its 10% reduction in corporation tax to encourage innovatory companies to locate intellectual property and manufacturing here in Britain. That is why, for manufacturing, it matters that there is support for research and development. I hope that in refocusing current support, it is not so severely circumscribed as to avoid support for world-beating companies such as Jaguar Land Rover. The Jaguar plant in my constituency is at the heart of a hub of 150,000 people in the

[Jack Dromey]

midlands who depend on the motor industry for their livelihoods. I will look to the Government to work with me, as the Member for Erdington, in respect of the Jaguar plant, and the hon. Member for Solihull (Lorely Burt), in respect of the Land Rover plant, to secure the future of those two beacons of manufacturing excellence.

That is also why regional development agencies matter. What we have heard today is ill-informed prejudice that flies in the face of the history of, in particular, the successful RDA that is Advantage West Midlands. I have seen that at first hand. After the crisis at Rover in 2000, the supply chain became less dependent on Rover, thanks to the work of Advantage West Midlands. As a consequence, when Rover collapsed in 2005, the supply chain did not collapse, as might otherwise have been the case. The manufacturing technology centre and the manufacturing advisory service are prized by manufacturing employers in the midlands, and that is because of what Advantage West Midlands has done.

Let me issue a challenge to the Secretary of State: necessary as it is to move beyond myths, will the Government now publish the independent evaluation of regional development agencies ordered by the Labour Government before the election? Will he confirm that that demonstrates that Advantage West Midlands is one of the best two RDAs; that for every pound of public money invested, £8.14 of wealth is created in the regional economy; and that it has scored the maximum possible score and has been deemed to be performing strongly? In this new era of openness, will that report now be published?

Birmingham is historically the laboratory of manufacturing and of the genius and enterprise of the British people; too often, now, it is British genius but made in China. Our single biggest task is the renaissance of manufacturing in our country. That will not happen if Government once again abandon British manufacturing.

3.43 pm

Mary Macleod (Brentford and Isleworth) (Con): I thank those who made their maiden speeches today. It is so good to hear them participate in a debate on industry. For me, this is one of the most important debates that we can have, given that we are in the middle of a recession and trying to take our country out of it. Truly focusing on industry, business, skills and innovation will take us through the recession and get us back to the strong economy that we need again for this country.

I also feel personally that this is important. I still remember the day when I was in school and was first taught about the industrial revolution, and how that motivated and inspired me to go and do something in business. I spent the 20 years after I graduated in different sectors of business. The industrial revolution is a part of our history that made us great—one hon. Member mentioned that in his maiden speech today—and we want to make our country great again, and creating a strong economy is one way to do that.

The Government can do several things in that respect. Reducing bureaucracy has already been mentioned by several hon. Members, but I want to emphasise what businesses with which I have worked and spoken—in Brentford and Isleworth and elsewhere—have told me. We must do something about the bureaucracy and red tape that both small and large businesses must manage, because they saw it increase under the previous Government. Instead of that red tape and bureaucracy, we need to ensure that we create the atmosphere and environment in which enterprise can flourish, and create an enterprise-led economy. That means encouraging new businesses and getting them to innovate and create new ideas. Time and again, as a country and as individuals, we have proved that we can do that so well in Great Britain. Let us get rid of the regulation, support new enterprise, and ensure that we build this country again into what it can be.

On creating a better-balanced economy, we have perhaps limited ourselves and focused on too few sectors. I worked in financial services, which in the past has helped us to create a strong economy, and I believe it will again. However, we need to look beyond what we have done before and ask, "What is needed for the future?" I want to ensure that we are supporting the manufacturing sector, research and development, and science and technology, which need our input and support if they are to grow.

On education and skills support for business, I welcome our proposal—it was mentioned today, in the coalition agreement and previously in the general election—for investment in apprenticeships and university places. Businesses have told me that they have spent crucial training time in their organisations teaching people how to read and write, rather than getting on and developing the skills that they need. We must begin to address that at schools, by ensuring that our children get the best possible education, so that we create the skills necessary for the country.

The previous Government pursued wasteful policies in the past 13 years. They introduced a number of schemes that were designed to help businesses through the recession, but those have failed. We now have a duty to this country to review those projects and ensure that we are getting value for money for them. Policy is really all about the outcome; it is not about having another new idea or drafting another piece of legislation every day. It is about asking, "What will this policy actually deliver on the ground in terms of jobs and support for industry?" I encourage the Government to look again at those policies. We need to ensure that we are supporting people in skills-based training and apprenticeships. I thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for Universities and Science for visiting West Thames college in Isleworth with me. That college is a great example of a good scheme. We need to build on such schemes to ensure that we gain the skills that are required in future.

I also encourage the Government to do everything that they can to support British industry and create that competitive environment for business investment. Given the state of the public finances, we must find ways to do that and increase opportunities for business, cut excessive expenditure and red tape, and simplify our processes. I therefore support the Government's amendment, because we should do all that we can to rebuild our country and allow businesses and people across this land to aspire to do what they can to make this country great once again.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The conventions for maiden speeches now apply.

3.50 pm

Pat Glass (North West Durham) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech today in this debate on Government support for industry. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) and my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton West (Julie Hilling) and for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) on their contributions. Over the last few weeks, I have listened to many maiden speeches and been very entertained—although probably not as much as I was today by the story of the cow—and taken on a descriptive geographical journey around many parts of this great nation.

It is a great privilege to stand here today in this wonderful place, having recently been elected by the people of North West Durham, the community that I was born into and grew up in. There is something very special in being elected to represent the people I grew up with, went to school with and still live among. I follow in the footsteps of Hilary Armstrong, who served North West Durham for 23 years and, before her, of Ernie Armstrong, her father. I have followed in Ernie's footsteps in more ways than one as he was a head teacher in Durham County and went on to be the assistant director of education in Sunderland, a job I followed him into many years later, before following him and his daughter as Member of Parliament for North West Durham. Both were first-class Members of Parliament, hard working and passionate about the north-east region and the North West Durham constituency.

Hilary is certainly going to be a very difficult act to follow. She was a social worker who brought practical skills and experience to this House. She was a strong, determined and persuasive female MP, at a time when there were even fewer female Members than there are today. She was immensely proud of her northern roots and a staunch defender of the north-east region. She had a long and distinguished career, holding several posts in government—not least Chief Whip—but it was her role as social inclusion Minister where she was truly in her element. Hilary was passionate about improving the lives of the most vulnerable and the disadvantaged in our society, and in that we share a common purpose.

For those who have never visited North West Durham, I can tell them that it is a hauntingly beautiful place and that they should plan to visit it soon. The towns of Consett, Crook and Willington are surrounded by small villages. The Durham dales and countryside surrounding that are categorised as an area of outstanding natural beauty. That contrasts sharply with the countryside as I remember it as a child, when it was black and covered with coal dust, but all that has now gone. I do not know why I should be surprised at that—given that it is sandwiched between north Yorkshire and Northumberland, it was always going to be beautiful under all that coal dust.

Durham has a long and proud industrial history. It was heavily dependent on coal mining, steel production and heavy engineering. Every village had a pit and Consett was a steel-making town. North West Durham, our industries and our people suffered terribly during the Thatcher years. The closure of Consett steelworks resulted in unemployment among the male population reaching almost 100%. We lost jobs and we lost industries, but there were some things that even the Thatcher Government could not take from us—our communities; our resilience; our fortitude in the face of unemployment, poverty and deprivation; the warmth of our people; and the way in which they care and work for one another. That may be linked to what the Prime Minister now refers to as the "big society", but we in the north-east think of it fondly as socialism.

North West Durham, like most of the post-industrial north, has undergone an economic and social revolution in the past 13 years, with the support of the last Government. Educational outcomes, which are very close to my heart, have been transformed. We now have some of the best schools in the country, with the best performances. Sure Start centres are ensuring that our children have the best beginning to their academic lives, and our young people now go on to further and higher education in much great numbers than was possible before. There are more good, sustainable jobs; people are better off; health and housing services are much improved; our local economy has been given the time and support needed to adapt and diversify; and the food and renewable energy industries and tourism now thrive. The biggest employers in North West Durham, outside the public sector, are International Cuisine and Derwent Valley Foods—a sign of the diversification of our industries and jobs. Renewable energy and green industries were being established in the north-east region with the help of the last Government, and I sincerely hope that they will continue to be supported by the new Government.

Like Ernie and Hilary Armstrong, I have spent much of my career working with, and supporting, vulnerable young people—in my case, specialising in special educational needs. I will be campaigning on behalf of these young people in the House and will speak on SEN and disability matters whenever I have the opportunity. I will be looking to Members from both sides of the House to support me in advancing the interests of this group of disadvantaged, and very often marginalised, young people. I will also be championing the cause of children living in poverty, because I have seen first hand too many times the links between poverty and educational under-achievement. It is simply unacceptable that children in receipt of free school meals—a clear indicator of poverty—on average do progressively worse at school than their peers, that young people with parents in manual occupations are far less likely than others to go to university and that only one in six students at top universities come from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

With the recession and the return to power of a Conservative Government, backed by their Liberal Democrat friends, my people fear a return to the desperate situations of the 1980s and early 1990s. They fear for their jobs, their homes and their children's future. The public sector in my constituency employs 6,100 people, and I am especially worried about them, particularly given the Prime Minister's warnings about what he has in mind for the north-east. In order to grow, the north-east needs a work force who are highly skilled and possess diverse, adaptable and technological knowledge. There are real opportunities for us to seize, in tourism and the renewable energy industry, that have the potential to bring jobs and growth to the north-east, but to do this the Government need to show that they have faith and confidence in the region—the kind of faith and confidence that employers such as Nissan have shown and which the previous Government had in my region.

[Pat Glass]

I will work ceaselessly as the MP for North West Durham—the constituency I was born into—and for the people I grew up with and whom I am proud to represent in the House.

3.58 pm

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass) on her passionate speech about her constituency, and I am pleased to hear how attracted she is to the big society—she is always welcome on the Conservative Benches.

We all know that we are in times of deep economic hardship, but we are now heading in the right direction. A key reason is that we have already begun to fix the wrongs, and our first focus has been on balancing the books. For anyone in any doubt about whether this is the right strategy, I need only point to the commendations that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor received at the G20 summit in South Korea for his efforts in this area. However, although we have made an important start, there are of course many things that we need to do, and for me the importance of business cannot be underestimated. From my experience at YouGov, and from talking to businesses in Stratford, small or large, I know that there are three main areas that people want us to focus on: getting rid of bureaucracy and red tape, simplifying the tax system and giving small and medium-sized businesses tax incentives and easier access to funding. All those areas must be addressed, and I shall endeavour to discuss them today.

It is no coincidence that after 13 years of a Labour Government, business in this country feels bogged down by bureaucracy. I am delighted that one of the first things that we have done is introduce a one-in, one-out policy on regulation. That will change the culture of Whitehall and help those stuck in red tape to free themselves and get on with their business. Next, we need to focus our efforts on the need for a simpler and fairer tax system for business. It is not in our country's interest for businesses to waste time and resources on decoding the hugely complicated tax system. Someone running a small business is the chief executive officer, the salesperson, the receptionist and the accountant, so the more time they spend on bureaucracy, the less they spend on building up their business.

The abolition of the employer's contribution to national insurance must be commended. It is an excellent policy, and there are already businesses in my constituency, such as GreenMech, DCS Europe and the brilliant Purity Brewing, applauding this initiative. Even Lord Digby Jones, the previous Government's adviser, warned against that anti-jobs policy in the other place.

One of the most difficult areas to address is the funding available to SMEs. The previous Government made steps in the right direction, but they did not work. The RDAs have clearly not worked, and they have wasted an enormous amount of taxpayers' money on bureaucracy. Banks want to lend only when the sun is shining. The previous Administration failed to fix the roof during those times, and it was SMEs that paid a heavy price. However, I am pleased that we have already pledged to ensure that a flow of credit is available to viable SMEs, both by considering a national loans guarantee scheme and by the use of net lending targets for banks. In the future, we must continue to do more to help in that area.

I want to address another matter that is key to strengthening our business sector in this country. We must ensure that our employees of the future are equipped with the skills that can help them and their employers succeed. I for one always looked at the skill and expertise of a potential candidate, rather than just their university education. That is why I am such a strong believer in apprenticeships and the skills that they offer. In a previous life, I did a lot of work with a fantastic charity called Edge, and I applaud the Government's focus on apprenticeships.

Making things and selling things to the world are going to be vital for our future. That is why we need to support engineering, whether it be mechanical, civil or software engineering. Engineering needs to be seen as an aspirational qualification again. We need only look at Germany, a nation proud of its engineers, to see what can be achieved. For me, we must focus on specific areas of business, in order to create a niche for ourselves as a nation.

Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way—I believe that this might be his first run at active combat in the Chamber, so he is welcome. He talked about software engineering, and his party made a commitment in the election to a tax relief system for the games industry, which is important in the sub-region that he represents. Does he still support that?

Nadhim Zahawi: It is important that we look at whatever area we can support, but at the same time—

Mr Watson: What do you think?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am going to answer the hon. Gentleman. At the same time, we have to remember that we are currently borrowing £500 million, and we have to cut our cloth accordingly.

We must focus on specific areas of business to create our niche. If we look at Britain in relation to our Chinese and Indian counterparts, we see that we can never hope to compete with them on production cost or quantity. That is why we must focus on intellectual property and innovations. We need only look at Formula 1 to see what talent we already have in innovation here in the United Kingdom. As politicians, we need to focus our energy on the recommendations of inventors such as Sir James Dyson. Sadly, however, we are tending to lose our best people to other nations where innovation is better funded. For example, Jonathan Ive, the designer of the iPod—such an iconic brand of our era—is British, but he works for a great American company. We must learn from the USA. Silicon valley is the home of US tech start-ups precisely because of the environment created there by the US Government and because of the support that start-ups receive. We should learn from that and create our own opportunity zones here in the United Kingdom.

I applaud the approach taken so far by the coalition Government, and it is important that we continue to do all we can to encourage growth in the private sector, so that we can continue to create jobs that are sustainable.

That will be an important move away from the previous Government, whose policies led to an unsustainable and unrealistic bloating of the public sector. Our future lies in business and, for me, specifically in innovation. What we do now will affect the course of our business future, and I am confident that, with the coalition Government in place, we will succeed.

Let me end by saying that I support the amendment tabled in the name of the Prime Minister and colleagues.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The conventions of the maiden speech apply. I call Michael Dugher.

4.6 pm

Michael Dugher (Barnsley East) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to make my maiden speech. I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) and my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton West (Julie Hilling), for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) and for North West Durham (Pat Glass) on their excellent contributions to the debate today.

Barnsley East is a new constituency, albeit one with an old name. It is made up of wards in the old constituency of Barnsley East and Mexborough and in the old Barnsley West and Penistone seat, so it is my privilege today to pay tribute to not one but two predecessors. Jeff Ennis served the people of Barnsley for three decades, first as a local councillor, rising to become leader of Barnsley council, then as the Member of Parliament for Barnsley East and Mexborough. Born and bred in Grimethorpe, he still regards himself as a "Grimey" lad. He was not merely from that community; he was always part of it.

Jeff Ennis was well known in this House, not least as an animal lover, particularly those animals of the four-legged variety that can be seen at events such as the 2.15 at Newmarket, the 3 o'clock at Cheltenham and the 3.30 at Sandown—votes permitting, of course. Hon. Members might know that Grimethorpe is the home of the world-famous Grimethorpe colliery band. The band featured in the film "Brassed Off", which was set in my constituency. Indeed, Jeff Ennis helped to set up the all-party group on brass bands. He understood as much as anyone that the elites who run the world of culture do not always properly reflect and support the culture and entertainment of working-class communities, and in a small but important way, this highlights the insight that Jeff Ennis was able to bring to the House. He was always a powerful and authentic voice for working-class people.

I mentioned that I also had the privilege of representing wards that were part of the Barnsley West and Penistone seat, which was represented with great distinction for the better part of 20 years by Michael Clapham—better known to us all as Mick Clapham. It is fair to say that, in the brief time that I worked in the Labour Whips Office, Mick's name would occasionally appear on the lists of hon. Members who might require extra assistance in finding their way through the appropriate voting Lobby. I know that he opposed ID cards, tuition fees and the Iraq war, which puts him on broadly the same platform as all the candidates for the Labour leadership. I am sure that that will amuse him, and slightly surprise him.

I was privileged to be present at the unveiling of a memorial by the steps of the town hall in Barnsley to mark all the men and boys who were killed or injured while working in the pits in and around Barnsley. Mick Clapham spoke movingly, and without notes. In this place, he was able to use his tremendous experience to considerable effect, especially in helping to secure much-needed compensation for former miners. I know that he will continue to use his experience in his capacity as chair of the Government's important review committee on the regeneration of the coalfield communities.

Mick embodied one of the finest traditions of this House in being one of the large number of former miners who have served here. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) represents this tradition extremely well, as do others, including my fellow new Member, my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery). The number of former miners in the House is, sadly, reducing and it is my view that the House of Commons is the poorer for it.

The area I represent remains a community built on coal. I myself grew up in Edlington, the site of the main Yorkshire colliery, and the house I grew up in overlooked the pit. My brother and his family still live in the same house. In not-too-distant history, coal mining in Barnsley accounted for more than 30,000 jobs, with many more dependent on that employment. My constituency has had more than a dozen pits at one time or another. Today, the number is zero, and we are still dealing today with the consequence of the closure of those pits.

My constituents are proud—very proud—of their industrial heritage. They remember the jobs of the past, but they want the jobs of the future. The question today, then, is how we continue to give people the opportunities they need and how we can continue to transform lives and life chances. The context was set out very well by the leader of Barnsley council, Stephen Houghton, in the "Tackling Worklessness Review" of March last year. How we use the power of Government, working with the private sector and with local government to promote employment in areas like my own is extremely important.

I have to say that the policies of the new coalition Government are not encouraging. There seems to be complete hostility towards the public sector, and complete hostility towards the role of Government: it is always the Government who are the problem, and they can never be a force for good. That was certainly the Prime Minister's and the Chancellor's rhetoric. We heard, I thought, a slightly different tone from the Secretary of State in his rather baffling performance today, but I am sure that we will get to the bottom of where he is coming from.

The abolition of the future jobs fund, which was pioneered in Barnsley, was a major blow and a matter of profound regret for me and my constituents. We are also seeing the beginning of the hidden cuts in education that are affecting schools across Barnsley right now. This is not new politics, but old economics. The mistakes of the 1920s are being repeated today—the sort of deflationary policies that we are now seeing repeated nearly a century later. By itself, the private sector cannot possibly deliver all the decent jobs in areas like mine that have fundamental structural problems.

[Michael Dugher]

To finish, George Orwell spent some time in Barnsley when he was researching "The Road to Wigan Pier". He once said, in a rather critical way:

"A Yorkshireman in the South will always take care to let you know that he regards you as an inferior. If you ask him why, he will explain... The Northerner has 'grit', he is... 'dour', plucky, warm-hearted, and democratic; the Southerner is snobbish, effeminate, and lazy".

That might be slightly uncharitable towards southerners—*[Interruption.]* I emphasise the word "slightly". Despite the serious threats we in Barnsley face from the new Government and despite the challenges that lie ahead, I am convinced that the greatest asset we have in Barnsley are the people of Barnsley. It is their talent, their skills, their hard work, their ingenuity, and their pride in themselves and their compassion for others that make me so very proud to represent them here today.

4.14 pm

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher) on his confident and well-spoken maiden speech. I noticed that he mentioned in the early part of his speech that he had worked in the Labour Whips Office, so I suspect he will be extremely useful to his new colleagues in helping to explain to them exactly how this place works. He also mentioned the need for jobs for the future; I entirely endorse what he said and agree with him on that.

I think it was the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills who set out earlier the basic difference of opinion between the Government and the Opposition regarding the spending of money, and that is reflected in the Government's amendment to the Opposition motion. The previous Government tested to destruction the theory that if we throw money at a problem, we will resolve it. We all know now that that is not the case.

All Members should welcome discussion in the Chamber of the importance of manufacturing, and of the need for a balanced economy. I might have misheard the shadow Secretary of State earlier, but he seemed to imply that only Labour Members of Parliament understood the needs of manufacturing because it was based in their constituencies. Perhaps Labour Members have missed this, but there has been an election, and some seats have changed hands. I for one represent a seat with a significant amount of manufacturing, although there will be less when AstraZeneca closes its site at the end of 2011. However, my constituency has a large amount of high-tech manufacturing, including a wonderful engineering department at Loughborough university.

Matthew Hancock: Does my hon. Friend share my bafflement that all the speeches that we have heard from Labour Members seem to ignore the fact that over the past 13 years the share of manufacturing in our economy has halved? It is entirely contrary to the facts for them to talk about the brilliance of the Labour Government as regards manufacturing.

Nicky Morgan: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Manufacturing has fallen at a faster rate over the past 13 years than in the 1980s. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) spoke about the need for a balanced economy, but the previous Government had 13 years to achieve that. I welcome the fact that the Conservative-Lib Dem Government's coalition agreement says that there is a need for a balanced economy.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a powerful case. Was not the entire strategy of the former Labour Government predicated on three things: the housing market, the growth in financial services and public sector expenditure increases? All were found wanting, and manufacturing and other sectors were neglected.

Nicky Morgan: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I noticed a certain amount of eye rolling when an earlier speaker mentioned that she had worked in the financial services industry. As my hon. Friend has pointed out, however, the financial services industry's growth over the past 13 years was huge. We will not take lessons from Labour Members in that regard.

In referring to industry, I think that Labour Members have been talking about larger companies—perhaps I will be corrected—but most people in this country work for smaller businesses, and in some cases very small businesses. They are the backbone of our economy, and their growth will drive the economy out of the current situation.

I want to talk about three aspects of support for business, some of which have been referred to already. First, more bank lending to businesses is necessary. As chamber of commerce research shows, small businesses are being penalised with higher rates of interest. In my constituency, two gentlemen running a small industrial company who rightly took out a mortgage to buy premises in 2007—when lenders were falling over themselves to lend their company money, as it was a very sound bet and had never failed to make repayments—have suddenly been told by the building society in question that the property has fallen in value and that the ratios are therefore wrong, so they will have to renegotiate the mortgage and pay higher interest rates that are clearly beyond them. That is exactly what banks should not be doing at this critical time in the economic cycle when businesses need support.

Mr Watson: Will the hon. Lady suggest how Government might intervene to stop that?

Nicky Morgan: Obviously I am not running the Treasury, and I am not the Chancellor of the Exchequer. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not yet."] That is too kind.

I contacted the chief executive of the building society I mentioned and asked for an explanation, but I sometimes wonder whether decisions are made at a lower level of management and without any real thought or understanding. We heard a statement earlier about the directors of banks. I should like to know whether all directors are fully informed of the way in which their bank is running its business, and whether they realise that they are putting the squeeze on businesses which, although sound, cannot afford to make higher repayments at this stage of the economic cycle while they are also trying to stay afloat and keep people employed.

Much has already been said about the increase in regulation. According to the Federation of Small Businesses, small firms spend seven hours a week dealing with red

tape. I welcome the Government's decision to introduce a "one in, one out" system. I do not know whether other Members have been receiving surveys, but I received one recently asking what law I would like to introduce. Actually, I do not want to introduce any more laws. I should like to see fewer laws. I should like laws and regulations to be simplified, both for businesses and for individuals.

Members have mentioned the gold-plating of European Union legislation, which goes on all the time. I sincerely hope that following the change of Government, we shall see an instruction that regulations are no longer to be gold-plated.

Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): May I commend to the hon. Lady the most recent report of the Regulatory Reform Committee, published in the last Session? Evidence was taken from a wide range of sources, including the London Business School, which said that it was not true that Britain was in the habit of gold-plating EU regulations.

Nicky Morgan: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I shall certainly look at the report, but I know from my business experience that that is not the case. Some regulations may not have been gold-plated, but I understand that in one instance that has been brought to my attention—the agency workers directive—the Government have gone further than was intended in the EU's original drafting.

I visited a local business recently, a recruitment company. I was told that it employed one individual to help it to deal with its accounts. In one month, he has to fill in four different forms for a business register and employment survey, an annual business survey, an annual survey of hours and earnings, and a monthly wages and salaries survey. The annual business survey asked how long it took him to fill in the form. It had taken him one hour and 25 minutes—one hour and 25 minutes that could have been spent earning money for the business. Who is using all this information, and what is it being used for? Is it just going into some big black hole somewhere? We are making our businesses spend far too long on red tape and form-filling.

Before I return to the subject of regional development agencies, I want to say something about skills and apprenticeships. I was delighted when, earlier today, the Prime Minister said that there would be support for them in the Budget, and I welcome the 50,000 additional places that are mentioned in the amendment to the motion. We have a terrific college in Loughborough, which I visited again recently. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Universities and Science has visited it with me, and his colleague the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), has visited it as well.

The college provides a variety of courses, but its building plans—like those of the college in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Margot James)—have been hit by the chaos in the Learning and Skills Council. Having committed £30,000 to the planning process for its new buildings, Loughborough college found that the LSC had massively overspent, and that it would receive none of the money. It now tells me that, although it does a tremendous job and its courses are well over-subscribed, its buildings will not be fit for purpose for much longer, and it does not know how it will find the money to fund the new ones.

Adult learning is very important. The hon. Member for Bolton West (Julie Hilling) spoke of aspiration. I think that we should encourage better careers advice, emphasising the importance of manufacturing to school pupils and informing them of the opportunities that are available in the engineering sector and, indeed, all areas of manufacturing. One practical suggestion from a manufacturer is to help employers to run in-house training courses.

I want to comment on RDAs because I did not get a chance to intervene on the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey). Some RDAs may have achieved their purpose, but I recently spoke at a conference organised by the Leicestershire Asian Business Association. There were 50 people in the room. Not one of them—I specifically asked the question—had a good word to say about their RDA, the East Midlands Development Agency. I am happy to listen but it is up to the regions to decide the best way to offer business support. The best way may be through local enterprise partnerships. It may be through keeping some form of regional structure, but I support the amendment to the motion.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The conventions of the maiden speech apply.

4.25 pm

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your new position. I also congratulate the new Members—the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), and my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton West (Julie Hilling), for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery), for North West Durham (Pat Glass) and for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher)—on their excellent speeches.

I am grateful for the opportunity to address the House for the first time as the Member of Parliament for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, particularly during a debate on industry. I follow in the footsteps of my former employer, mentor and friend Dr Ashok Kumar, who tragically died on 15 March this year. He was a polite, courteous and conscientious local community leader with an exemplary knowledge of manufacturing, processes and industry in general. More than that, he was loved in our area not just for his tenacity and work ethic, but for the warmth that emanated from his every pore. The people living in the hills, valleys and suburbs of Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, whom he served with a selfless and determined devotion, will miss him terribly. He will be a hard act to follow.

It is a great honour and a privilege to represent the constituency where I was raised, and that I call home. Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland is a microcosm of British society. It includes former mining villages such Loftus, Carlin How, Skinningrove, Brotton and Skelton, large estates such as Hemlington and Park End, market towns such as Guisborough, leafy suburbs such as Nunthorpe, Marton and Coulby Newham, and seaside resorts such as Saltburn, where I live today. Those are all areas where I have personal memories of growing up.

[Tom Blenkinsop]

Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland encapsulates some of the diverse and interesting communities that make our country great, and those communities are a reflection of their industrial setting. My area bore men and women who assisted a son of my seat, Captain James Cook, to build the Endeavour from local timber to sail and discover Australia. Centuries later, the descendents of those same people helped to build the Sydney Harbour bridge from East Cleveland iron ore and Tees river steel. Today, my constituency still provides and proudly manufactures steel components at Corus Skinningrove and at TC Industries—places I know very well—where, alongside fellow workers at TCP Redcar, whom I represented as their union official, and with our two local papers, the *Evening Gazette* and *The Northern Echo*, we have fought to keep our proud steel-making heritage. That campaign still continues.

Many of my constituents work in and around the Wilton and Billingham chemical sites. A proud tradition of mining still continues at the Boulby potash mine; it is still going strong. Important institutions such as TTE bring on and train apprentices to be our next generation of skilled workers.

My seat also has a rich and varied agriculture. It has begun to diversify into a bourgeoning tourist industry, and a rapidly emerging digital economy, supported by our local Teesside university. That rich diversity was represented excellently by Ashok, an Asian MP in a predominantly white seat, who in his own maiden speech reflected upon following in the footsteps of local Labour heroes who overcame prejudice to build a better and fairer country for the minorities of the future. He talked about Billy Mansfield, an East Cleveland ironstone miner who left school at 13, and from the pit face to Parliament, as Ashok said, fought for his class and his people. There was also Ellen Wilkinson, who represented the old Middlesbrough East constituency throughout the early 1920s. She proved, against the conventional wisdom of the day, that a woman could successfully promote the needs, aspirations and dreams of a heavy industrial region.

As Ashok always reminded me, without the Labour party none of these huge cultural shifts could have been achieved. I am proud and humbled to be following in the historic tradition set out by my predecessors. The voices of the people of my area are ringing in my ears when I enter this House every single day. I am thinking of voices such as June Goodchild, a local community activist, who has strived for her estate in Easterside for years and achieved great things for her community by working in partnership with her local Labour authority in Middlesbrough; and Robbie Middlemas, a Skinningrove steelworker and community trade union site official, who for the past 24 months has led his members through some of the most difficult days that they have ever witnessed at Skinningrove. There has been a similar situation down the road at TCP Teesside. I am thinking of voices such as that of Ian, a local entrepreneur who lives next door to my parents, runs a small chemical fabrication business and has been helped by One NorthEast. Their lives will not be improved by over-simplified ideological positions and a reliance on the invisible hand of market forces. Sometimes the reason why that hand seems invisible in areas such as mine is because it is not, in fact, there at all.

The new coalition Government seem intent on a withdrawal of public funding, and a rolling back of the state and of the work of regional development agencies such as One NorthEast. The coalition blame red tape and not the real culprit: a lack of long-term secure capital specifically set aside for a manufacturing base—it is a base that has historically provided revenues to keep leafy idylls in the south leafy. This ideology condemns my area and my people—the people of Teesside—to a bleak future. This ideological short-termism fails to seize the opportunities that the level of sterling currently offers in building on our manufacturing export markets; money could be reinvested in vital research and development projects. This bleak future undermines market certainty for any prospective private long-term investor in my area.

It has always been necessary for the public sector—or, rather, the Government—to take the initial risk in investment, so that private investment would follow with assured certainty. The new coalition Government see this public spending, on my home town area, as a huge waste. They apply a perfectly rational, liberal, laissez-faire logic—they say that if the market does not invest in the area, it should be left—but where does that leave the people I live alongside, who need jobs and opportunities to feed their families? This monetarist logic is not new; neither is the grim condemnation of my area's people.

Another predecessor of mine waxed lyrical in his maiden speech about the fact that the world-class British TCP site produced 1.5 million tonnes of steel with 25,000 employees and within the period of terminal Tory rule could then produce 2.5 million tonnes of steel with only 5,000 employees. This is a grim logic of no industrial support and a grim Government who defer to an inflated natural level of unemployment. But in this era, the deliberate attack upon jobs in my area is now targeted at the public services, public servants and the voluntary sector. These are all jobs that provide a market for the private sector. Public sector jobs make up the lion's share of employment in my constituency. Prior to the election, both the Lib Dems and the Tories promised to protect front-line services, but we have seen jobs for the young cut, incentives for employers to employ cut, training for the unemployed cut, grants to build housing for people with learning disabilities cut, funding to offer college places to all 16 and 17-year-olds not in employment or education cut, funding for the police cut and free school meals cut. Those are all the real coalition anti-job policies. In addition, if this coalition raises VAT on 22 June, it will hurt the poorest people and the smallest businesses the most. The only VAT rates that should be raised are the current 0% rates on private health care and private education, which only the rich can afford.

So, I come to this House with great regret for my area that Labour is not in power and with great anxiety and fear over what the future under a Tory-led coalition Government will bring. However, as a newly elected representative, I pledge here and now to be vigilant in the face of every threat to the livelihoods of the people of my constituency and never to give up fighting for those who elected me.

4.33 pm

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): This is the first time that I have spoken in a debate when you have been in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I

welcome you to it. I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop). He has a truly charming constituency—it is perhaps not quite as charming as my own—with a distinctive pioneering heritage. Given the eloquence of his speech, I believe that he will be doughty champion for people in his constituency.

My speech follows a long line of maiden speeches made today. The hon. Member for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher) referred to miners and former miners. He may be aware that the Government Chief Whip was also a miner, so he may add him to his little club. The hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass) also spoke eloquently, as did the hon. Members for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) and for Bolton West (Julie Hilling), and our friendly doctor, my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), even though his joke was the worst that I have heard in a maiden speech. *[Laughter.]* I am sure he will thank me for that later.

I was terribly surprised that the first debate called by the Opposition was on Government support for industry, because these are the same people who have just been in government while we witnessed the loss of 1 million jobs in the manufacturing sector. I shall bring my personal experience to this debate, because I worked in manufacturing for 13 years for a company—not as a trade union official, but right in the thick of it. I should have said that I also worked for the BBC for six months and I saw where they filmed—I can assure hon. Members that they were the flashiest offices.

I worked in industry only under a Labour Government, and I am sorry to say that I learned the Labour litany "Regulation, regulation, regulation", "Tax, tax, tax", and "Reporting, reporting, reporting". To sum up, I encountered a lot of bureaucracy and complexity wrapped up in red tape. There has been talk today about capital allowances, refunds and rebates, but for me, as a finance director of one of the subsidiaries of the company that I worked for, all I can say is that it got more and more complex. The only people who truly benefited were the tax accountants from PricewaterhouseCoopers and other firms. They were the people who had to take on the job, if we wanted to do it, of reclaiming the money. Better still, I think, is the attitude that we should stop telling industry how to invest and that we should reduce corporation tax instead. I praise the former Government, because they undertook that during their term of office. That was the right thing to do and I hope we will go further.

I want to share two small examples. I am sure that people will have sampled the excellent produce of Adnams, a company in Southwold in my constituency, which built a special new building that required no equipment to keep the beer cool. Because Adnams did not buy old-fashioned technology, it could not get capital allowances for it. It even pressed the former Prime Minister on this point, but people still cannot get capital allowances for a new building. Adnams has suffered as a consequence.

Let me use another example from my personal business experience: car tax. There are a lot of unintended consequences. The health and safety aspects, which I thought were important, meant that we insisted on estate cars for all our field-based employees. We tried to encourage them to buy or lease British-made cars, but the sad reality was that the extra costs of preparing for £600 or £700 of car duty meant that we had to think through the options of recommending that they no longer buy cars from manufacturers that made cars in Britain or to remove two or three jobs to pay for that. That is the unintended consequence of some of the legislation, which might sound good at the time, but in the real world means that jobs go.

Both sides of the House are united in believing that the private sector will lead the recovery—or, at least, most of us are. Of course, we disagree on how to do it. I see the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) on the Opposition Front Bench; he is a great advocate for businesses in his constituency. I know his constituency quite well, not just because he soundly beat me five years ago when I stood for election there, but because I have cousins who live and work there in Kellogg's and other businesses. For me, it is an example of a one-business town—mining was a big part of it—that has diversified. It needs to broaden its base and I welcome that, but we need to see that more across every region—every county, I should say—in our great country.

The RDAs were one of the flagship policies of the last Government and I am delighted that they are having their sails trimmed—indeed, that they are being scuttled. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), who is not with us at the moment, referred to a report. I am not sure which one he was talking about, but the National Audit Office published its report just three months ago and it was not rosy reading when it came to the effectiveness of the RDAs in helping business. The net cost was £60,000 per job created, which is a hefty introduction fee for trying to get jobs into our economy. The NAO was unable to say that there was value for money and could not conclude that the return for money was optimal. It blamed aspects of poor project analysis, pervasive optimism bias—that is, very rose-tinted spectacles were worn in considering how particular projects would generate benefits—and weak evaluation. Indeed, it made the point that most RDAs were unaware until 2009 of the types of projects that yielded the best and most enduring benefits.

The fact that in a number of cases RDAs struggled to identify market failure and, where an intervention was made, they could not justify why they had done the project, speaks volumes to me. It gives a feel of money being thrown at projects, as my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) mentioned, and throwing money does not solve a problem. That might be backed up by the statistic given by the NAO—30% of RDA funds were spent in one month, the last month of the financial year, when RDAs were desperate to get rid of their budget, no matter where.

I shall not cry to see the RDAs go. I am not saying that everything they have done was bad, but for me they are not necessarily the best way to deliver the support that businesses need. The key point that the National Audit Office uncovered was that targeted business support generated the best return. I hope that the new local enterprise partnerships will focus on that and will learn that lesson.

I welcome the amendment to the motion, because it mentions the college places and apprenticeships that are necessary to rebuild the skills needed to get Britain back on its feet. Local businesses of mine, including EDF at Sizewell and BT at Martlesham, already run apprenticeship schemes that are oversubscribed, and I hope we can encourage more to do so. Companies such as Brafe

[Dr Thérèse Coffey]

Engineering in Woodbridge want more technically skilled people coming through—not just people with degrees in any subject, no matter what. We have to do this and it is absolutely imperative to have appropriate Government support and not just the blank, scattergun approach that is the legacy of the previous Government. I support the amendment.

4.40 pm

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): First, I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House who have made their maiden speech today, especially my hon. Friends and neighbours the Members for North West Durham (Pat Glass) and for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop). They reminded me that the north-east of England is probably the most beautiful part of the country and that we discovered Australia as well, so we have a lot going for us.

Today's debate is mainly about how we reduce the deficit and how to grow ourselves out of the problems that we have at the moment. My big worry about all the doom and gloom that we are getting from the Government, who are basically talking down the economy and talking down the country, is that we will end up in a spiralling, self-fulfilling prophecy where it is all doom and gloom. It is not just me who says that. On Sunday, a recent business survey by the Centre for Economics and Business Research was on the BBC's online news website. It stated:

"Business confidence among UK firms has seen its biggest drop since 1995 due to the government's rhetoric on spending cuts, a survey suggests...there is a significant risk that the rhetoric has begun to impact on business confidence, and fears of the economic impact of spending cuts may be causing businesses to rein back on growth plans."

So, it is not just the Labour party and the Opposition saying that; it is business itself, which will be fundamentally affected by the Government's current programme.

Let me say something about employment. Previous Government intervention has meant that even though we are going through what is apparently the worst recession for 60 years, unemployment is nowhere near what it was in the 1980s and 1990s. Today's statistics put the figure for people claiming benefits at about 1.4 million or 1.5 million. In my constituency, the number of people who are out of work has fallen by 600 in the past year and by 140 in the past month. In the 1980s, that figure was 5,500, and 40% of those people had been out of work for 12 months or more.

We all know the quote that has been mentioned twice today about the Tory Government of those days saying that unemployment was a price worth paying, but we do not need to go back to those days. We can look at last Thursday's Department for Communities and Local Government questions to find the Government's default position on their programme for cuts. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Mr Blunkett) asked,

"is it not inevitable that those in greatest need will take the biggest cuts?",

the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), without hesitation, stood up and said:

"Those in greatest need ultimately bear the burden of paying off the debt".—[*Official Report*, 10 June 2010; Vol. 511, c. 450.]

That proves to me where the cuts are going to hit the most—local communities not just in the north-east of England but throughout the country. We have to be prepared for that, and one thing that prepares us for it is the regional development agencies.

I must say that I am more confused now than I was at the beginning of the debate about what the Government's position is on RDAs. "The Coalition: our programme for government" document says on page 10:

"We will support the creation of Local Enterprise Partnerships—joint local authority-business bodies brought forward by local authorities themselves to promote local economic development—to replace Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). These may take the form of the existing RDAs in areas where they are popular."

After the Secretary of State spoke earlier, I kept asking myself, "When is an RDA not an RDA?" It seems, from what the Government are saying, that the answer is—when it is an RDA.

Let us get some facts right about RDAs. First of all, they have trained more than 400,000 people and created more than 850,000 jobs over the last 10 years. They have helped nearly 60,000 businesses to start up and more than 110,000 businesses have benefited from a free business health check. RDAs brought forward funding of £100 million for regeneration projects, and they have launched transition loans to help businesses access finance. We are talking about a strategy for growth, but RDAs helped to deliver it.

In my constituency, the RDA helped businesses such as Rock Farm Dairy to set up a new bottling facility. The RDA is creating jobs in the north of the constituency. The Printable Electronics Technology Centre—PETEC—is in Sedgefield village, at NETPark, the North East Technology Park. The hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) was on about space and science. From what I see at NETPark, I know that today's science fiction is tomorrow's reality. That work was being done with the help of the RDA and a Government who invested £12 million to promote it. The research and development facilities at PETEC have helped to protect more than 600 jobs at Thorn Lighting, just over the border in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman). That is creating high-value jobs, making sure that manufacturing jobs stay in this country and do not migrate to the far east or to eastern Europe.

One NorthEast put investment of £10 million into NETPark to help set up headquarters for global science and technology companies, such as Kromek—global headquarters in the north-east of England. We should be proud of the fact that such companies are basing themselves in an area that in the past was used to deprivation and high unemployment. That investment was under a Government who were thinking ahead for the future well-being of local people.

Newton Press is a small company in Newton Aycliffe that has just invested in £100,000-worth of new equipment. It is a family firm, going back over many years, employing 11 or 12 people; I know the owner, Syd Howarth. He had a phone call from One NorthEast to tell him that he could not have the £20,000 grant they were working on to fund a further two jobs, because the Government said that One NorthEast can no longer award grants. That may be only two jobs, but it would be two people off the unemployment total in my constituency. If those

grants are being withdrawn all over the region, how many other people who could be in work will not be in work?

The cuts are undermining growth in areas such as the north-east of England, which has suffered in the past. We should be thinking about the future, and ensuring that there is a future for people in places such as Sedgefield. One person's cut is another person's front line, especially in business where the front line could be the bottom line, too.

What we have learned from the debate is that there is total confusion in the Government. What is their strategy for growth? The Government started the debate by saying that RDAs were safe, then they said that RDAs could be safe, then that they were not and now they are again. We need consistency and clarity from the Government, because the people I represent want certainty.

4.48 pm

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): This is the first time I have had the privilege of speaking while you are in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, so I congratulate you on your appointment.

We are in a bit of a déjà vu situation. Labour Members cry about Tory cuts, yet they forget why the cuts have to take place. They are suffering from collective amnesia and forgetting that for the last 13 years they ran this country and the Government on the proposition that they had abolished boom and bust. The former Prime Minister, when he was Chancellor, openly boasted about that. There was a feeling that money would pour in—that there was an inexhaustible pot of gold to be drawn from. It reminded me of Aladdin, who rubbed the lamp and the genie appeared. Labour seemed to think that the genie would appear, they would ask for money and, magically, it would arrive.

Rachel Reeves: Does the hon. Gentleman remember that the financial crisis happened across the whole world? Does he believe that the Labour Government are responsible for the budget deficits in all those countries?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I remember that very well, but I would point out that, in the five years before the crisis that the hon. Lady speaks of, we were running completely needless deficits. We did not have to run those deficits; we did so because of the concerted attempt by the then Chancellor to expand the state and to keep spending money.

Rachel Reeves: Can the hon. Gentleman give us an example of when the Conservative party opposed our spending plans?

Kwasi Kwarteng: During the 2005 election, we were—*[Interruption]*. If I may continue.

The general Aladdin's lamp approach was shown to be absurd. As the then Government kept rubbing the lamp and the genie came out, they asked for money, but the genie suddenly became rather less giving. At one point, the genie—in form of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr Byrne)—wrote a letter and said, "There is no money. We have run out of money." The reason why we have done so is simply that we were spending too much.

I have a Methodist background. My mother is a Methodist lay preacher, and she would tell the Sunday school, which I attended, about the seven fat years and the seven lean years. Those hon. Members who know the Old Testament will remember that Joseph had a dream in which he dreamt of seven fat cows and then the seven lean cows. *[Interruption.]* This is not very complicated; it is quite simple actually, so please bear with me. I know that Labour Members have concentration problems sometimes. I am sorry—it was a long time ago. The pharaoh had the dream and he spoke to Joseph. *[Interruption.]* This is very important and interesting. He asked, "What does this mean?" and Joseph said very simply, "You will have seven fat years and seven lean years." The whole point is that we are meant to save money in the fat years, so that we can spend it in the lean years. The Labour Government comprehensively failed to do that. They thought that the fat years would run indefinitely. They thought that they had abolished boom and bust.

The point of telling that simple story is to show comprehensively the reason for the cuts mentioned by the hon. Gentleman—I forget his constituency. [HON. MEMBERS: "Sedgefield."] I apologise; I was perhaps confusing him with another Member for Sedgefield. The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) referred to them as Tory cuts, but the simple story of Labour's failure to rein in Government spending in the boom is why we must make these cuts. They are not coming out of the blue or from savageness.

Phil Wilson: I was pointing out that, because of Government intervention, we were creating jobs, especially in the north-east of England, through the regional development agencies. We were not creating poverty; we were creating growth and prosperity. We took action when we were in government before the last election, and 500,000 fewer people are out of work than if we had not done so.

Kwasi Kwarteng: With respect, the idea that, somehow, our wealth was purely predicated on Government spending is exactly the principle that Conservative Members have problems with.

Matthew Hancock: Is my hon. Friend aware that Great Britain went into the recession with the largest budget deficit in the developed world and that that was nothing to do with the banking crisis but was solely due to the management of the economy by the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown)?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am fully aware of those facts. The figures show that the ratio of our debt to GDP is 12%. That is higher than any other country in the west. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry; I stand corrected. The deficit-to-GDP ratio is the highest of any other country in western Europe and, indeed, in the western developed world.

Rachel Reeves: I am sorry to correct the hon. Gentleman again. He is right to correct himself—the deficit, not the debt, ratio is 12%—but is he aware that the deficit figure in Greece stands at 14%? Greece is, I believe, in the western world. Is he also aware that we went into the crisis with the second lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7?

Kwasi Kwarteng: The hon. Lady is being quite clever and fixing the measuring rod.

Gordon Brown, the former Prime Minister, openly boasted of abolishing boom and bust. That was the central claim that he made. He predicated his entire policy on that premise. The premise was wrong. As we all know, and as hon. Members have commented, we went into a recession and we were faced with a huge deficit. That was a huge bust, which the former Prime Minister, in his wisdom, failed to see. That is why we were saddled with the deficit, and why we have had to make some of the tough adjustments to which Opposition Members have alluded.

That context is important. I know that there will be difficult times. I know that up and down the country Opposition Members will bemoan and complain about Tory cuts, but the context demonstrates why the adjustments have had to be made. They were forced upon us by the international environment. My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) mentioned that investors would not buy British Government debt. As a consequence, we have to rein in our spending. That is common sense. It is wrong for Opposition Members to say that we are trying to strangle the baby in its cot and that we are savage and uncaring. It is a matter of practical policy. Without that, we have a bleak future.

Mr Anderson: The hon. Gentleman spoke about fairy tales and Bible stories. Some of us lived the reality. Some of us in this country were starved for 18 years, while others became fat cats. We know that his party is taking us back there.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am not talking about the 18 years from 1979 to 1997. I am talking about the 13 years in which we lived under Labour.

To finish my contribution, I want to talk about the private sector and the public sector. Someone described trying to grow an economy by focusing on the public sector as a man sitting in a bucket trying to lift himself up by pulling the handle. It does not work. The only way we can have a viable public sector is if we can have revenues coming in from a buoyant private sector. As my hon. Friends have reiterated time and again, it is only by having a prosperous private sector that we can grow our way out of the recession. The message about a strong private sector is clear. It wants less regulation, less red tape and bureaucracy and a clear tax system, and it generally supports the coalition Government and the Government programme. For these clear and simple reasons, I support the Government amendment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Under the power I have to vary the time limit, I am changing it to 10 minutes.

4.58 pm

Mr Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Lab): I welcome you to your new post, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I am not sure about the Aladdin analogy. I am, however, convinced that with the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, we are now in the age of the brothers Grimm.

Before I get to that, however, may I congratulate everyone who made their maiden speech today? They spoke with passion, commitment and humour, and all bring something special to this very special place. I want to mention in particular the contribution of my new hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop), who spoke superbly about his predecessor, Ashok Kumar, who was both a colleague and a friend to those of us who were elected before 2010.

I congratulate the Government and, in particular, the Prime Minister. They got the decision on the £21 million for Nissan absolutely right, confirming the investment made by the Labour Government. It offers welcome reassurance to the highly skilled work force, some of whom live in my constituency, to the companies in the supply chain, and to the region as a whole. If the Government insist on revisiting all the spending commitments that were made in the preceding months before the election, I hope that when they do so, they will follow the model that they have developed in looking at the Nissan grant. It is important that they get on with it, because if they do not, they risk sapping the confidence of business in the region.

I want to make it absolutely clear, as did the shadow Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), that we accept the need for deficit reduction, but we also accept that there needs to be a strategy for growth alongside it.

Kwasi Kwarteng: The hon. Gentleman said that he accepts the need for cuts—for the deficit to be dealt with. Where does he, as a representative of his party, see those cuts falling?

Mr Campbell: I have news for the hon. Gentleman: he is sitting on the Government Benches. It is up to the Government to bring their proposals to this House, and it is for this House to make judgments on them. As my right hon. Friend made clear—

Matthew Hancock *rose—*

Mr Campbell: One at a time!

As my right hon. Friend made clear, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills identified £900 million-worth of cuts before the election. Before the election, I was in the Home Office, where we had identified £500 million-worth of savings. It is simply wrong to say that the previous Government did not identify savings, but if the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) wants to go beyond that programme, it is up to his party and his Government to bring forward those proposals.

Matthew Hancock: The hon. Gentleman talks about cuts that were identified by Labour. We all know that the Labour figures implied £50 billion of spending cuts; for all that we have heard about demanding more money, that is the fact of the matter. He mentions £500 million as an aggregate figure, but can he give us, say, five specific examples of cuts at the Home Office, where he was a Minister, that would have happened under a Labour Government had they been re-elected?

Mr Campbell: I would first mention the battle for savings that every police force has to deliver while protecting front-line services. However, I do not necessarily want to talk about that—I want to talk about the money that was in the budgets under the previous Government for a very good reason.

This debate is not only about BIS but about the whole of Government. I hope that the Minister will have a word with colleagues in other Departments, for the sake of construction workers in my constituency. I hope that we can have a decision on Building Schools for the Future in north Tyneside. Our children deserve the best learning environment, but our construction workers deserve jobs, too. When the last new school in my constituency—Monkseaton high school—was built, more than half the construction jobs went to local people. When the then Leader of the Opposition, now the Prime Minister, went to the school, he praised the building. So let us have some commitment from the Government that gives certainty and ensures that Monkseaton high school was not literally the last new school to be built in my constituency.

There was also money in the regional transport budget, but that budget has been frozen. That has caused me concern, but, more importantly, it has caused concern for local businesses and their representatives. There was £30 million in the budget to improve the A19-A1058 Silverlink roundabout. A driver who turns left at that roundabout goes to the new green technology park on the north bank of the Tyne. If they go straight over, they go to the Cobalt business park—the biggest private business park in the country, which is there because of co-operation between the public and the private sectors in bringing those jobs to the area. If we do not get those improvements, then people who go through the new Tyne tunnel—delivered by the previous Labour Government—will end up in gridlock. A whole host of then shadow Ministers came to look at those roads and made promises to my constituents about what they would do. Well, they are in government now, so they had better start delivering on those promises. If the road network in the north-east is not upgraded, if we are excluded from the rapid rail link, and if the new runway at Heathrow does not take place, squeezing out the regional air links, why would an investor who comes to Great Britain think about putting their money into the north-east given that we do not have a transport network for the future to create future jobs?

I want to concentrate on the regional development agency, which has been mentioned. Before the recession, the north-east had the fastest-growing economy of any region outside London. That did not happen despite Government action, it happened with it, and One NorthEast was part of that story.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Campbell: No. The hon. Gentleman has had his chance.

One NorthEast has been a leading player in the New and Renewable Energy Centre in Blyth and along the north bank of the Tyne, in low-carbon vehicles at Nissan on Wearside, and in the Printable Electronics Technology Centre in County Durham. Every one of those developments had at their heart a level of operation between private investors and the public sector. There may be support for small businesses for local authorities to pick up, but I am concerned that without such strategic action, the big national decisions will go elsewhere. My fear is that that will be bad news for the north-east.

If the Government are getting rid of RDAs in England, as has been suggested, have they spoken to the devolved Administrations in Wales and Scotland about them getting rid of their RDAs? One of the first issues that I took up in 1997 was the case of LG Electronics. That company went to Wales because we in the north-east did not have the money, but the Welsh Development Agency did. LG did not stay there, but Wales pinched the jobs.

Cuts in the RDA budget are already affecting jobs in my constituency: the Seafood Training Centre looks as if it will close its doors. Again, a troop of Conservative spokespersons went to that training agency and said how important it was, but now it is closing its doors, which is another bitter blow for the local fishing industry. That is why the Government need to be much clearer than they have been today about their plans for RDAs.

The Business Secretary said that

"changes depend very much on the reaction of local business and local authorities."—[*Official Report*, 3 June 2010; Vol. 510, c. 556.]

I can tell him that One NorthEast has the support of local authorities, five universities, the Northern Business Forum, the CBI, the chamber of commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Engineers Employers Federation, so let us see him get on and back it.

Of course, we know why there is dither: there is disagreement at the heart of the coalition. The Communities and Local Government Secretary—the man with the money—wants the money to go to local enterprise partnerships, but the Business Secretary, who is in charge of the sponsoring Department, favours regional economic enterprise partnerships, rather like RDAs. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) said, this afternoon we have simply heard confirmation of uncertainty. That adds to confusion, and it is not good for business.

Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Campbell: Not at the minute. I will if I have time later.

The Government need to accept, as the Opposition accept, that although deficit reduction is important, so too is economic growth. If we do not have the latter, we cannot have a better-balanced economy, including in respect of the regions and London. The north-east remains hopeful, but not expectant, because the Prime Minister said in that interview with Jeremy Paxman that of all the English regions, the north-east can expect to bear the brunt of the cuts. The problem and the danger is that in taking too much of an orthodox approach, involving cuts but very little else, we risk mirroring the policies of the last peacetime coalition Government, who turned a recession into a depression. They were not balanced in their approach to the regions, and the effects were not even, because the depression hit regions such as the north-east hardest. We must not, and we will not, allow that to happen again.

5.9 pm

Matthew Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to catch your eye, Mr Deputy Speaker, and to see you in the Chair. I am glad to see that you have adopted the traditional attire of the Deputy Speaker. It has been very enjoyable this afternoon to listen to the maiden speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) and the hon. Members for Wansbeck (Ian

[Matthew Hancock]

Lavery), for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher), for Bolton West (Julie Hilling), for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) and for North West Durham (Pat Glass)—the latter was a particularly charming speech. I agreed especially with the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell, and less so with all of the others.

I wanted to speak in this debate on business because I grew up in a small family business. In a sense, that is what brought me into politics. It taught me the values of enterprise and responsibility as I watched that small business grow. It was my first job and it has informed the way in which I think about the world and how it operates. I still remember the occasion when I first realised the impact of Government regulation on small businesses and the amount of time that that could take up to no particularly beneficial effect. The Health and Safety Executive visited my family business—an office-based computer software business—and took two days of senior management time and its own staff's time to search for something that breached the health and safety code. I am sure that many small business people across the country will recognise that scenario. After two days, all that they had found was a bottle of bleach in the cupboard under the sink in the small office kitchen and no sign saying that it was there. This was put into the report and I remember laminating the sign that still hangs above the sink and says, "There is bleach in the cupboard. Please do not drink it." That gave the company a clean bill of health from the HSE. What a waste of resources, of management time and of the HSE staff time.

I was therefore delighted to hear that the Government will review health and safety laws. We all recognise the importance of health and safety—indeed, it was a Conservative Government who introduced the Factory Acts—but the over-bearing, centralised, top-down, intrusive, suspicious, expansive and expensive health and safety system that has grown up in the past few years needs to be reviewed.

I have given just one example of something that has happened frequently over the past 13 years. The end result has been the economic crisis that we are now in and that members of both parties on this side of the House are trying to face up to and solve for the future good of our country. I have been astonished that in this debate Opposition Members have joined in a leftward march away from the centre of political debate, ignoring entirely the depth of the crisis that we face. Even the former Minister, the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr Campbell) could not specify a single reduction in spending in his Department, despite saying that he had identified £500 million of cuts.

Mr Alan Campbell: I identified £116 million of back-office savings that police forces were instructed to make. That is £116 million of cuts, is it not?

Matthew Hancock: It is £116 million of unspecified cuts, which is precisely the point that I was making.

Mr Campbell: It is not for us to tell police forces where they should make cuts. It is for us to set the police budget, but police forces are operationally independent, and it is for police authorities to make those decisions. The Government do not tell them how to do that.

Matthew Hancock: We have not heard a single consequence of the £50 billion cuts that the Labour party would have had to introduce had they won the election. That puts the Labour party out of the debate, and leaves it to others—especially those on this side of the House—to work out how we get our country out of this terrible mess.

Over the past 13 years we have heard about the six regulations a day from the Secretary of State and the £11 billion cost each year of extra regulations. I used to say that we had the longest and most complicated tax code in the world except for India, until last year when India overtook us—I mean, when we overtook India. I will get it right eventually! Youth unemployment is the highest on record; we have had a record fall in business investment; and for all the hot air about manufacturing, the number of manufacturing firms in this country has fallen by a fifth over the past 13 years. We do not need to hear anything more from the Labour party about manufacturing as we try to turn the economy around.

I am delighted that, in the agreement on in-year spending reductions of £6 billion, £50 million was found to put right part of the catastrophe in further education funding that happened under the last Labour Government, when so many promises were made with no funds attached, when the budget was completely overcommitted, and when the Government had to go around the country to half-started projects and take away the funding. Since the election, we have heard that that is the case in Department after Department, and that FE was just unlucky that it all came out before the election. So I welcome strongly the statement by the Minister for Universities and Science that that money will go to FE colleges and that we can try to put right some of that wrong and reduce the deficit in a way that does not cause the greatest possible damage. I will be writing to him today to argue the case for Haverhill college in my constituency. It was ready to go and had been allocated funding by the previous Government, but had the funding taken away at the last minute because they had overcommitted the budget. I welcome the £50 million that the Government have found to do that.

More than all those things, and more than the Mandelson cheques we have heard about, businesses crave stability in the broader economy. Under the last Government, we had an asset price boom and bust, a credit boom and bust, uncertainty and complexity in the tax system, the longest recession in the world, the deepest recession since the war and the worst peacetime public finances in our history—and perhaps worse than all that, we had no answers to the questions of how to deal with those problems and of where growth would come from. I noted earlier that the shadow Secretary of State refused to say whether it was still Labour party policy to put a tax on jobs via an increase in national insurance, and I will be fascinated to hear whether the leadership candidates plan to argue next year that taxes should go up on every job in the country. Instead, all we have heard is the tinny sound of demands for cash and, from one hon. Member, a demand for an unfunded tax cut—those used to come from our party!

Phil Wilson: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that VAT should go up next week?

Matthew Hancock: I think that is one for the Budget statement on Tuesday.

Finally, we are starting to get the answers to some of these deep-rooted problems. We heard today about the changes to financial regulation, and I wonder how long it will take the Labour party to involve itself in the debate about the future of financial regulation. We think that banks should be properly regulated, not regulated under the old system that failed. The Government are also putting forward solutions to help credit flow to businesses; we are getting increased certainty in the tax system; and of course we have measures to tackle the deficit. As a result of those last measures, since the election, the interest rates paid on Government bonds has fallen by 0.4%—one tenth—which means that the interest on Government debt has fallen by one tenth in just over a month since the election, in anticipation of action to deal with the deficit.

Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con): I want to emphasise that point. We heard so much about the financial stability that the previous Government were going to give us, yet the international markets have sent out an incredibly strong signal: that we finally have a Government with the guts and the policies to tackle this deficit, which hon. Members who are now on the Opposition Benches could never even own up to, let alone deal with. The markets are saying, "This is now a country that we want to invest in again," and interest rates have fallen as a consequence. I want to underline the importance of the statistic that my hon. Friend gave in demonstrating the world's view of Britain finally being open to business, now that we have had a change of Government.

Matthew Hancock: I agree with my hon. Friend.

Rachel Reeves *rose—*

Matthew Hancock: It would be a delight to give way to the hon. Lady, who has made so many fascinating interventions this afternoon.

Rachel Reeves: The hon. Gentleman has quoted a fascinating statistic, but does it not fly in the face of what those on his Front Bench have been saying about how, because nobody wants to buy our debt—that is what one of his colleagues said earlier—we have to make cuts immediately? If interest rates are going down, surely there are lots of people who want to buy our debt.

Matthew Hancock: Interest rates are going down in the market because people can see a Government who are taking action and getting to grips with our problems, who have already made in-year cuts and who will finally put this country back on the path to fiscal sanity. That is exactly why interest rates are going down, which is a commendation on the action that the Government have taken so far.

The point that I will rest on is this. Across this country, businesses are paying interest rates that are in some cases extremely high. They need to borrow in order to invest for the future and get the private sector recovery that even some Labour Members talk about. The single best measure to do that is to have low interest rates and a stable economy, with confidence in the future. That is exactly what this Government's programme is delivering, and I commend them on that. I strongly support the amendment to the motion, and I look forward to voting for it later.

5.22 pm

Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): May I join others in congratulating you, sitting there in your smart attire, Mr Deputy Speaker, and also the many hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches this afternoon? Clearly standards have gone up since you and I entered the House in 1992. Congratulations are due to those from all parts of the House who have made such interesting contributions.

I want first to encourage people to think about what has been happening in manufacturing. There has been massive technological change impacting on manufacturing, along with a continual process of globalisation in the manufacturing process, which has put all developed countries under huge pressures to maintain their positions. Because of the changes that have occurred, we have to work at the leading edge—something referred to by hon. Friends who spoke about Nissan and similar projects—if we are to sustain our position. However, one thing is for certain: we will not sustain the number of jobs in manufacturing. There will continue to be pressure on those jobs, as there has been over a long period, because of technology.

I would like to cite two examples from my constituency by way of illustration. Vauxhall Motors used to employ nearly 11,000 people, but now produces a much higher quality product with 2,200 people, with much higher numbers of vehicles coming out of the factory. The Shell oil refinery used to employ 10,000 people, but now the control room looks like something out of NASA and a handful of people can control the whole refinery, because of sophisticated IT technologies, which have made such a massive change to the way such operations work.

Richard Graham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Miller: No, I will not for the moment.

The Secretary of State and I had a short exchange about Vauxhall Motors earlier, and there have been developments during the course of the afternoon. The Government eventually agreed that the loan guarantee approved by Lord Mandelson had been approved correctly and was in order—contrary to earlier suggestions—but despite that and because of what has happened in Germany and the UK, the company finds itself having to drive things forward itself. In a statement issued this afternoon, the company says:

> "We cannot afford to have uncertain funding plans and new time-consuming complex negotiations at this time when we need to keep investing in new products and technologies. With these new products and the impact of restructuring, we expect to return to profitability shortly".

The parent company is going to support the necessary changes. It is a pity that the Government were not part of the solution, but I welcome the fact that the mischief that had been created over the inappropriateness of the grant has at last been dealt with.

Mr McFadden: Does not my hon. Friend agree, however, that the delay involved in this case should serve as a warning of the damage that can be caused by needlessly calling a halt to important industrial projects? It is little use the Government coming along today and saying that they have approved the loan guarantee, on the very day that the company in question has run out of patience.

Andrew Miller: I could not agree more—

Richard Graham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Miller: May I please finish?

I could not agree more with my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden). There is a lesson for us all here. There has to be proper due diligence, and I respect the fact that Lord Mandelson took a long time to reach the agreement, working with my right hon. Friend. It was done correctly and, what is more, the then Opposition party was notified of that during the process.

Richard Graham: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he agree that one of the main reasons for the decline in manufacturing in this country has been the slowness of decision making by the previous Government? To bring that point alive, I shall give one particular illustration. British Energy, which is headquartered in my constituency of Gloucester, was eventually taken over by the French company, EDF, simply because the previous Government failed to make any future provision for the nuclear power that this country so badly needs.

Andrew Miller: That is a bit rich, coming from the hon. Gentleman. He really is rewriting history. He must acknowledge how slow his party has been to wake up to the calls from people like me who were demanding a move towards nuclear power. I find it ironic that the amendment to our motion starts with the words "leave out from 'power'". I just wonder how much of a row there was in the coalition about that, given the fact that the two words before "power" are "civil nuclear". I am pleased to see that the Government's amendment would allow those words to stay in the motion, but I bet there is going to be trouble in the coalition when it comes to agreeing on some of the decisions that the hon. Gentleman is quite right to suggest are mission critical to the success of the UK economy.

This Government's delays in decision making have also had a dramatic impact on the supply chain and, as a consequence, on many of the apprenticeships in the supply chain. We have heard all the stories about the creation of 50,000 new apprenticeships, but, goodness me, those delays have slowed down the creation of apprenticeships in my constituency and in the travel-to-work area around it. That includes the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) and others, all of which are affected by the decisions at Vauxhall and the other big manufacturing operations around us.

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Mr John Hayes): I could not intervene on a less experienced or distinguished hon. Gentleman than the one who is speaking. On apprenticeships, he will understand that recessions do make things difficult, but will he not celebrate and welcome the commitment of this Government to creating more apprenticeships, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises, in constituencies such as his?

Andrew Miller: I am counting every one of them, and if I have to come back and agree with the hon. Gentleman in a year's time, I will do so. I just hope that he is not double-counting the commitments already made by those on the Labour Front Bench before the election. As long as he is not double-counting the number of apprenticeships, I will celebrate them with him. I look forward to seeing them.

We have also heard mention of FE colleges this afternoon. One thing I am immensely proud of—photographs of it feature on my website if anyone would like to look at it—is the new FE college that was built with funding provided by the Labour Government. It was chosen to be part of the network of colleges that would be built because of the importance of manufacturing to constituencies like mine. Apprentices from Vauxhall and the petrochemical sector, as well as from the retail and leisure sectors, study in that college, which is going to be a centre of excellence in the middle of Ellesmere Port, where manufacturing genuinely matters. I welcome that investment.

I move on to the second issue that is particularly important for the future of manufacturing. I welcome the fact that the Minister for Universities and Science has taken over the science portfolio, and I look forward to working with him in my new position as Chair of the Science and Technology Select Committee. We have already had some exchanges. I also put on record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) for the civilised way in which the election between him and me was conducted.

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes) knows how passionately I feel about the role of science. He and I have talked about information technology issues in the past. I will press the Minister for Universities and Science in particular to ensure that he protects our science base, without which our future will genuinely be bleak.

To return to what I said at the beginning of my remarks, the impact of technological change on manufacturing and the globalisation of manufacturing mean that if we are to have a place in the manufacturing of tomorrow, part of it is going to have to be science-led and driven by the highest levels of research. It is mission critical—I hope this commands support from all corners of the House—that we maintain our investment in the science base. In areas of scientific endeavour that are close to market, we cannot afford—because of the pace of change—to take our eye off the big picture either. When it comes to our commitment to CERN or the European Space Agency, we need to realise that these blue-sky areas are incredibly important for our children and their children in turn. They are crucial if we are to maintain our position in this incredibly competitive field.

Another important issue for my new responsibility is ensuring that we work together—I hope in a collegiate way—across parties to improve public understanding of some of the complex scientific challenges that face society today. On that note, despite our odd disagreements on manufacturing issues, I hope that there will be common ground between the parties. Some aspects will divide the parties and other aspects might divide people within the parties, but I hope that serious progress can be made during this new Parliament. Nothing can be more important to our children than making sure that we are at the leading edge. If we do not stay there and if we do not invest in science and technology, we will start slipping down the ladder.

In seeing you join us, Mr Deputy Speaker, I note that this is the first time I have had the pleasure of speaking with you, another Lancastrian, in the Chair. I will

conclude my remarks. I know how dearly you, Mr Deputy Speaker, hold manufacturing to your heart and how importantly you view it as the cornerstone for our future. It has to be manufacturing that is led by investment in science and technology; we need to deliver that at all levels in every aspect of our endeavours.

5.34 pm

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this Opposition day debate on Government support for industry. It was a great pleasure to hear the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee). I also heard the maiden speeches of the hon. Members for Bolton West (Julie Hilling) and for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery). I apologise for having to leave the Chamber, as I had been invited to tea by Mr Speaker, and that is why I sadly missed the maiden speeches of the hon. Members for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher), for North West Durham (Pat Glass) and for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop), but I look forward to reading them in *Hansard*. It has been delightful to hear so much about the north-east in today's debate. In 2005, I fought Stockton North, and, as they say, Stockton North fought back. However, I do know what a delightful part of the world the north-east is.

I speak as someone who has worked in the private sector for the past two decades—my whole career thus far has been in the private sector. In those two decades, I have survived both boom and bust and all types of economic cycle. I have been through the cycle in which one hires additional people, the cycle in which, sadly, one has to let people go, the cycle in which one invests heavily in training, research and development, and the cycle in which one markets and exports products overseas, so one travels to explore overseas markets. I learned in those two decades that businesses have to be adaptable to thrive and survive. I also learned that Governments do not create wealth. Governments do not invent new products or start new businesses and cannot tell which businesses will survive or thrive. However, I strongly agree with the Secretary of State's comments at the beginning of the debate that the Government have an important role to play.

There are signs that the Labour party is beginning to understand that Governments do not create wealth. Last week, the former Labour City Minister, Lord Myners, said:

> "There was flawed thinking about job creation in the past. I found it very frustrating to sit in meetings with some of my fellow Ministers talking about creating jobs in the green economy and biotechnology. The Government cannot create jobs."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 June 2010; Vol. 719, c. 625.]

Lord Myners is right. Across the world, and throughout history, economic recoveries are almost invariably led by small business creation and by the jobs created by those small businesses as they grow and become successful.

Against that background, I would like to consider Advantage West Midlands, the regional development agency that covers both my constituency and that of the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden). I have been surveying my local businesses recently about how they perceive Advantage West Midlands. Their reactions are mixed. Some of the bigger businesses have had a very positive experience of working with the regional development agency. However, some of the smaller businesses, which the Federation of Small Businesses represents, have found it difficult to negotiate a way into the large regional organisation that is the regional development agency. As it is the small businesses that create the large part of the jobs that bring us out of recessions, it is vital that we get better at signposting that help to small businesses.

According to the annual report of Advantage West Midlands for 2008-09, which covers the worst period of the recession, its budget peaked at £330 million, which I think we would all agree is substantial. With that budget, it was able to create or safeguard 16,997 jobs. I worked that out to be approximately £20,000 per job—quite a high level of subsidy. The Labour Government cut this year's budget of Advantage West Midlands to, I think, £270 million, and so far it has created about 4,000 jobs, but let us assume that that annualises out to about 8,000 jobs—a cost of well over £30,000 per job.

In 2008-09, the key inward investment achievement was the expansion of Deutsche Bank into Birmingham, which created 300 jobs. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), who is not unfamiliar with that organisation, will be able to find out whether Advantage West Midlands was the deciding variable in Deutsche Bank's decision, or whether the expansion might have happened anyway.

Management costs and the implementation of the myriad different initiatives and programmes used a considerable proportion of Advantage West Midlands' annual budget. The salaries of the chief executive, the director of resources, the director of operations, the director of strategy and communications, the director of economic development and the director of economic regeneration are all similar to, or higher than, that of the Prime Minister. If that management structure is replicated in all eight regional development agencies and the London Development Agency, it is likely that many of the front-line funds destined to play their role in helping business and industry are being rather diluted by the high cost of implementation.

The Government have an important role to play in helping business and industry. I believe that they should focus on the creation of excellent infrastructure, on keeping the Government's own borrowing costs down so that interest rates remain low, and on an attractive taxation environment for both start-ups and inward investment. That is how we can compete with countries such as Singapore and Portugal, which were mentioned earlier.

Ian Mearns: I welcomed the hon. Lady's comment about the number of Members from the north-east of England who had spoken today. Obviously, when it comes to our region and our regional development agency, our perspective is very different from that of many Conservative Members. As was pointed out earlier, geography is an important factor.

In the north-east, one of the magnificent benefits of the RDA has been its fantastic "Passionate People, Passionate Places" tourism regime, which has received national and international acclaim and has massively boosted the tourism industry in our region. That is vital to us, given that the nearest capital city to Tyneside, for instance, is Edinburgh, 100 miles to the north. The amount spent on tourism per head of population by the Scottish Government is significantly greater than the amount

[Ian Mearns]

spent in the north-east of England. That is the market in which we have to compete. We are peripheral to the English economy. I welcome what the hon. Lady has said about strategy and infrastructure, because it is vital to the integrity of the regional economy.

Harriett Baldwin: I love visiting the north-east. I wish that the weather were a bit better for the beaches, but it is a gorgeous part of the world.

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con): Delightful though it always is to hear about the north-east, may I add that we have a town in the south east, Hastings, which is heavily deprived? Members may not be aware that, although it has received a good deal of investment, in the past 13 years the average wage has fallen from £30 to £100 a week below the United Kingdom average. We need the private sector investment that the Government are talking about.

Harriett Baldwin: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention.

I was outlining some of the other ways in which Government could help small businesses. We all agree on certain points, and I hope we can agree that the Government should concentrate on keeping regulation to a minimum. They should also concentrate on reducing the gold-plating of European legislation and confining such legislation to acceptable levels. I think we can all agree that they should spend money on education and skills. The more flexible, well trained and mobile the work force are, the more they will be able to thrive and adapt to the changing environment that we will inevitably experience in the future.

Direct spending on business and industry should happen at as local a level as possible. The regions sometimes make natural geographic sense. Sometimes they do not, so I welcome the opportunity to look at local partnerships. Local communities should be encouraged to reap the reward of businesses' expansion as much as possible and be allowed to keep some of the increase in taxation revenues locally. I welcome some of the points that have been made along those lines in respect of the Government's programme.

We have had to learn all over again that Labour Governments run out of money. As we rebuild Britain's industrial and business base, we need to acknowledge the limits of Government support for industry but at the same time focus on unleashing the potential of the private sector to help us to grow our way once again to prosperity.

5.45 pm

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): I welcome you to your position in the Chair today, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to speak in the debate after so many excellent speeches, not least from the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock). Ten years ago, he and I started work on the same day at the Bank of England. We had many good debates there and I am sure that they will continue in the House.

It is also a pleasure to follow the maiden speeches of so many Members: the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), and my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton West (Julie Hilling), for North West Durham (Pat Glass), for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop), for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery), and for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher). I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East shares my concerns about the future of Yorkshire Forward, our RDA.

We have heard lots of stories from Members on the Government Benches about the waste of RDAs. I can only tell them what Phil Thompson, managing director of Resource Print Solutions in my constituency, says. His business, like many in all our constituencies, was hit hard by the recession, but he got through it because of a grant from Yorkshire Forward, which enabled him to buy new machinery and equipment and to keep jobs in-house that he had previously had to contract out. During the recession, he did not lay off a single worker. Because of the support from Yorkshire Forward and changes to shift patterns, he managed to keep people in work. The company is now growing again as we recover from the recession. What Phil's business needs now and what the British economy needs now is economic growth.

Mr Hayes: The hon. Lady is already a distinguished and articulate advocate of her cause—I note it from her many interventions in the debate. In an effort to be helpful on RDAs, may I recommend to her the National Audit Office report and the report that preceded it from the Public Accounts Committee, which make it absolutely clear that in many instances the RDAs are cost-ineffective and insensitive to the very local circumstances that she champions?

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I think that we can tell from the debate today that different Members, representing different areas of Britain, have different views about their RDAs. I plead with the Minister. Labour Members representing Yorkshire, the north-east and the west midlands have spoken with huge passion about their RDAs. They have related the stories that they hear day in, day out from businesses and the people they represent. Let us keep our RDAs and let them continue to do the work that they are doing in our regions. That is all that I ask.

Matthew Hancock: Given what the hon. Lady has just said, does she support the Government policy on RDAs, which is to allow local people to decide whether local economic partnerships should cover the region or a smaller area?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Hoyle): Order. Only one Member can be on their feet at any one time. Please allow the Member to finish before rising again.

Rachel Reeves: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am sorry for my enthusiasm.

I welcome the clarification from the hon. Member for West Suffolk that regions will be able to make their own decisions, but that was not my understanding of what the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills said earlier. *[Interruption.]* If he did say that, I think that everyone on the Opposition Benches would welcome that. If our regions will be able to make the decisions about our regional development agencies and their future, I welcome that. I am grateful for that clarification, but that was not my understanding of what the Business Secretary said in his statement.

I know that Conservative Members will disagree with this, but I am sorry to say that we do not hear enough from them about growth. They cite the G20 advice about reducing deficits while consistently forgetting about or ignoring the advice in the G20 communiqué for

"credible, growth-friendly measures, to deliver fiscal sustainability".

That omission on growth is worrying from the perspective of industry and jobs—the subject of today's debate—because the greatest risk we face is that of a double-dip recession, with the job losses, business failures and higher budget deficits that that would bring.

On Monday, the Chancellor dismissed the possibility of a second recession, but businesses in my constituency are less certain that we are out of the woods. Key to the recovery and to bringing down the budget deficit—we hear a lot about that from Conservative Members—are growth and having a regionally strong and diverse economy. That will not happen by chance; it depends on a strategic Government policy supporting industry in all our regions.

Nadhim Zahawi: What does the hon. Lady think about scrapping the national insurance hike for employers? A lot of employers in my constituency will say that the really harmful thing to do to growth is to add to the cost of employing people, thus reducing the net income of a business. What does she think about that?

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. What he describes perhaps comes up less in my constituency than in some others, because average earnings in my constituency are £16,000 a year and the national insurance increase proposed by the previous Labour Government was to apply only to wages of more than £20,000 a year. So that was less of a concern in my constituency.

Britain is the sixth largest manufacturer in the world. If one believed some of the statements made by those on the Government Benches, one would think that the UK did not have a manufacturing industry at all—that is not the case. People in Yorkshire have huge pride in our industrial past. From wool to coal and steel, and to retail and finance, our industries have enriched the region—more than that, jobs and industry in Leeds and Yorkshire have helped to power the UK economy.

The true test of this Government's strategy and their woolly words about local economic partnerships will be whether they can give local people and businesses a true sense of control over their economic future. That is what Yorkshire Forward and other RDAs have been doing; they have been promoting enterprise and driving economic growth across Britain.

We now know—I am reading what I wrote before the intervention by the hon. Member for West Suffolk—that the RDAs are to be scrapped. Or are they? That wind-down has already started in Yorkshire. The *Yorkshire Evening Post* today revealed that the proposed cuts to Yorkshire Forward mean that no fewer than 109 projects will see their support slashed and that that will affect 24,160 separate companies our region. Some £1 million that would have been used to help small and medium-sized enterprises to access finance is to be cut. Some £1.4 million that would have helped businesses and universities with research and development is to be cut. Some £2.4 million that would have been spent on Tower Works in Leeds to support the digital and creative industries in my city is to be scrapped.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Rachel Reeves: I shall give way once I have finished citing these examples. Some £3.2 million that would have supported the roll-out of broadband and £2.5 million that would have helped people at risk of redundancy to get back to work are to be cut. I could continue on this, but I shall give way.

Harriett Baldwin: I seek clarification, because cuts were announced by the previous Government and I want to find out whether the cuts that the hon. Lady is describing were announced by them.

Rachel Reeves: The hon. Lady makes an important intervention, because cuts were already proposed. The hon. Member for West Suffolk asked whether Labour had any plans to reduce Government spending. I can tell him that it had, and this is one example of them. But this is in response to the—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Rachel Reeves: Sorry, as I am still on my feet—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members can, by all means, seek to intervene, but if the Member does not give way, they just have to leave it there. We cannot have two Members on their feet at the same time.

Rachel Reeves: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. This Government—the party of the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin)—have called for £293 million of cuts from the regional development agencies. Yorkshire Forward was asked to make £44 million of cuts. It was written to and asked to come back with those cuts within two weeks—it had two weeks to determine cuts that will affect 24,000 businesses in my region. These are not Labour cuts; they are Conservative cuts.

I ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills to give my constituents some commitment and some hope and certainty that the work that Yorkshire Forward does to support innovation, manufacturing, jobs and skills will continue. I urge the Government not to destroy the support for jobs and growth that the Labour Government put in place. Without Yorkshire Forward, we would not have brought clean coal to our region and the 1,000 jobs that that means in South Yorkshire. Without Yorkshire Forward, we would not have negotiated a deal with Siemens and GE to bring offshore wind, with thousands of much-needed jobs, to Hull, Grimsby and Scunthorpe.

Nick de Bois: What I am hearing today is that growth depends entirely on regional development agencies. We have to liberate businesses from the heavy hand of regulation and taxation that the Opposition imposed under the last Government. That is the way to growth. It is not entirely dependent on the regional development agencies to which the Opposition seem to be so wedded.

Rachel Reeves: The reason that I talk so passionately today about regional development agencies is that they are what the Government intend to cut.

The regional development agencies do not create jobs. I recognise that, and I believe that all Labour Members recognise it. Siemens and GE will bring those jobs, but they could bring the jobs to anywhere in Europe and anywhere in the world. It is the work of the regional development agencies with businesses, on skills and with people in my region that means that those jobs are coming to Yorkshire. That is why I and other Members on this side of the House speak with such passion about the work that the regional development agencies do.

Matthew Hancock: Does the hon. Lady agree that there is a short-term populism that pushes us towards more Government intervention? What we need is a thriving and effective private enterprise to lift our economies up and through to better times—not my words but those of Tony Blair.

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I hope that I have made it clear that I support the private sector's coming to our region and bringing jobs with it. However, that requires a Government on the side of our communities and of businesses. That means encouraging jobs to come to this country when they could go to any other country in the world. If we were in Germany or China, we would be urging jobs to come to those countries. If we want a level playing field, we need a Government who support industry.

In Yorkshire, we look to Government for support—to honour the commitments on high-speed rail and on Sheffield Forgemasters. They are key to Yorkshire's future and good for the British economy, too. Yorkshire Forward and regional development agencies have fought our corner in a way that Whitehall simply cannot. The support is critical and it is good for all of Britain. The short-term hatchet job pursued by the Government risks the recovery and will put Britain in the slow lane of the global economy, making reducing the deficit harder because there will be higher unemployment and tax revenues will be weaker. Growth is the essential ingredient that is missing from the Government's strategy.

Now is the time for some more ambition. In the wake of the recession, we can build a fairer, stronger and more diverse economy, built on skills and high-end manufacturing, if the Government put in place the policies—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

5.59 pm

Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for your tutorial on how to be a good parliamentarian. I fear that many of us will let you down before we have learned to do our jobs properly.

I came into this debate to listen, not to speak, but I have found myself compelled to get up and speak on what I think is an incredibly important matter. I apologise for being in and out of the Chamber. I have had a huge visit from the 3rd Regiment Royal Military Police, who I then took for tea. They were marking the maiden speeches out of 10. I am not going to say who did well, but they were quite impressed by some speeches on both sides of the House.

I felt compelled to speak because I have a business background. I went to that bastion of capitalism, Harvard business school, but that was 20 years ago and I have been somewhat cleansed since then. I have had many years of working in consultancy, finance and running my own small business. Then I lived in the countryside and raised my children. On my campaign, I had a reputation for speaking from notes on the back of a fag packet. As this is a no-smoking zone, I have had an upgrade and am speaking from scribbles on the back of some very nice House of Commons paper.

I want to make a couple of specific points and to say why I felt compelled to get up and speak. I am really worried, because I do not think that Opposition Members understand the fundamental reason why we are here today or how Government should support business. We hear lots about micro-interventions and RDAs. Everybody knows that if one visits one's RDA one will find that they have wonderful and often overlapping agendas with many other parts of the public and private sectors, but they are not lean, honed, efficient and joined-up mechanisms. In many cases, they are the worst bastions of the unaccountable and unelected public sector. They might, in many cases, be doing good work, and that is why they might well have a role to play in many places, as the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) suggested, but they are not the best way in which to spend precious pounds of taxpayers' money. However, the Opposition appear to think that that is the right thing to do.

The Opposition also think that micromanaging the economy is the right thing to do. Let me just reference a couple of the myriad schemes that were put in place to support business during the recession. The £10 billion working capital guarantee scheme was designed to underwrite portfolios of loans held by banks, which is such an important part of unlocking the crunched credit system, but it made only £2 billion-worth of guarantees in the time that it was operational. It lent only 20% of its capacity, which suggests that it was not doing what business needed.

Then we had the £75 million capital for enterprise fund, which was designed to do what we would all like to do—get high-tech, high-grade start-ups off the ground—but it lent only half of that money in the time that it was operational. That again suggests that there was a disconnect between what the then Government wanted to do and what business really needed.

Nadhim Zahawi: Does my hon. Friend agree that the real problem with these quangos is accountability? A very good local charity in my constituency was the beneficiary of some money from Advantage West Midlands, and it was very grateful for that money. When it asked, "How would you like us to report on our achievement?" the RDA said, "Oh, just write a report; it doesn't really matter." So there is no real accountability. Will she expand on that point and on how the coalition's policy will bring to local people the accountability that will make the difference in terms of efficiency of delivery?

Claire Perry: I thank my hon. Friend for that important intervention. The whole issue of accountability and transparency in the public sector is key. One phrase that I love to say is that sunlight is the best disinfectant, and that can be applied to the spending of central Government, local authorities or these unelected, unaccountable quangos.

which in many cases are not even consolidated into departmental accounts. It is very easy to pay for junkets to the south of France if one knows that nobody is looking at the books. He raises an incredibly important point on an issue that we have pledged to improve with a far more rigorous and accessible system of transparency in public spending, which I wholeheartedly support.

Let me return briefly to the other schemes that were meant to make such a difference. Do hon. Members remember the £2.3 billion automotive assistance programme—the former Government's flagship scheme that was going to support the entire vehicle manufacturing system and supply chain? It made only three offers of loan guarantee schemes and only two companies decided to go ahead with them.

Then we had the other enormous underpinning of the British export industry—the £5 billion trade credit insurance scheme, which sought to underwrite firms doing the incredibly valuable job of earning pounds by exporting. Well, it underwrote 109 policies. That sounds reasonable, but they were worth £18.5 million. That sort of micro-meddling and initiative-itis bedevilled the former Government, and as a business person, I feel they do not get what British business needs. But we do.

British business needs three things. First, it needs transport and broadband infrastructure. If my memory serves me right, Labour Members only recently started to get to grips with the concept of high-speed rail, which will do so much to rebalance economic growth across the regions.

As for broadband infrastructure, in rural Britain we are extremely deficient in what will give us a living and working countryside. Instead of grinding through additional taxes, more changes and a digital switchover fee, the Government have a plan to get the broadband network in place. That is incredibly important.

Secondly, British business needs a decent low-taxation environment. On corporate competitiveness, we have gone from 10th in the world to 26th over the last 10 years. We can all give examples from our constituencies of companies that have left the country to move to more benign taxation environments. I am talking just about the headline rate, not the taxation complexity to which my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) referred earlier. Have Members seen the size of our tax code list? The list reaches my waist and I am 6 feet 1 inch. It is a lot of paper and we have developed a whole industry employing lots of people to interpret tax codes for small businesses. The Conservatives' aspiration is to have the lowest tax rate in the G20 and that is what British business needs.

Thirdly, we need to get regulation out of the way. My hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock) described the health and safety madness that bedevils businesses of all sizes. Indeed, we have gone from fourth in the world for business regulation benignness to 86th over the last 10 years. We have become a country where people have to wade through acres of red tape to do what they need to do every day.

Over the last 13 years, Labour Members did not get, and still do not get, what British business needs. We are the party that will deliver our promises, which is why I am pleased to speak in support of the amendment for which I shall vote tonight.

6.7 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) said at the beginning of the debate, we stand on the brink of a new industrial revolution.

Let me declare two interests. Newcastle was at the leading edge of the first, high-carbon industrial revolution, so we have an interest in seeing a resurgence of industry and manufacturing. As an engineer, I too want to see manufacturing and industrial resurgence. But it is not my interests that lead me. There are five global challenges that require a new industrial response.

First, population and economic growth across the world are stoking demand. Secondly, the global financial crisis has made it extremely important that we grow other sectors. Thirdly, climate change is making many of our ways of building and manufacturing things inefficient. Fourthly, the population of the western world is ageing. That is a good thing; it is good that people are living longer, but it requires different markets and goods—for example, more automotive goods. Finally, globalisation means global markets and global industries.

On the Opposition Benches, we believe that we need to grow our way out of the global financial crisis. The challenges I have enumerated give us many opportunities for growth in the UK, in the north-east in particular; for example, in renewable energies such as wind power, which is why the previous Government invested in NaREC—the New and Renewable Energy Centre—a world-class testing facility for wind turbines in Blyth. Sustainable transport provides another opportunity for growth, which is why the previous Government invested in it by giving grants to enable Nissan to build the electric car facility in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson).

Some months ago, I visited Newcastle university's electrical engineering department, where I saw the world-leading research into electric motors that is taking place as a result of the previous Government's increased funding for research and development. Another example relates to ageing with dignity, as promoted by the centre for ageing and vitality in Newcastle.

We stand at the brink of enormous industrial change and the potential for enormous industry growth. The Government have two possible responses. They can leave things to the market, get out of the way—such a well-loved phrase—and let the existing capital and goods markets figure everything out, or they can put in place the economic and active industrial policies that will support industry. The Government seem to have decided to do the former; or having listened to the words of the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, I would say that they have decided to do the former while professing to do the latter. I want to say why that is not in this country's or even the coalition Government's interests.

As I have said, I am engineer by profession. I also spent three years getting an MBA to hone my business and management skills. I have worked in France, the US, Nigeria and the UK, as well as travelling extensively for my work. I have seen many different combinations of private and public sector involvement, including the raw entrepreneurship of Lagos street markets. Having

[Chi Onwurah]

listened to Conservative Members expressing their contempt for all regulation, including that on health and safety, I now understand that that is the kind of market economy that they want to bring to this country. I have also worked in the highly regulated labour markets of Germany. I have helped to build small businesses, to grow medium-sized ones and to expand multinationals. I have also helped to set up the framework for the public sector regulation of the telecommunications industry. So I know from bitter experience just how difficult it is to create the virtuous cycle of investment, innovation and job creation.

Let me tell hon. Members what I have found that works. The role of the private sector is crucial—it mobilises investment, creates jobs, innovates and takes risks—but the public sector is equally important. The right regulatory environment gives investors the confidence to invest and helps smaller companies to compete on a level playing field. By providing grants and incentives for innovation and investment and using the public sector procurement process intelligently, the public sector can help emergent industries to flourish. By directing funds to build the right infrastructure, the public sector helps ideas to become businesses. Conservative Members are right: the public sector does not create jobs, but it can provide the soil and fertiliser to enable them to grow. So we need active individuals, partnered by industrial activism. A proactive partnership between the public and private sectors is essential if the UK is to take a leading role in the world's low-carbon future.

Nadhim Zahawi: I am pleased to see a fellow engineer on the Opposition Benches. I recall the hon. Lady not wishing to be here for the election of the Speaker and wanting to go back to play bingo in Newcastle. Is she proposing that the Government give further subsidies to the bingo industry in her constituency?

Chi Onwurah: I would thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention if I could understand the line that he is drawing between bingo and the huge questions that we face. I support the bingo industry—I support all service industries—but he may not have followed today's debate, which is about Government support for industry, particularly manufacturing and engineering industries. I would appreciate being able to stick to that subject for the rest of my contribution.

Labour's industrial activism means that there are appropriate grants to support industry across the country. Under Labour, the regional development agency One NorthEast was able to take strategic regional decisions and support new technologies and the complex supply chains necessary to make them successful. I share the utter confusion of my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) about Government policy with regard to the RDAs, which are to be abolished but allowed to re-grow in some form that is not entirely clear. That uncertainty is damaging jobs and industry in Newcastle and across the north-east, and I urge the coalition to provide clarity and send signals that a regional strategic decision-making authority will continue to exist.

Chris Heaton-Harris: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Chi Onwurah: I am afraid I will not give way. I have very little time and I know that other Members wish to speak.

Let us be clear. Active support for industry is not a uniquely Labour policy. Across the world, Governments who know the benefits of long-term investment support their industry. I do not believe that China is a political model for us, but it has invested aggressively in technology and is reaping the rewards for doing so. Its wind power industry has doubled in output in the past year. In Singapore companies planning to relocate are asked how many graduates they need, what kind of grants they want and what kind of infrastructure would help.

Claire Perry: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Chi Onwurah: No, I am afraid I have no time.

Our competitors recognise the importance of supporting industry. The coalition uses the excuse of not wanting to pick winners, but in reality it wants to take our country back to a laissez-faire industrial indifference which will leave us without technology leadership in any sector. It talks about the importance of cutting the deficit. We agree. We set out plans to cut the deficit in half over four years, but that should not be used as a reason to risk our futures.

The people of Britain understand that even when times are difficult, one should not stop investing in the future. It was Britain's leading role in the first industrial revolution that gave us our current relative prosperity. If the Government do not equip the country to take advantage of the opportunities that are presented now, they will betray not only the north-east, but future generations across the UK. I support the motion.

6.17 pm

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a great pleasure to speak for the first time in a debate chaired by you.

I am sorry to see that the hon. Member for Devizes (Claire Perry) is leaving us.

Claire Perry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Toby Perkins: That was a brave attempt. Before the hon. Lady spoke, I thought we had already been patronised more than we could stand, but she raised the bar considerably.

Claire Perry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Toby Perkins: No, I should like to make progress. Other Members wish to speak.

My background as a small business owner and now as an MP in the east midlands, in a coalfield and manufacturing area, gives me a broad perspective on the debate. That broad perspective is one of the things lacking in the arguments that we hear from the Government Benches. People seem to fail to understand that the private sector and the public sector do not live in two entirely opposite worlds that never have anything to do with each other. As a business man, I rely on people buying products from my firm. Some of those people might be doctors, some might be teachers, some might work in private industry. What all of us who run a business need more than anything else is a strong economy and a strong environment in which to do business.

Of course, everyone running a business and everyone in society wants to pay less tax. More important than a small cut in corporation tax is an economy supported by Government to run successfully. Hon. Members should remember that corporation tax is 5 per cent. lower now for big firms than it was in 1996-97. All the parties are talking about manufacturing, yet only Labour has put in place the financial means to support manufacturing and to boost industry, which is what should be happening.

I was pleased to hear the contribution by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), who I think might be joining the proud tradition of Tory rebels over the years in his call for more support for industry. He said that the British Government should support our manufacturing firms in the way that the American Government support theirs. I hope that he will continue to stick to that line after he has spoken to his Whips.

In our area, the East Midlands Development Agency is not, of course, the whole solution, but it is an important contributor. In Chesterfield, there is an organisation called CPP that employs 270 staff. When I went to visit it before the election, people there told me that they were able to carry out the initial set-up only because of the support of the development agency, which put in £1.7 million.

The east midlands engages in more manufacturing than any other area. The Secretary of State has said that he wants his Department to be the Department for growth, but cutting investment allowances will not speed the growth that we need in our economy. I was horrified to hear the hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), who is not with us at the moment, say that she keeps speaking to people who tell her that the East Midlands Development Agency is not contributing and is not doing a good job, and they want to get rid of it. In fact, for every £1 the development agency puts into the local economy, we get £9 of benefit coming back. I do not know who the hon. Lady can have been speaking to, because local businesses and business organisations are queuing up to support it.

Chris Heaton-Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Toby Perkins: Yes, if the hon. Gentleman promises to be brief.

Chris Heaton-Harris: As a fellow east midlands MP and a former east midlands Member of the European Parliament, I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Will he at least acknowledge that lots of the money that is invested by the East Midlands Development Agency goes to the so-called golden triangle, which his constituency falls within, and that areas in Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire have suffered because they have not been getting the inward investment that they might well have got had there been a local enterprise partnership?

Toby Perkins: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows his local area better than I do. I do know, however, that Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire chamber of commerce has spoken out strongly in saying that it would like the East Midlands Development Agency to be left in place. It is up to Members in other areas to ensure that they get schemes before the agency and try to work with it in a positive way. The current lack of certainty from the Government will not lead any organisations to think that they should be talking to the development agency, as they cannot be sure that it will even be there in a few months' time.

Pat Zadora, the chair of the east midlands business forum, has said:

"We can't speak for other areas of the country, but there can be no doubt that"

the East Midlands Development Agency

"has been extremely effective. The all-important private sector has forged a strong and helpful relationship with the agency and we believe it has made a positive contribution to the regional economy. There are a number of instances where we believe Emda's intervention has been crucial in resolving key issues and unlocking opportunities to develop strategically important sites."

The hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Peter Luff), when he was Chair of the BIS Committee, said that every business organisation that he had spoken to, from the Federation of Small Businesses to the CBI, said that development agencies help the economy, and that abolition would send completely the wrong message. We absolutely support his comments. The manufacturers' organisation, the EEF, argues against a more local approach, saying:

"Local authorities lack the critical mass, the funds and the ability to step outside local politics to identify the priorities for their region, to set out how best meet them and to make it happen."

What we need now is consistency from the Government. We need to see that there is support for our industries. Business wants Government to take a proactive role, but it also wants support to be there through measures such as investment allowances and the excellent car scrappage scheme that the Labour Government put in place—an example of Government investment supporting private industry. The Secretary of State is saying that he wants to send a clear and decisive message, but in fact he is painting a confused picture. His approach is not supported by manufacturing companies, which want to see Government driving growth, or by local businesses and business organisations in the east midlands, which are saying that we need investment in allowances, in development agencies, and in our manufacturing sector. They need a strong and unequivocal message from the Secretary of State, and in that regard he is failing them.

6.25 pm

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): It is a great privilege to speak before you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I congratulate you on your new role. I congratulate all hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today, in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery), who has taken my title, which I never wanted, of the last miner to enter the House. I hope he does not keep that title either, because this House would be stronger and better if more people from the mining industry came here, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher) said.

It is from my history of working in the mines that I have formed my view today. The truth is that there are two nations—one nation split by geography as well as history. In my history, markets have failed our part of the world, as they have failed places such as Yorkshire and the east midlands. In the years between the wars, this is what happened in areas such as mine: we saw 1,000 miners killed every year—one man every six hours—in the coal mines of Britain. Why? Because the markets

[Mr David Anderson]

would not put the money in to invest in health and safety and machinery. We had a very poor industry that was let down.

There was public intervention after the war. The industry was taken over and nationalised and what did we see? Within a few years, health and safety legislation—the Mines and Quarries Act 1954—was passed through this House. We went from killing 1,000 men a year in the 1930s, to killing fewer than 20 men a year in the 1960s. That is the difference. That is what happens when we have red tape and health and safety legislation to take care of people. That is what happens when the public and the state stand up for people and do not let the market dictate.

We saw the same thing in the 1980s. What happened? The markets intervened. We did away with the most productive, cleanest, the most technologically advanced and the safest coal industry in the world. What are we left with now? A rump of a coal industry, in which more people are being killed pro rata than for the past 50 years. Only a few pits are left, but we have seen a fourfold increase in deaths in coal mines.

We saw the utilities taken into private ownership in the 1980s. What are we left with? There are problems with security of supply, the national grid is not fit for purpose, and there is a skills gap, because the companies have been more interested in looking after their profit margins than in developing a skilled work force for the future. But what else have we got? We have got all the utilities companies with their hands out, saying, "Give us some money from the public purse so we can develop carbon capture and storage. If you don't give us it, we'll turn our backs on the clean coal strategy and just have the dirty gas industry." Effectively, they are putting this country over a barrel, which is what they will always do, because they put themselves first.

In the past 13 years, regions such as mine have had input from public bodies such as RDAs, which have been a success, because there has been a genuine partnership not only with the Government, but with local government and colleges, and particularly with private businesses, which have welcomed the fact that at long last, there has been stability, support and a way forward, particularly in the case of Nissan. At Christmas 2008, Nissan was going down the plughole, and 1,200 men were being put on the dole. Nissan worked with people from the House, and local councillors and colleges, to put together a scheme that kept people in work and training. When Nissan then got the contract for the batteries, those people went back to work, and the work force are doing better than ever. I would imagine that they will now be getting worried about where things are going.

It has been said that nobody in the Opposition has any alternatives for dealing with the deficit, but I will give the House some. The Government should go and work with the trade unions, the civil service and the TUC on tax evasion. In a report before the election, they pointed out that 20,000 tax collectors lost their jobs in the past few years, for a saving of £100 million, but that is at a time when this country has a tax gap of evasion and avoidance—this has been admitted by the leaderships of both main parties—of at least £40 billion, and that the TUC report says is £120 billion. The Government should go and close that gap before doing anything else.

Chris Heaton-Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Anderson: No, I do not have time—I have to finish soon.

Chris Heaton-Harris: You'll get extra time.

Mr Anderson: No, I won't—I'll tell you the orders, right?

The Robin Hood tax—a tax on banks' international financial transactions—was rubbished by Government Members, but it would take care of a big chunk of expenditure on public services. Public sector workers are asking me, "Why should we pay Dave? Why should we carry the can for the failures of the banks? Why should we have to lose our jobs? Why should we have to stop looking after people we want to look after, when people who have robbed this country blind are getting away with more robbery?" Everyone in this House should agree with that.

I will say it: we should put the national insurance contribution charges on employers as well as on the work force. Why should it be the work force alone who carry the can? If the Liberal Democrats have a voice in this place, I would like to ask them what they would do to pay for the £17 billion of tax cuts. I am all for giving tax cuts to the low paid, but why should people at the level of pay we get also benefit from those tax cuts, when we will be shutting hospitals and schools and sacking home care workers? We keep hearing that we are all in this together. It is like a vuvuzela sounded every week by George Osborne, or a rattle in the background. No one in the working class believes that we are all in this together—nobody who works in school meals or hospitals. They know that those with money will be looked after and those without will go to the wall. That is the way that it has always been in this country. Saying something often and loudly does not make it any truer.

Should my party say sorry? No, it should not, because it stopped this country going into depression as a result of the failures of global finance and capitalism. We stopped that being any worse. The G20 said clearly that the actions we took brought the country into recovery more quickly than would otherwise have been the case.

The most ludicrous suggestion is one in, one out for regulation. That is daft. Who decides which regulation should be done away with to bring in another one? It is nonsense and it should be abandoned now.

6.31 pm

Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): It is a delight to wind up this debate with you in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. As we have already heard, your interest in manufacturing and in representing your constituents has been a feature of the House for many years.

I am pleased to have had this opportunity to debate the importance of Government support for industry. Some of the least endearing aspects—among many—of the Tory-Lib Dem Government are their willingness to misrepresent the policies of the previous Government, to be less than candid about their own past policy positions, and to adopt language that threatens the developing partnership for growth in UK industry which was the legacy of the Labour Government.

First, I pay tribute to the quality of the debate today and, in particular, the maiden speeches. The hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) gave us a very good joke about "Earnest". It is always good to have a doctor in the House—we had Dr Howard Stoate until the election—and we know where to come if there are any difficulties in the Tea Room. The north-east had a very loud voice in the Chamber today, in maiden speeches and others. My hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) told us about his constituency and of the excellent Newbiggin by the sea, with which I am very familiar. From my home county, my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass) told us about the beauty of her constituency, which is unparalleled in Britain and should be visited by all hon. Members.

We heard also from my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher), who appears to be a natural in the House. With the Grimethorpe colliery band in his constituency, he is well qualified to be the chair of the all-party brass band group, and he can put me down as a member. I welcome him to the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) spoke movingly about his predecessor, Ashok Kumar, whom we all miss. He was valued not only in the House, but—as I know from ministerial visits to the north-east—was greatly valued by the community there. He will be sadly missed. I am sure that his successor will establish himself quickly in the House and make many contributions.

We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Julie Hilling), who let us know that the Reebok stadium is in her constituency. Bolton Wanderers are in the premiership, and that is where my hon. Friend will be with her contributions in the future.

For the past two years, the UK has faced, first, a world banking crisis and, second, a world economic crisis. As anyone willing to approach matters with an open mind must see, this crisis has affected all the world's major economies, including the United States, Germany, France and Japan, as well as developing economies such as China and India. Against this backcloth, the previous UK Government had a choice either to pursue deflationary policies espoused by the Conservative party or to pursue policies designed to maintain employment and protect growth espoused by every other major economy.

For those of us who witnessed first hand the consequences of Tory Government policy in the 1980s and 1990s, when UK unemployment reached 3.5 million on two separate occasions, the choice was clear, and I am proud that the Labour Government acted to maintain employment and protect the fundamentals of our productive economy. That is why Opposition Members speak so passionately about the involvement of, for example, regional development agencies, and about their communities, which were devastated by the consequences of laissez-faire Tory economic policy in the 1980s and 1990s.

One of the features of this debate, which the Minister for Universities and Science did not attend, was the fact that Conservative Members are out of the Thatcherite school. That was clear when they spoke. What we did not hear, however, were Liberal Democrat voices—the only Liberal Democrat to make a substantial contribution in the debate was the Secretary of State. He does not have any support from his Back Benches; no speeches were made by the Liberal Democrats. Were I he and looking for their support, I would look well behind me.

As Gregg and Wadsworth have pointed out in the *National Institute Economic Review*, as a result of Labour action and intervention in the economy in the world recession, employment rates did not shrink at the same rate as in previous recessions, despite the reduction in productive capacity. This was due to the Government pursuing a Keynesian reflationary policy and the contribution of employers and trade unions, working together to agree reduced wages and hours. As a result, more people stayed in work and their homes, and Britain moved out of recession.

The Labour Government played a key role by creating the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which I note has been retained in the same form by the Tory-Liberal Democrat Government, and which acted to support manufacturing. Its new industry, new jobs strategy—an active industrial strategy—set the framework for its developing relationship with industry. I, for one, will always be grateful to those senior representatives of companies and trade unions who worked with me and gave their time freely in bodies such as the manufacturing advisory group, and I would like to use this opportunity to thank them for their commitment. If there is one piece of advice I would give to my successor—I am delighted he has finally been able to join us—it would be not to jettison this well of good advice, and I would welcome his assurance that he will continue to work with that group.

Partly as a result of the Labour Government's close contacts with industry and trade unions, we introduced a car scrappage scheme. It is striking that we are hearing a different argument from the Conservative party. In 2008 and 2009, the then Opposition were saying that the Labour Government were spending too little, too slowly on supporting the economy—for example, I received criticism from the BIS Committee that the automotive assistance programme was not paying out fast enough—but today we are hearing from Conservative Members that the programme was a flagrant waste of money.

Building on the relationship that we established in our work on the car scrappage scheme, the Labour Government established the UK Automotive Council, which I am happy to see has been retained by the Tory-Liberal Dem Government, to build on past inward investment into UK industry and to make the UK a centre for low-carbon manufacturing. As a consequence, and working with Government, investors such as General Motors, Toyota, Jaguar Land Rover and Nissan all made commitments to the UK that would secure jobs in manufacturing. Very important work is being done by the UK Automotive Council relating to the development of the UK manufacturing supply chain, and it is important that continues.

The UK's aerospace industry is the second largest manufacturer in the world, with companies such as Airbus, AgustaWestland and GKN looking to work with the Government by establishing a national composites centre in Bristol. There is a complete failure among Conservative Members to understand the importance and strength of the UK manufacturing industry.

We have a great deal to be proud of in this country, and it is quite disgraceful that the Government parties seem to talk down UK manufacturing so much. I invite

[Ian Lucas]

them to go up to the Tyne—we have heard a lot from the north-east this afternoon—and see the Clipper site on the north bank, which is manufacturing a new generation of wind turbines, showing the Labour Government's commitment to a low-carbon future.

If the Tory-Lib Dem Government's rhetoric about a low-carbon economy is to mean anything, the Secretary of State must act to end the marginalisation of his Department in the Government, stop the Treasury running the show and fight for UK industry. One of the white flags of surrender that he put up today was the fact that he is going to scrap the RDAs—I think that that is where we ended up, after his tortuous exposition of coalition policy. The RDAs are extremely important. The north-east of England has a great champion in One NorthEast, which has brought investment from companies such as Nissan to the UK, when it could have gone elsewhere in Europe. Portugal fought hard for that money; One NorthEast and the Labour Government achieved it.

We must retain the competitive advantage that was built on Labour's huge investment in science and our universities, but that cannot be done if the Government will not support UK industry, because there are European competitor countries that will support theirs, as I always witnessed at European Council meetings. Any reduction in the UK's budget deficit must be built on three pillars: reductions in spending, tax changes and, equally importantly, economic growth. The Work Foundation's recent paper makes some important points, not least that

"any successful deficit reduction strategy must include a strategy for encouraging growth and jobs".

To date, the Secretary of State appears to have no understanding of that central truth, which was pointed out again by my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor over the weekend.

To hear the Prime Minister and the Chancellor trashing inward investment by major globalised manufacturers is quite astonishing. Do the Tory-Lib Dem Government not want Airbus, General Motors, Ford and Clipper to invest in the UK? The idea, peddled by the parties on the Government Benches, that detailed agreements with inward investors, which were worked out over many months, were not a good deal for Britain is simply not true. That accusation should be withdrawn immediately. Will the parties on the Government Benches tell us which of those partnership agreements was not good value? We are still waiting to hear that—I am prepared to wait longer, if they would like to intervene and tell us. If they cannot do that, they should stop demoralising British manufacturers and British industry.

Guy Opperman: I come from a family of manufacturers. I also come from the north-east, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that tens of thousands of jobs in the north-east were lost under the previous Government. Does he actually believe that the increase in national insurance—a tax on employers—was a good thing, or was it a bad thing? Would it make us more competitive?

Ian Lucas: The hon. Gentleman should not lecture me about manufacturing in the north-east. My father worked for 40 years in manufacturing in the north-east, and I witnessed what the hon. Gentleman's party did to those industries in the north-east in the 1980s and '90s. That is why my hon. Friends are so passionate about protecting UK manufacturing and why the Conservatives will never understand why they are viewed with such distaste by the north-east of England, by manufacturing industries and by the people in manufacturing areas across the UK.

I am sad indeed that BIS has been marginalised within Government, moving from its pivotal role under my noble friend Lord Mandelson to the margins under the new Secretary of State. That must be draining for those who committed so much time to putting UK manufacturing at the heart of the UK's recovery this year—the trade unionists, the industrialists and the small businesses, all anxious to build demand and jobs in UK manufacturing. Perhaps that is not surprising, when the Tory-Lib Dem coalition agreement said so little about manufacturing.

The reduction of £800 million in the Department's budget is a threat to the lessening of the budget deficit, for it threatens to reduce the building of the economic infrastructure that is so necessary to sustain manufacturing. What the Department must do is fight its corner for British industry and British jobs. An active industrial strategy is an essential part of the way forward to reduce the budget deficit as the UK moves out of recession. If the Department allows itself to be neutered by the Treasury, the progress in building a manufacturing base will be lost. The cost will be high-quality jobs, innovation and a viable industrial base. That cost will be too high, and that must not be allowed to happen.

6.45 pm

The Minister for Universities and Science (Mr David Willetts): I am delighted that we have had so many firsts in this debate. It is the first in which I have participated with you and other new Deputy Speakers in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, and we very much welcome you. We have also heard the speeches from the new Chairs of the Select Committees that will take a close interest in our deliberations: I welcome the speeches by the hon. Members for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) and for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Andrew Miller).

Above all, we have had some very welcome maiden speeches in the debate, and I pay tribute to the excellent speeches from new colleagues, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee). He spoke as a doctor, and also with great passion for space and the importance of the space industry. That cause is also close to my heart, and I welcome him to the Chamber. I hope that we shall be able to work together on that important subject.

We also heard from the hon. Member for Bolton West (Julie Hilling), and I agree with her about the importance of unionlearn. It is an excellent and cost-effective way of spreading access to skills in the workplace. We heard from the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery), who spoke of the importance of the coal industry to his constituency. We also heard from the hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass), who explained that her predecessor had been Hilary Armstrong, and that Hilary Armstrong's predecessor had been Ms Armstrong's father. We therefore welcome this radical break with the hereditary principle, and welcome the hon. Lady to the House. She also referred to socialism

in her speech. We do not hear the word "socialism" in the Chamber very often, but we enjoyed her contribution all the same.

The hon. Member for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher) spoke with great passion about brass bands. Just occasionally, the meaning of the word "socialism" is a bit fuzzy when used by Labour Members, but, having heard his speech about brass bands, we now know that a socialist utopia will have been achieved when the Arts Council devotes as much money to brass bands as it does to the Royal Opera House. We very much look forward to the hon. Gentleman's advocacy of that cause.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (Mr Edward Vaizey): We'll look into it.

Mr Willetts: I hope that all hon. Members heard that intervention.

We also had a maiden speech from the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop). That was particularly touching for those of us who were here in the last Parliament, because he referred to the sad loss of Ashok Kumar, who was held in high regard on both sides of the House.

As I was listening to those maiden speeches, I recalled a maiden speech delivered in a previous Parliament by a newly elected loyal Blairite Back Bencher who had previously been a London taxi driver. Many of us regretted that, in his new role, he would no longer be able to share his political opinions with us. However, we now have new Members who are certainly going to share their opinions with us in a most vigorous and effective way. Indeed, some newly elected Members are so vigorous and dynamic that they have already made their second speeches, which must be some kind of record. Among my intake in 1992, we had a competition to see which of us would first be referred to in the press as a senior Back Bencher, and I think that we have heard from several candidates for that title here today.

There was a paradox, however, in that many of these new Members, who are changing the character of our House, and rejuvenating and refreshing it by coming from all sides to bring fresh angles to the issues of the day, defined their political loyalties by historic disputes, especially disputes about the performance of our economy. I should like to set the record straight, especially for those Labour Members who have given such a caricature account of this country's economic history.

In 1979—a year that clearly rankles with some Labour Members—manufacturing industry comprised 25.8% of the British economy. In 1990, when Baroness Thatcher lost office, as a result of the economic policies that Labour Members have been criticising today, manufacturing was down to 22.5% of gross domestic product. In 1997, when we last lost office, it was 20.3% of GDP; and in 2009, it was 11.8% of GDP. So next time we have any sermons from Labour Members about what has happened to manufacturing industry, I hope that they will come to this House and be willing to accept the simple evidence from those statistics.

Perhaps I can give the House a second set of statistics on another important measure of the performance of our economy—business investment. In 1979, business investment was 13% of GDP. Business investment goes up and down, but there was a trend, and I regret to say that by 1997 that figure had fallen to 11.7% of GDP. In 2009, the last full year in which Labour was in office, business investment was 8.8% of GDP. When it comes to investing in the future of our economy and when it comes to manufacturing and the significance of the manufacturing sector, I hope that Labour Members will recognise the comprehensive failure of their years in office.

Toby Perkins *rose—*

Mr Willetts: I have very little time.

Many Labour Members referred particularly to regional issues, and I have to say to them that of course we understand the concern about regional imbalances in our economy. In fact, another measure that deteriorated over the past 10 years has been the gap in GDP between different regions of our economy. If we are to tackle the problem of regional imbalances, we have to look objectively at the performance of regional development agencies. The report from the National Audit Office, published in March this year, made it clear that the NAO was

"unable to conclude that the regional wealth benefits actually generated"

by RDAs

"were as much as they could and should have been, and are therefore value for money."

The report went on to refer to "weaknesses", which

"in many cases, undermined the RDAs' ability to make decisions and set priorities to maximise regional economic wealth".

It concluded that RDAs were simply not doing the job they were supposed to do. That is why Government Members believe that RDA boundaries do not reflect functional economic areas; we wish to enable local enterprise partnerships to reflect better the natural economic geography of the areas that they serve. We are committed to replacing RDAs with local enterprise partnerships and we will invite local groups of councils and business leaders to come together to consider how they wish to form local enterprise partnerships.

Mr Bailey *rose—*

Mr Willetts: I will give way to the Chairman of the Select Committee.

Mr Bailey: Will the right hon. Gentleman answer the query I posed in my contribution and tell us whether the money hitherto allocated to RDAs will follow through to the local economic partnerships?

Mr Willetts: We do believe that there are efficiencies to be made because of the very high overhead costs of RDAs. Government Members are committed to saving public money, and I have to say that one way in which we will do so is by saving money in the overhead costs of RDAs as we move to the new arrangements—and we make no apology for that.

We also believe that some roles currently carried out by RDAs can be scrapped to save money—regional spatial strategies, for example. We simply do not need them—full stop. There are other roles, including inward investment, that we believe should be led nationally and can be carried out elsewhere. We heard powerful examples from several of my hon. Friends of how individual RDAs were spending money around the world on regional offices; this type of function is better done at the national level. We believe that some RDA roles in sector leadership and taking responsibility for business support and innovation can also best be done nationally. That is the approach that we will take.

[Mr Willetts]

Our challenge is to rebalance the economy, to rebalance it in favour of manufacturing, to rebalance it in favour of investment and to rebalance it regionally as well. That is part of the inheritance that we take on from the previous Government.

Esther McVey (Wirral West) (Con): I have listened to what has been said this evening, and I would like to raise the concerns of small business owners and family-run businesses in Wirral, Cheshire and Merseyside, as I have been part of the Merseyside Entrepreneurship Commission. What they say is drowning them is the burden and cost of regulation. Last year, in the north-west alone, it cost £8.3 billion and, since 1998, the overall figure has gone up by £11 billion a year. I want to know what we are going to do to help the small businesses across the north-west.

Mr Willetts: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. To indicate the challenge that we face, the previous Government introduced 20,938 new regulations. Between 1987 and 1997, 46 pieces of primary legislation affected the workplace. In the subsequent 10 years under the Labour Government, 92 pieces of legislation affected the workplace. In the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, working with the Secretary of State, we have already identified on our forward programme 200 proposed regulations inherited from the outgoing Government that would have cost more than £5 billion to British business. Every one of those will be scrutinised, and we will roll back the burden of regulation, which is fundamental.

We believe in "rebalancing the economy", and although those are the new words, I sometimes think that Winston Churchill, who served in the House as a member of the Liberal party and of the Conservative party, expressed it best when he said that he wanted to see finance less proud and industry more content. That is what the Government stand for. Getting a grip on the public finances is fundamental, because otherwise, as my hon. Friends the Members for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock) and for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid) described powerfully, interest rates will rise, which is a burden that British industry cannot be expected to bear. We need to bring down the burden of public borrowing and of the public finances.

The Government are not alone in believing in that—former Ministers who are now on the Opposition Benches signed up to such plans in government. They have failed today to give us any information about their plans to deliver the savings to which they publicly committed themselves. Let me remind them of what was in last year's pre-Budget report with regard to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. It said that £300 million would be saved by reducing funding for adult skills budgets, and £600 million would be saved from higher education and science and research budgets. I agree with Labour Members about the importance of science, although it is a pity that they fought the last election on a proposal to save £600 million from higher education and science but have never informed us of exactly how they would have made those savings. We will now deliver the savings, and they are in no position to criticise the savings that they planned for but never had the guts to share with us and explain.

The Government are committed to a strategy for growth that involves an enterprise-friendly tax system, support for science, support for free trade and competition, a belief in investment in skills and training, and rolling back the burden of regulation, setting British industry free. As every contribution to the debate has revealed, there is a simple difference between the Government and Opposition. The Government believe in freedom, enterprise, initiative and competition, and the Labour party still believes in state control, higher public expenditure, more regulation, more RDAs, and more interference in the wealth-creating sector of the British economy. That is not the way we will recover from the recession in which the Labour party left the country.

The Government will commit ourselves to bringing down the burden of borrowing and managing the public finances prudently. In the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, in which it is a privilege to work with the Secretary of State, we are determined to have a more flexible and dynamic industrial sector because of our commitment to free trade and free markets.

Question put (Standing Order No. 31(2), That the original words stand part of the Question.

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the Aye Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 238, Noes 322.

Division No. 8] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Alexander, Heidi
Allen, Mr Graham
Anderson, Mr David
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bain, Mr William
Balls, rh Ed
Banks, Gordon
Barron, rh Mr Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Roberta
Blears, rh Hazel
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Blunkett, rh Mr David
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Brown, Mr Russell
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Byrne, rh Mr Liam
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Mrs Jenny
Clark, Katy
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crausby, Mr David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Tony
Curran, Margaret
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
Darling, rh Mr Alistair
David, Mr Wayne
Davidson, Mr Ian
Davies, Geraint
De Piero, Gloria
Denham, rh Mr John
Dobbin, Jim
Docherty, Thomas
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Doran, Mr Frank
Dowd, Jim
Doyle, Gemma
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Engel, Natascha

Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Mr Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flello, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goggins, rh Paul
Goodman, Helen
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hain, rh Mr Peter
Hamilton, Mr David
Hamilton, Mr Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harris, Mr Tom
Havard, Mr Dai
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Heyes, David
Hillier, Meg
Hilling, Julie
Hodge, rh Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Mr Jim
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Illsley, Mr Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda
James, Mrs Siân C.
Jamieson, Cathy
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Diana R.
Jones, Graham
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Jowell, rh Tessa
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeley, Barbara
Keen, Alan
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Chris
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Ian
MacShane, rh Mr Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Mann, John
Marsden, Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McClymont, Gregg
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKinnell, Catherine
Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Mearns, Ian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, rh David
Miliband, rh Edward
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Morden, Jessica
Morrice, Graeme
Morris, Grahame M.
Mudie, Mr George
Munn, Meg
Murphy, rh Mr Jim
Murphy, rh Paul
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Nash, Pamela
O'Donnell, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Osborne, Sandra
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Perkins, Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Qureshi, Yasmin
Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
Reed, Mr Jamie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Robertson, John
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Roy, Mr Frank
Roy, Lindsay
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, rh Joan
Sarwar, Anas
Seabeck, Alison
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shuker, Gavin
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Mr Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela *(Penistone and Stocksbridge)*
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Soulsby, Sir Peter
Spellar, rh Mr John
Straw, rh Mr Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Mr Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, Valerie
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mr Tom
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, rh Malcolm
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Woodcock, John
Woodward, rh Mr Shaun
Woolas, Mr Phil
Wright, David
Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Dave Watts and Helen Jones

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Aldous, Peter
Amess, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bagshawe, Ms Louise
Baker, Norman
Baker, Steve
Baldry, Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Binley, Mr Brian
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Mr Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Bray, Angie
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Mr Steve
Brokenshire, James
Brooke, Annette
Bruce, Fiona
Bruce, rh Malcolm
Buckland, Mr Robert
Burley, Mr Aidan
Burns, Conor
Burns, Mr Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burstow, Mr Paul
Burt, Alistair
Burt, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Cable, rh Vince
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Crockart, Mike
Crouch, Tracey
Davey, Mr Edward
Davies, David T. C. *(Monmouth)*
Davies, Glyn
Davis, rh Mr David
de Bois, Nick
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
Dorries, Nadine
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Dunne, Mr Philip
Edwards, Jonathan
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Jonathan
Evennett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farron, Tim
Featherstone, Lynne
Field, Mr Mark
Foster, Mr Don
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Fuller, Richard
Garnier, Mr Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
George, Andrew
Gibb, Mr Nick
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Damian
Greening, Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hague, rh Mr William
Halfon, Robert
Hames, Duncan
Hammond, rh Mr Philip

Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hands, Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, Mr John
Heath, Mr David
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Hendry, Charles
Hinds, Damian
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollingbery, George
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Horwood, Martin
Howarth, Mr Gerald
Howell, John
Hughes, Simon
Huhne, rh Chris
Hunter, Mark
Huppert, Dr Julian
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, Sajid
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kelly, Chris
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
Latham, Pauline
Laws, rh Mr David
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Jessica
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leech, Mr John
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Mr Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, Mr David
Lloyd, Stephen
Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Main, Mrs Anne
Maude, rh Mr Francis
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Patrick
Metcalfe, Stephen
Mills, Nigel
Milton, Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, rh Michael
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Mundell, rh David
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Sheryll
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Ollerenshaw, Eric
Opperman, Guy
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, Mr James
Parish, Neil
Patel, Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Pickles, rh Mr Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Raab, Mr Dominic
Randall, rh Mr John
Reckless, Mark
Redwood, rh Mr John
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reevell, Simon
Reid, Mr Alan
Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm
Robathan, Mr Andrew
Robertson, Angus
Robertson, Hugh
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rogerson, Dan
Rudd, Amber
Russell, Bob
Rutley, David
Sanders, Mr Adrian
Sandys, Laura
Scott, Mr Lee
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Shepherd, Mr Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, David
Simpson, Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Miss Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Sir Robert
Soames, Nicholas
Soubry, Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mr Mark
Stanley, rh Sir John
Stephenson, Andrew
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Mr Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sturdy, Julian
Swales, Ian
Swayne, Mr Desmond
Swinson, Jo
Swire, Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Thurso, John
Timpson, Mr Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Tredinnick, David
Truss, Elizabeth
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Uppal, Paul
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Ward, Mr David
Watkinson, Angela
Weatherley, Mike
Webb, Steve
Weir, Mr Mike
Wharton, James
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whittingdale, Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, rh Mr David
Williams, Mr Mark
Williams, Roger
Williamson, Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wishart, Pete
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wright, Simon
Yeo, Mr Tim
Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Norman Lamb and Jeremy Wright

Question accordingly negatived.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 31). That the proposed words be there added.

The House divided: Ayes 319, Noes 243.

Division No. 9] **[7.16 pm**

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Aldous, Peter
Amess, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bagshawe, Ms Louise
Baker, Norman
Baker, Steve
Baldry, Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Binley, Mr Brian
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Mr Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Bray, Angie
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Mr Steve
Brokenshire, James
Brooke, Annette
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona
Bruce, rh Malcolm
Buckland, Mr Robert
Burley, Mr Aidan
Burns, Conor
Burns, Mr Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burstow, Mr Paul
Burt, Alistair
Burt, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Cable, rh Vince
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clark, rh Greg

Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crockart, Mike
Crouch, Tracey
Davey, Mr Edward
Davies, David T. C. *(Monmouth)*
Davies, Glyn
Davis, rh Mr David
de Bois, Nick
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
Dorries, Nadine
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Jonathan
Evennett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farron, Tim
Featherstone, Lynne
Field, Mr Mark
Foster, Mr Don
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Fuller, Richard
Garnier, Mr Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
George, Andrew
Gibb, Mr Nick
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Damian
Greening, Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hague, rh Mr William
Halfon, Robert
Hames, Duncan
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hands, Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, Mr John
Heath, Mr David
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Hendry, Charles
Hinds, Damian
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollingbery, George
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Horwood, Martin
Howarth, Mr Gerald
Howell, John
Hughes, Simon
Huhne, rh Chris
Hunter, Mark
Huppert, Dr Julian
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, Sajid
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kelly, Chris
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
Latham, Pauline
Laws, rh Mr David
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Jessica
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leech, Mr John
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Mr Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, Mr David
Lloyd, Stephen
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
Main, Mrs Anne
Maude, rh Mr Francis
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Patrick
Metcalfe, Stephen
Mills, Nigel
Milton, Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, rh Michael
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Mundell, rh David
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Ollerenshaw, Eric
Opperman, Guy
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, Mr James
Parish, Neil
Patel, Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Pickles, rh Mr Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Raab, Mr Dominic
Randall, rh Mr John
Reckless, Mark
Redwood, rh Mr John
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reevell, Simon
Reid, Mr Alan
Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm
Robathan, Mr Andrew
Robertson, Hugh
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rogerson, Dan
Rudd, Amber
Russell, Bob
Rutley, David
Sanders, Mr Adrian
Sandys, Laura
Scott, Mr Lee
Selous, Andrew
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Shepherd, Mr Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Miss Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Sir Robert
Soames, Nicholas
Soubry, Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mr Mark
Stanley, rh Sir John
Stephenson, Andrew
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Mr Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sturdy, Julian
Swales, Ian
Swayne, Mr Desmond
Swinson, Jo
Swire, Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Thurso, John
Timpson, Mr Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Tredinnick, David
Truss, Elizabeth
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Uppal, Paul
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Ward, Mr David
Watkinson, Angela
Weatherley, Mike
Webb, Steve
Wharton, James
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittingdale, Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, rh Mr David
Williams, Mr Mark
Williams, Roger
Williamson, Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wright, Jeremy
Wright, Simon
Yeo, Mr Tim
Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Norman Lamb and
Mr Shailesh Vara

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Alexander, Heidi
Allen, Mr Graham
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bain, Mr William
Balls, rh Ed
Banks, Gordon
Barron, rh Mr Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary

Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Roberta
Blears, rh Hazel
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Blunkett, rh Mr David
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Brown, Mr Russell
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Byrne, rh Mr Liam
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Mrs Jenny
Clark, Katy
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Chwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crausby, Mr David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Tony
Curran, Margaret
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Mr Wayne
Davidson, Mr Ian
Davies, Geraint
De Piero, Gloria
Denham, rh Mr John
Dobbin, Jim
Docherty, Thomas
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Doran, Mr Frank
Dowd, Jim
Doyle, Gemma
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Engel, Natascha
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Mr Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flello, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goggins, rh Paul
Goodman, Helen
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hain, rh Mr Peter
Hamilton, Mr David
Hamilton, Mr Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harris, Mr Tom
Havard, Mr Dai
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Heyes, David
Hillier, Meg
Hilling, Julie
Hodge, rh Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Mr Jim
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Illsley, Mr Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda
James, Mrs Siân C.
Jamieson, Cathy
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Diana R.
Jones, Graham
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Jowell, rh Tessa
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeley, Barbara
Keen, Alan
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Chris
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Ian
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
MacShane, rh Mr Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Mann, John
Marsden, Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McClymont, Gregg
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKinnell, Catherine
Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Mearns, Ian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, rh David
Miliband, rh Edward
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Morden, Jessica
Morrice, Graeme
Morris, Grahame M.
Mudie, Mr George
Munn, Meg
Murphy, rh Mr Jim
Murphy, rh Paul
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Nash, Pamela
O'Donnell, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Osborne, Sandra
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Perkins, Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Qureshi, Yasmin
Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
Reed, Mr Jamie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Robertson, Angus
Robertson, John
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Roy, Mr Frank
Roy, Lindsay
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, rh Joan
Sarwar, Anas
Seabeck, Alison
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheridan, Jim
Shuker, Gavin
Simpson, David
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Mr Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela *(Penistone and Stocksbridge)*
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Soulsby, Sir Peter
Speller, rh Mr John
Straw, rh Mr Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thornberry, Emily
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, Valerie
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mr Tom
Weir, Mr Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, rh Malcolm
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wishart, Pete
Woodcock, John
Woodward, rh Mr Shaun
Woolas, Mr Phil
Wright, David
Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Noes:
Helen Jones and
Mr Dave Watts

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes the need for a clear deficit reduction plan, and that such a plan must have at its heart measures to foster growth and create the conditions for a strong business-led recovery; believes Government has a crucial role to play in fostering economic growth and in creating a better-balanced economy; supports strategic decisions to back key sectors such as digital, life sciences, low carbon manufacturing and civil nuclear power; welcomes the Government's £150 million investment in a further 50,000 apprenticeships and their £50 million to support the college building programme that was in chaos under the last Government; further welcomes the extra 10,000 university places on offer for 2010-11; notes with concern the wasteful, ineffective policies pursued by the last Government regarding industrial support, and commends the Government's plans for local enterprise partnerships that will deliver better value for money and support long-term growth objectives; recognises the need for a review of all projects approved since 1 January 2010 to evaluate their worth to the economy and taxpayer; welcomes Government support for entrepreneurs by reducing bureaucracy and increasing flexibility for both employees and employers; and believes the Government has made a strong early start in providing the conditions for long-term low-carbon economic growth and rebalancing the economy.'.

Business without Debate

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That—

(1) the matter of the Government's Legislative Programme as outlined in the Queen's Speech and the Budget Statement as they relate to Wales be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration;

(2) the Committee shall meet at Westminster on Wednesday 30 June at 9.30 am and between 2.00 pm and 4.00 pm to consider the matter referred to it under paragraph (1) above.—*(Mr Dunne.)*

Horton General Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Mr Dunne.)*

7.30 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): I am grateful to Mr Speaker for allowing this debate on the future of services at the Horton general hospital in Banbury. This continues to be one of the most important constituency campaigns in which I have been involved during my time as a Member of Parliament. I am pleased to see in their places my constituency neighbours and hon. Friends the Members for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) and for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi). Their presence in the Chamber makes the point that the Horton general hospital's catchment area, which is home to some 190,000 people, reaches well into Northamptonshire and Warwickshire.

The Horton general hospital also provides services for a significant part of Oxfordshire, including a sizeable part of the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I am also grateful for the support of my hon. Friends the Members for Henley (John Howell) and for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), who, as usual, show great Oxfordshire solidarity on such important issues.

I am also pleased to see the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns), at the Dispatch Box, as he has taken particular trouble to ensure that he is briefed to respond to what I will say in this evening's debate.

On Monday, the board of the Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust met in public in Banbury. Its meeting had only one agenda item: the Horton general hospital, to agree a vision for the hospital and proposals for the enhancement of services at the Horton. The ORH Trust board agreed to implement proposals made by the Oxfordshire primary care trust that would ensure 24/7 consultant-delivered children's services, a 24/7 special care baby unit and a significant enhancement of consultant-led maternity and obstetric services at the Horton and the employment of further consultant anaesthetists for the hospital—all of which will also enhance the robustness of the accident and emergency service.

The chair of the ORH Trust, Dame Fiona Caldicott, and the trust board's paper made it very clear that

"The Oxford Radcliffe NHS Trust is committed to a positive and vibrant future for the Horton General Hospital"

and that they and the Oxfordshire PCT want to see a situation where

"the vast majority of care required by the people of Banbury and the neighbouring communities will be delivered from an innovative and modern local District General Hospital working closely with primary care and other health and social partners."

They made it clear that

"the strategy of the Horton General Hospital must exploit the very real strengths of the Horton to develop innovative ways of providing care in order to address the present challenges within a very difficult financial environment"

and that

"the objective will be to advance the opportunity to use the Horton General Hospital as the basis of a newer model for providing care where there is greater integration between services provided in a hospital setting and community based services while maintaining the appropriate level of immediate/emergency service support needed by the population."

[Tony Baldry]

A strategy is needed that exploits the strengths of "Banburyshire", as there is a general recognition that the area served by the Horton benefits from some unique strengths that must be fully exploited. In its vision for the future of the Horton hospital, the Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust has noted that

"the Horton is in a similar position to many other small District General Hospitals across the country. It should be an objective of the strategy to articulate a vision that will position the Horton as a national exemplar of how the challenges faced by such hospitals can be addressed in a positive and effective manner."

Of course, as has been recognised by everyone involved with the Horton general hospital in recent years, if it is to aspire to be a national exemplar, its services will need continuously to change if they are to continue to meet in a clinically and financially sustainable manner the evolving health needs of the populations of Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire and the surrounding areas that the hospital serves.

All this is very welcome news. I have no desire in this debate to dwell on the past, but it is important to explain how far we have all travelled in a campaign that has lasted for some seven years.

It was in July 2003 that the *Banbury Guardian* reported on its front page:

"The children's ward at Banbury's Horton Hospital is under serious threat and could be reduced to a daytime-only service...staff on the ward were gathered together by bosses this week and warned that current pressures could spell the end of the 24-hour acute paediatric services the Horton has enjoyed for the past 27 years.

A senior children's doctor said the end of children's services could mean the demise of other Horton Departments."

Without 24/7 consultant-covered children's services, it would not longer have been possible for the hospital to have a special care baby unit. Without a special care baby unit it would effectively have been impossible to have had a consultant-led maternity service, and the maternity unit at the Horton would have become a midwife-led unit with a very large number of mothers, many of them in labour, being obliged to go to Oxford to deliver their babies, and there would have been a cumulative knock-on effect on the effectiveness of the accident and emergency unit. In short, if those proposals had gone ahead seven years ago, the Horton would have ceased to be a general hospital and simply become a somewhat random collection of medical services.

This is not the opportunity and time does not permit me to give a full account of the exemplary way in which local people rose up to confront this challenge. The "Keep the Horton General" campaign, ably led by local Labour Councillor George Parish, now chair of the Cherwell district council, ensured that soon the whole community was involved in a campaign to "Keep the Horton General". In due course the then proposals for downgrading services at the Horton were referred to Oxfordshire county council health overview committee, which unanimously decided to refer the proposals to the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson), with the recommendation that they be referred to the independent reconfiguration panel—the IRP.

The then Secretary of State did exactly that. The IRP took evidence and produced a report. The IRP's report was very clear. It concluded that

"our main focus is always the patient."

The report continued:

"The Horton General Hospital in Banbury must continue to serve the local community in North Oxfordshire and surrounding areas...we concluded that the local community's access to services would be seriously compromised if the Trust proposals were implemented. Panel members were particularly concerned about the difficult and costly journeys that local people would need to make to Oxford and felt this might even prevent or delay some people from seeking medical advice or treatment. The Trust's proposals are not in the best interests of patients, families and carers."

The IRP went on to state that

"local patient choice and access must also be a priority and that there are other possible solutions to the Horton Hospital".

Not surprisingly, the chair of the IRP, Dr. Peter Barrett, commented:

"During the course of this review we were left in no doubt that local people are passionate about the Horton Hospital. The hospital is well located for the population it serves, and the Trust's dedicated staff will play a vital role in the future success of the organisation. All parties should now work together to redevelop the proposals in response to our recommendations".

The IRP recommended that Oxfordshire primary care trust should develop a clear vision for children's and maternity services and a clear strategy for hospital services within north Oxfordshire as a whole.

It should be put on the record that I have no doubt that among the factors that caused the IRP to come to such robust conclusions were the very clear and unequivocal views put forward by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when he, as the local Member of Parliament for Witney, but also at the time Leader of the Opposition, gave evidence to the IRP, along with myself and my hon. Friends' predecessors, John Maples and Tim Boswell, both of whom I am delighted to see will shortly go to the other place, where I am sure they will continue to champion the interests of the Horton general hospital.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it very clear to the IRP that as far as he was concerned, the only things that mattered were the best interests and the health care of his constituents, a view supported without equivocation by the Horton's other Members of Parliament.

It is right that I should report to the House that in the just over two years since March 2008 when the IRP published its recommendations, the leadership and staff of the Oxfordshire primary care trust and the Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust have worked tirelessly and in an exemplary manner, on a process that sought to involve the whole community in finding a solution that works. Too many people have been involved in the process—the PCT, the Banbury better healthcare programme, and the community partnership forum, ably chaired by Julia Cartwright—for me to be able to name and thank them individually, but they all know who they are and they deserve our thanks.

During the time that this work was going on, we had visits to the Horton hospital from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and several visits to Banbury by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. Indeed, I do not think there was a single Opposition health spokesperson in the last Parliament who at some point did not come and visit the Horton hospital. The last Labour Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), came and visited the staff and patients at the Horton and observed:

"I am very impressed. This is a much loved hospital which is crucially important to Banbury...there have been question marks over the hospital for too long and that will have had a destabilising

effect on any hospital. I came to signal my commitment to the Horton. The time has come to take away the doubts. There comes a point where you have to take a decision".

We were grateful for the visit of the previous Secretary of State and are grateful that decisions to support the Horton hospital have been taken. I am now concerned to look to the future. I want, so far as is humanly possible, to ensure that we will never again have to pursue a seven-year-long campaign to keep Horton general hospital.

I very much welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the Department of Health, together with an impressive ministerial team. He is probably better prepared than any of his predecessors, and his knowledge of the NHS is as impressive in private meetings as it is in his public speeches. I suspect that people have seriously underestimated the scale of the ambition of the new Government in their health policies. Health professionals are swiftly starting to recognise that the Government's proposed programme is intended fundamentally to change the health care system and has the intention of shifting power from the centre to patients and clinicians. The Secretary of State obviously has a clear vision of where he wants the NHS to get to over time.

There are several issues on which I would welcome the Minister's thoughts. There is going to be commissioning by GPs with funding going directly to them for such commissioning. When the Secretary of State visited the Horton, he made it clear that he believed that GP commissioning would potentially be a great support to the Horton that would enable the many GPs in Oxfordshire, Warwickshire and Northamptonshire who refer their patients to the Horton to collectively commission services at the hospital and help to develop new services. We will want actively to engage with local GPs in support of the Horton.

What is the timetable for the transition to GP commissioning? What will then be the role for primary care trusts? The Horton has only one potential weakness—it is a smaller general hospital. The cost of underpinning the new consultant appointments at the Horton will effectively be about £2.5 million over tariff. That is an annual cost that will be shared between the PCT and Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust. It is the price of maintaining services in a smaller general hospital serving a significant catchment area, where the distances to the next general hospital are such as to justify extra investment in maintaining services at the Horton. But who in the new system will make the value judgments and have the funds to ensure the continuity of care at the Horton? I understand that in due course there will be an independent board to set standards in the NHS, allocate resources and oversee the system. Can my hon. Friend provide more details?

My next concern relates to consultant provision. The effect of the European working time directive is that there has been a need for more doctors. I think I am correct that the previous Government were the only Government in the European Union who decided to interpret the directive in such a way that training counted as work. A few days ago, the British Medical Association issued a response to the review of the impact of the working time directive on training, concluding that

"the review defines and calls for a consultant-delivered service. The BMA has long advocated a service organised in this way—it will assure a high quality of care for patients as and when they are in the greatest need."

By developing consultant-delivered services at the Horton, we are in the vanguard of this trend, but the Government will of course need to ensure as time goes on that there are sufficient consultants to take up these places.

Medicine and medical training is one of the few disciplines where the numbers are almost entirely controlled by the state. I fully appreciate that medical manpower planning involves a whole number of difficulties in getting it right. However, all too often in the past, there has been a tendency to believe that if at any time we have insufficient doctors, we will always be able to busk it by recruiting doctors from overseas. For all sorts of reasons, that is now becoming much more difficult, and I think we all need to be confident that there will be sufficient training places today to ensure that there will be sufficient consultants tomorrow. Moreover, we should not in any way underestimate the changes in work practices that a consultant-delivered service will bring about. I would like to give particular thanks to Dr Janet Craze and the consultant paediatricians at the ORH Trust for the incredible work that they have done in devising consultants' rotas that will enable there to be effective 24/7 consultant-delivered paediatric services at both John Radcliffe and the Horton.

I have two brief final points. First, Horton general hospital is not the only small general hospital in the country. Such hospitals exist because the geography is not convenient, and they usually have a particular purpose in serving a significant community. Will my hon. Friend the Minister support any initiative that would bring those smaller general hospitals together in an alliance to see how they can maximise their contribution to the NHS and, in particular, how they can become, as we hope that Horton will become, an exemplar of how best to integrate community primary and hospital services? Secondly, I very much hope that my hon. Friend; given his ministerial responsibility for hospital services, will find time to visit Horton general hospital. I know that such a visit would be much appreciated by staff and patients, by me and my hon. Friends, and by our constituents.

There can be no conclusion to this debate because much of the story of Horton general hospital is yet to be written. I am simply glad that by our collective endeavours, we have managed to "Keep the Horton General". All the many thousands who have taken part in this campaign, in whatever way—by petitioning, writing letters, offering professional advice, or just being there—can take pride in what we have achieved. But let me be very clear: as far as I am concerned, the well-being and welfare of Horton general hospital will always be unfinished business.

7.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Simon Burns): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) on securing this debate on the future of Horton general hospital. I know that he has campaigned vigorously in support of the hospital for several years, and I am sure that his constituents appreciate both his hard work and his dedication to protect good local health services in his constituency. I also pay tribute to the NHS staff across the whole of Oxfordshire, who provide such first-class care for his constituents.

As my hon. Friend will know, the Secretary of State has visited his constituency a number of times, and has seen for himself the excellent work carried out daily at

[Mr Simon Burns]

Horton general hospital. I would be delighted to accept my hon. Friend's offer to visit Horton myself, so that I, too, can benefit from knowledge of the experience that his constituents enjoy.

Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) on securing this debate, and I note the Minister's diligent concern for Horton hospital. Will he consider the case of Wycombe hospital, which is somewhat further down the route upon which the Horton had embarked, and our local services?

Mr Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that to my attention. Given the constraints of time in this debate, if he were to be kind enough to write or to come and see me, I would be more than happy to discuss the situation with him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury referred to the decision made by the board of Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust on Monday this week to maintain 24-hour paediatric services and a full obstetrics service at Horton general hospital. That is good news, and thanks in no small part to the strong opposition mounted by local GPs, clinicians and the public to the trust's original plans that were proposed in 2007. In addition, my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—in his constituency role—my former hon. Friends Tim Boswell and John Maples, and my new hon. Friends the Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) and for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), should be congratulated on the determined way in which they have fought for their constituents in seeking to stop the original proposals, which would have meant paediatric in-patient services moving from the Horton to the John Radcliffe hospital in Oxford, with the problems that that would cause for their constituents.

Following the rejection of the original plans in 2008 by the independent reconfiguration board, Oxfordshire PCT set up the better healthcare programme to develop proposals on how safe, long-term services at Horton might be delivered. It established a community partnership forum to ensure wide engagement with the local community, which included representation from local GPs, patients, the public, Horton general hospital staff, councillors and Members of the House. I am aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury played a long and active role in those deliberations.

I am pleased to note that local engagement has been such a key part of the better healthcare programme. I understand that the community partnership forum has been involved throughout, and that frequent briefings were held with GPs and the practice-based commissioning consortia. Clinical staff at Horton general and John Radcliffe hospitals have also been involved, to ensure wide clinical engagement.

The model of care that emerged from the better healthcare programme was for consultant-delivered paediatrics and obstetrics services to remain at Horton general. That will mean less reliance on middle-grade doctors, and result in Horton continuing to provide local, high-quality paediatric and maternity services. The Oxfordshire health overview and scrutiny committee agreed with that model.

In March, the proposals developed to implement that model were presented to a clinical review panel. The panel consisted of local GPs, representatives from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Royal College of Anaesthetists, Cherwell district council and a PCT board member. Although I understand that the panel had some concerns, it concluded that the proposals were clinically safe and deliverable. Now that the PCT and trust boards have decided to go ahead with these proposals, the next step is for the trust to develop an implementation plan. That will involve recruiting the required number of additional consultants.

I am pleased that Oxfordshire PCT and South Central SHA have both assured me that the better healthcare programme has passed the four tests set out by the Secretary of State, which have been a strong feature of the way the programme has been organised. As my hon. Friend will appreciate, the four tests to which I refer are the new tests that the Secretary of State has laid down to ensure that when reconfiguration proposals are made, local GPs and clinicians—and local communities—are fully consulted before any decisions are made, so that they can have a say in the health care that they need.

My hon. Friend asked a number of questions that I will seek to answer now as far as I can. He asked about the timetable for the transition to GP commissioning and the future role of primary care trusts. As he knows, we have only been in government a matter of weeks and a tremendous amount of work needs to be done to begin to realise our vision for an NHS based on putting patients first so that quality of care is the priority in the service. In that context, we will set out our vision for the national health service shortly. Until we do, I am not in a position to respond in detail to those two specific questions.

My hon. Friend asked about the independent NHS Board. The board will set outcome objectives, allocate resources and provide commissioning guidelines free from political interference. Again, I beg my hon. Friend's patience as we will set out further details of the NHS Board shortly. I am sure that he appreciates that I cannot go into detail at this stage and while we are putting together our proposals to bring before the House and the nation.

My hon. Friend also raised the idea of an initiative to bring together an alliance of general hospitals to help provide the best integrated primary, community and hospital care. Like him, I believe that it is vital to have first-class integrated health and community services, and I assure him that we are looking at how we might best achieve that.

I applaud the determination that my hon. Friend, and my other hon. Friends—I am pleased to see them in their places tonight—have shown in their championing of local services in Banbury and in other areas affected by these proposals. His constituents, like those of all hon. Members, deserve good local health services that have the full support of local GPs, clinicians and the local community and provide the highest standards of quality and care. By seeking the support of GPs and local people for any changes made, by basing any changes on clear evidence, and by ensuring that all changes improve patient choice, the enhanced services in Oxfordshire will inevitably lead to better care for my

hon. Friends' constituents, not only in that area but in those parts of south Northamptonshire and Warwickshire that form part of this hospital area.

In conclusion, I am pleased that the plans that have finally been devised through local involvement and commitment have solved a potential problem. It shows that, by consulting with local stakeholders and the local community, one can achieve the sort of configuration that meets the needs of local people as well as the needs of a local national health service. In particular, I congratulate my hon. Friend on his tremendous work and the leadership that he has provided in ensuring that the local community, working together, achieved the successful outcome determined last Monday. I wish him and the local health service in Banbury and the surrounding area every success in ensuring that these proposals work, and work well, for the benefit of the local community.

Question put and agreed to.

7.55 pm

House adjourned.

House of Commons

Thursday 17 June 2010

The House met at half-past Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL BILL

Motion made,

That so much of the Lords Message [10 June] as relates to the Canterbury City Council Bill be now considered. —*(The Chairman of Ways and Means.)*

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Thursday 24 June.

LEEDS CITY COUNCIL BILL

Ordered,

That so much of the Lords Message [10 June] as relates to the Leeds City Council Bill be now considered.

That the promoters of the Leeds City Council Bill, which was originally introduced in this House in Session 2008–09 on 22 January 2008, may have leave to proceed with the Bill in the current Session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of bills). —*(The Chairman of Ways and Means.)*

NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL BILL

Motion made,

That so much of the Lords Message [10 June] as relates to the Nottingham City Council Bill be now considered. —*(The Chairman of Ways and Means.)*

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Thursday 24 June.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL

Ordered,

That so much of the Lords Message [10 June] as relates to the Reading Borough Council Bill be now considered.

That the promoters of the Reading Borough Council Bill, which was originally introduced in this House in Session 2008–09 on 22 January 2008, may have leave to proceed with the Bill in the current Session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of bills).—*(The Chairman of Ways and Means.)*

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Heathrow Airport

1. **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with business representatives on the expansion of Heathrow airport. [2710]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Philip Hammond): I have not discussed the expansion of Heathrow with business representatives since my appointment, as we have made it clear that we will not support a third runway at Heathrow. This Government's focus is on making Heathrow better not bigger.

Mr Hanson: I welcome the Secretary of State to his position. I do not always agree with the CBI, but it has joined the Trades Union Congress and unions across London to say that the expansion of Heathrow is good for business and for London. Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore be careful that, in taking his stance—I recognise that it is one of integrity—he does not end up exporting jobs and business from London to Munich, Frankfurt and Paris?

Mr Hammond: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, both parties in the coalition campaigned before the general election on a clear commitment to scrap the third runway at Heathrow. However, we are not anti-aviation and, earlier this week, I set up a working group to consider aviation in the south-east and to work with all the stakeholders, including representatives of business, the airlines and people who work at the airport to ascertain how we can make aviation in the south-east work better within the constraints of existing runway capacity.

Angie Bray (Ealing Central and Acton) (Con): The people of Ealing Central and Acton were delighted by the decision to scrap the third runway. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the third runway had gone ahead, it would have imposed intolerable extra blight on those who live in west London?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When considering airport expansion, we must look at not only the economic benefits but the local environmental burdens and the impact on this Government's and the previous Government's commitments to CO_2 reduction.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State to his new position. I also welcome his comments about undertaking a review of aviation policy in the south-east because that suggests that the economic case has not been forgotten. Does he agree that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) said, when there is spare capacity in Paris, Schiphol and Frankfurt, and Dubai has built six runways, we run the risk of being disadvantaged not only by the rest of Europe, but by being bypassed by planes flying straight to the Americas from Asia through Dubai?

Mr Hammond: Heathrow is Britain's premier hub airport and we intend to ensure that it remains a major hub airport. We want to work with business and other stakeholders to ensure that Heathrow becomes better, not bigger, and that we protect its status.

Dartford Crossing

2. **Mr John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): If he will take steps to reduce congestion at the Dartford crossing. [2711]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Penning): The Department and the Highways Agency are committed to improving the levels of service experienced by users of the Dartford crossing. The Highways Agency and I will consider a package of measures, including better information and traffic management to help reduce the congestion at the Dartford crossing.

Mr Whittingdale: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, but is he aware that, since the tolls increased, the delays when approaching the tolling booths are anything up to 45 minutes and more? That causes enormous frustration to those who use the crossing, which is increased by the fact that the original intention was to scrap the tolls once the bridge was paid for rather than to put them up.

Mike Penning: My hon. Friend knows that I am personally aware of the problems at the Dartford crossing, having used it for many years. The £40 million net that we recover from the crossing is a significant income, but we need to consider technology that is being used in other parts of the world, particularly in Australia, so that we can remove the barriers and increase the speed at which traffic comes through while also picking up the revenue that the country desperately needs.

Airlines (Industrial Action)

3. **Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): What information his Department holds on the effect of industrial action involving airlines on the number of passengers on flights operated by those airlines. [2712]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mrs Theresa Villiers): The Department does not routinely monitor or hold information on airline passenger loads. However, most publicly listed UK airlines, including British Airways, regularly publish traffic and capacity statistics.

Caroline Lucas: Is the right hon. Lady aware of testimony from British Airways staff that British Airways has run commercially unviable flights in periods of industrial action, with low to zero numbers of passengers, to give the impression that it is unaffected by industrial action? Will you condemn any carrier for such environmentally unsustainable behaviour and investigate any report from BA staff?

Mr Speaker: I will neither condemn nor investigate, but the Minister might.

Mrs Villiers: It is clear that this Government are determined to provide encouragement to airlines to fly greener planes and to switch to flying fuller planes. That is what is behind the proposals we will make on reforming air passenger duty, and it will help to address the concerns around so-called ghost flights.

Turning to the hon. Lady's specific example, that is primarily a matter for British Airways. I understand from the airline that some planes flew with low passenger loads, some were freight-only, and some had only crew on board, to ensure that the aeroplanes were in the right place to resume passenger operations once the dispute ended. That is a concern to us because of the environmental impact of empty flights. Unfortunately, that is another negative consequence of the industrial dispute and another reason why I urge the parties to get back round the table to ensure that it is resolved as soon as possible to prevent a recurrence.

Concessionary Bus Fares

4. **Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): What plans he has for the future of the national concessionary bus fare scheme. [2713]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Norman Baker): The Government's commitment to protect free bus travel for older people is set out in the coalition agreement. The right to free bus travel for both older and disabled people is enshrined in primary legislation.

Clive Efford: Will the hon. Gentleman be the Government's conscience on the freedom pass, because when one looks at all the people who have tried to undermine it in the past, one realises that they have all been Conservatives. They have described the pass as a stealth tax, or said that it goes to the wrong people. Would it be a resigning issue for him if the scheme were to be watered down in any way, and will he keep a weather eye out for those nasty colleagues of his who always try to undermine the freedom pass?

Norman Baker: It is something of a record to ask a Minister whether he might consider resigning when he is answering his first departmental question. I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that the coalition—both parties—are committed to free bus travel for older people, as I set out. Indeed, that is enshrined in primary legislation, so I think that his fears are groundless.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): The Labour Government reduced the grant for the bus concessionary scheme in London by some £25 million quite late on in the process. Will the Minister confirm that the coalition will not do anything similar to the council tax payers of London?

Norman Baker: We have no plans to revisit the settlement for this year.

Mr William Bain (Glasgow North East) (Lab): I welcome the Minister and his colleagues to their appointments, and we wish them well in their responsibilities. It is hard not to notice that the Department is led by two former shadow Chief Secretaries to the Treasury, at least one of whom would rather like to be Chief Secretary to the Treasury, so the Opposition will be keeping a very careful eye on them to ensure that they are genuine advocates for modern transport infrastructure, and not holding office simply to wield the Chancellor's axe.

Will the Minister give the House a clear guarantee on two points on the concessionary travel scheme? Can he reassure the 11 million people who were given free bus travel under Labour that this Government will not introduce any new restrictions on when and how their passes can be used, and can he guarantee that there will be no means-testing for new recipients of free bus travel during the lifetime of this Parliament?

Norman Baker: The Opposition spokesman perhaps did not hear my original answer, which was that the Government are committed to protecting free bus travel for older people. That is set out very clearly in the coalition agreement and will be our policy.

5. **Mr Adrian Sanders** (Torbay) (LD): What recent representations he has received on the system of reimbursement to local authorities for their expenditure on the national concessionary bus fare scheme; and if he will make a statement. [2714]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Norman Baker): Department for Transport Ministers have recently received general representations about concessionary travel, including from local authority and bus operator representatives. Some of those representations have included funding issues.

Mr Sanders: I welcome my hon. Friend to his position. He will be aware that many councils have found it difficult to meet the full costs of the scheme. I successfully lobbied for extra money for my authority, but it is still out of pocket. While lobbying, I uncovered a report that suggested that significant savings could be made if the scheme were administered nationally, with the Government rather than lots of local authorities negotiating with the bus companies. Will he look at that idea to see whether savings can be made?

Norman Baker: The previous Government consulted on that very option, and only 23% of respondents were in favour of it, compared with a majority in favour of administration at county council level—the scheme that has now been adopted. The concern is that if the scheme were administered centrally, it might have an impact on the discretionary concessions offered by district councils. We could end up with a national system and local negotiations, thereby increasing administration costs.

Michael Connarty (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (Lab): The Minister will be aware that the decision to have a concessionary scheme in England had consequential effects on funding in Scotland through the Barnett formula. The scheme is already underfunded by the Scottish Government, so may I have an assurance that there will be no further cuts in funding in Scotland through the effect on the Barnett formula?

Norman Baker: I am happy to say that I am not an expert on the Barnett formula, and I advise the hon. Gentleman to await the outcome of the spending review.

Transport Services (Expenditure Reductions)

6. **Andrew George** (St Ives) (LD): What assessment has been made of the effects on front-line transport services of the announced expenditure reductions for his Department in 2010-11. [2715]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Philip Hammond): I can reassure my hon. Friend that this Government take protecting front-line services very seriously. However, we also take very seriously the need to deal with the unsustainable structural deficit we inherited. The Department for Transport is focusing on making its contribution to deficit reduction while supporting economic recovery and protecting priority areas.

Andrew George: Notwithstanding that answer, is the Secretary of State aware that the suspension of major schemes has meant that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency may not provide the Isles of Scilly ferry service with the necessary authority to continue? As the service has been 10 years in preparation, is 99% ready to go and is a lifeline for the Isles of Scilly, will he reconsider this issue?

Mr Hammond: Perhaps I can clarify what I have done. This scheme has conditional approval, and we have said that schemes with conditional approval or programme entry will have to await the outcome of the spending review before we can confirm them. My understanding is that Cornwall county council is still awaiting listed building consent, without which the scheme could not proceed anyway, but we are aware of the vital nature of the link to the Isles of Scilly and we will review the scheme as soon as the spending review has been completed.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment.

Two days ago in the other place, Lord Attlee stated that rail electrification could not be afforded. Does that mean that the Government reject the notion that investment in transport is essential to support economic recovery?

Mr Hammond: The Government are committed to rail electrification because of its carbon impact. However, as the hon. Lady will be aware, we have inherited a massive black hole in the public finances—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members can laugh, but the previous Government announced a halving of the public capital investment programme without giving any indication of where that cut would come. After the spending review, we will have to look at all these programmes in the light of their affordability and the urgent need to reduce the fiscal deficit.

Mr Rob Wilson (Reading East) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend meet me and a delegation from Reading borough council to discuss the continued funding of proposed transport changes that his announcement last week suggested might be suspended?

Mr Hammond: The only announcement that I made last week that affects the Reading scheme was about a local authority scheme for highway improvements around Reading station. That scheme will be reviewed following the outcome of the spending review, and my hon. Friend will learn the outcome in due course.

Sadiq Khan (Tooting) (Lab): May I genuinely welcome and congratulate the Secretary of State and the ministerial team on their new jobs? Good transport can be a driver of economic growth and I ask the Secretary of State to be a champion for transport, rather than treat his position as an application for his next job.

The Secretary of State will be aware that the rail network is carrying more passengers and more freight than at any time since the 1940s, and projections predict further growth. That is why we promised an additional 1,300 carriages by 2014 and we were well ahead of schedule in providing those. In fact, at the last

Transport questions, both Liberal Democrats and Conservatives asked us to provide more carriages even more quickly. Now that they are in government together, can the Secretary of State tell us how many more carriages than 1,300 they will provide and how much sooner than 2014?

Mr Hammond: I am genuinely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his congratulations.

The Department's principal task is to support economic growth and the Government's 2020 carbon reduction targets, and we have to demonstrate that we can deliver them in tandem. Approximately half the HLOS—high-level output specification—rolling stock has already been contracted and will proceed, but no further contracts will be signed during this financial year owing to the disastrous public finances. When the spending review is completed, we will review where we are with the programme and make a further announcement in due course.

Sadiq Khan: One would have thought that if the Secretary of State was serious about moving people from road to rail, he would encourage more carriages, so that people would be encouraged in turn to use the rail system. He will be aware that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) is a passionate advocate of reform of rail fares; in fact, in his last question at a Prime Minister's questions, he challenged the then Prime Minister to change the rail fares formula to 1% below inflation. I am sure that he remains a passionate advocate and is not simply window dressing, so now that they are hon. Friends, will the Secretary of State confirm how soon he will announce a change in the rail fare regime and how much below inflation it will be?

Mr Hammond: It is amazing that the right hon. Gentleman, who was a member of the last Government, appears to come to the Dispatch Box with no recognition of the deficit we are facing and the financial challenges that the Government have to deal with in order to clear up the mess that he and his hon. Friends left behind. We are committed to fair rail fares, but we have to do everything within the context of the fiscal inheritance that we have received.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I urge my right hon. Friend, when considering how best to expand rail, to consider branch lines off high-speed rail links to service some of the commuter towns disfranchised under the Beeching review.

Mr Hammond: Although we want to continue to increase passenger usage of the railways, we have to operate within a tightly constrained public spending environment. Our first priority must be to maintain and improve the trunk railway network that we have already. I will consider any proposals for reopening branch lines, but I have grave doubts about whether it is likely to be affordable in the foreseeable future.

Mr Speaker: Order. I gently point out that we need to make better progress, so short questions and short answers would be appreciated.

Mainline Electrification

7. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): What plans he has for the electrification of the mainline railway between Wales and London. [2716]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mrs Theresa Villiers): We support rail electrification because it helps to reduce carbon emissions and cut running costs. However, we are in the early stages of the new Government and Ministers are considering the full range of transport policy to ascertain what is affordable.

Kevin Brennan: I welcome the Minister to her post and thank her for her answer. In considering those matters, does she understand the importance of electrification on the line between Wales and London? I am glad that she did not simply repeat the mantra of her right hon. Friend, which is becoming as boring as a vuvuzela at the World cup—the one-note symphony we are getting from the Government. However, does she understand the importance of this kind of infrastructure? It is not just about the budget deficit, but about the future growth of the economy.

Mrs Villiers: I understand the importance of this issue, including in Wales, but the previous Government, of which the hon. Gentleman was a member, had 13 years to do this and failed. Just a few short years ago, the 30-year strategy they published for the railways had virtually no place for electrification. Then we had a last-minute change of mind, made at a point in the cycle when, as Labour's outgoing Chief Secretary made clear, there was very little money left. We support electrification—it was in our manifesto and the coalition agreement—and we will take forward those projects that are affordable in the light of the deficit left to us by the Government of which the hon. Gentleman was a member.

Roads

8. **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): What priorities he has set for departmental expenditure on the road network. [2717]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Philip Hammond): I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. He worked long and hard to win his seat and he thoroughly deserves the success that he has now enjoyed.

The first priority of this Government must be tackling the country's unsustainable level of debt. Once the spending review is complete and the Department has settled its budget, we will review all existing schemes, whether road or otherwise, on the basis of the economic benefits that they deliver.

Robert Halfon: Is the Secretary of State aware that Harlow has just one entrance to a motorway, whereas similar towns, such as Welwyn Garden City, have two or three and Basildon has four? Is he aware that traffic in Harlow is gridlocked and that residents in my constituency are crying out for an extra junction on the M11? With the road review under way, and when finances allow, will he give strong consideration to providing the road infrastructure that Harlow so desperately needs?

Mr Speaker: Order. I do apologise, but the questions are still too long. We are getting mini-essays. I want short questions.

Mr Hammond: I can tell my hon. Friend that we will be happy to consider proposals from local authorities and the Highways Agency for improvements, but he will understand that they will be affordable only once the deficit has been eliminated.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): A few moments ago, the Secretary of State said that one of the key priorities was supporting economic growth. How does suspending the decision on the Mersey Gateway project help economic growth in Merseyside and Cheshire, particularly given the support from the Conservative councils in Cheshire? And he should not give us that nonsense about a black hole in the finances.

Mr Hammond: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the black hole in the finances is nonsense, he needs to go back and do a little more homework. It is the most serious problem facing our country today and the most urgent challenge for this Government. However, let us be clear about the Mersey Gateway project. All we have done is suspend the progress of the scheme until after the current spending review is completed. We believe that it would be wrong to encourage or allow local authorities to incur significant additional expenditure on a large number of projects when some of them clearly may not be able to proceed on the original timetable.

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): Is my right hon. Friend going to treat the A1 as a national strategic road, rather than a regional road, and develop plans for full dualling of it when resources allow?

Mr Hammond: Yes.

Mr Speaker: We are grateful to the Secretary of State.

East London Line (Extension)

9. **Joan Ruddock** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Whether his Department's value for money evaluation of the proposed Surrey Canal Road station on the East London line extension has been completed. [2718]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mrs Theresa Villiers): We recognise the importance of Heathrow as the country's international hub airport—

Mr Speaker: Order. I think that the Minister has the wrong brief. I may be mistaken—if I am wrong, I apologise to her—but she is answering a question about the Surrey Canal Road station on the East London line. That is what is of interest to the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock).

Mrs Villiers: I apologise, Mr Speaker.

A value for money assessment of the proposed Surrey Canal Road station was carried out by Transport for London and Lewisham council last year. The Department for Transport has some concerns regarding the business case. I have asked officials to provide full advice on the matter and expect to make a decision in the near future.

Joan Ruddock: I welcome the right hon. Lady to her position, and I am grateful for that reply. However, she needs to remember that Transport for London has found that the proposal more than meets the business case that was applicable to all other stations in London, and that it is pivotal to the development of 2,500 new homes and to the job prospects of the 2.9 million people expected to use the station. Will she meet with me to see how to get the station built now, alongside the construction of the railway?

Mrs Villiers: I am happy to meet the right hon. Lady as soon as possible to discuss this important issue. She has fought hard on the campaign, and I am looking into the proposal with great care. I am discussing it with officials and, as I have said, I have asked them for extra briefing. It is important to take into account local views, TfL's views and the views of other stakeholders. However, I must also make it clear that we need to assess such programmes carefully for affordability, given the state of the public finances and the deficit that we have inherited from Labour.

Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): Does the Minister accept that this issue has a cross-borough and cross-constituency resonance, and that there is widespread support for the proposal across the parties? Will she meet all of us who have an interest in it? I hope that we shall be able to persuade her of its merits, because we have a very good case.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): Just say yes!

Mrs Villiers: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Excellent! Things are getting better.

Subsidised Bus Services

10. **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What guidance his Department issues to local authorities on the provision of subsidised bus services. [2719]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Norman Baker): In 2005, the Department published a document on its website detailing best practice in the process of tendering for subsidised bus services, along with examples of specimen conditions for contracts, as part of its wider guidance to local authorities. The guidance remains available, and there are currently no plans to update it. The Department's website also provides guidance on the de minimis rules for tendering.

Chi Onwurah: It was Baroness Thatcher who said that if a man finds himself on a bus at the age of 26, he is a failure. I assure the Minister that that is not the case in Newcastle, where the buses are an essential part of our economy. They are how we get to work. Will he assure us that, under the coalition Government, local authorities will have the powers to ensure that we have excellent bus services?

Norman Baker: We recognise that bus travel is the predominant form of public transport, and we want to encourage that. We also want to get better value for the

taxpayer and the fare payer from the bus services that are provided. We also recognise the good work that many local authorities do in dealing with bus services, and I particularly want to pay tribute to the Tyne and Wear integrated transport authority, which is designing a comprehensive bus network to improve standards of accessibility for local residents.

Sadiq Khan (Tooting) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his new role; I am sure that he will do an excellent job. We heard earlier that he had been unsuccessful in persuading his colleagues to change their views on carriages and rail fares. Has he had any more luck in changing their views on quality bus contracts? He will be aware that local authorities outside London want the same powers as those in London to choose to enter into quality bus contracts with bus operators. Local authorities around the country, led by all parties, are in favour of that, and so was the Minister before the election. Is he still in favour of it, and, if so, has he persuaded his colleagues to change their minds?

Norman Baker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind welcome. He was always considerate and helpful to me when I was in opposition, and I shall try to be equally helpful to him, now that the position has changed.

The legislation on quality contracts is as it is; it was set out and passed under the previous Government, and it remains in place. The Competition Commission is undertaking an investigation into the bus market, and it would be premature for me to make any further comments until it is completed.

Manchester Metrolink (Extensions)

11. **Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the merits of the 3a and 3b extensions to the Manchester Metrolink; and if he will make a statement. [2720]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Norman Baker): Phases 3a and 3b of the Manchester Metrolink were approved for funding by the previous Government. Construction of phase 3a is under way. Phase 3b has been re-examined following the announcement by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 May of a review of spending approval granted since 1 January this year.

Andrew Gwynne: With regard to the phase 3b contract for the Ashton-under-Lyne extension, it is important to note that substantial amounts of public funding have already been spent on the route, and significant advance works to provide dedicated strengthened central reserves and bridges have now been completed. Studies show that the East Manchester line will be commercially viable only if it goes all the way through to Ashton. Will the Minister confirm that all those issues will be factored into the review and that they will be carefully considered before a decision is made?

Norman Baker: The hon. Gentleman makes a number of pertinent points, and I understand the thrust of his argument and the strength of his case. I cannot give him a specific assurance at this precise moment, but I suggest that he will be interested to hear the statement that is shortly to be made from the Treasury Bench.

Speed Cameras

12. **Gareth Johnson** (Dartford) (Con): What his plans are for the future funding of new fixed speed cameras; and if he will make a statement. [2721]

15. **Richard Harrington** (Watford) (Con): What his Department's plans are for the future funding of fixed speed cameras; and if he will make a statement. [2724]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Penning): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 12 and 15 together. The Government will not provide—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am happy to allow the questions to be taken together, but this is the first that I have heard of it. The normal courtesy is that the Government notify me of this in advance. I shall let the Minister off on this occasion, but I do not want to see a repeat performance.

Mike Penning: I had been informed that these questions had been grouped, and I apologise to you if I was impertinent, Mr Speaker.

The Government will not provide any more money to local authorities for new fixed speed cameras. If authorities want to put up new fixed cameras, they are free to do so using their own resources, but we strongly encourage them to use other methods and effective safety measures.

Gareth Johnson: I am grateful for that reassurance. Does the Minister agree that when speed cameras are used more as a money-raising mechanism than as a road-safety measure, confidence in them will continue to fall?

Mike Penning: There are now three times as many speed cameras in this country as there were in 2000, and the public must be confident that speed cameras are there for road safety, not as a cash cow. Under this Government, they will be.

Mr Speaker: I call Richard Harrington. It appears that not only was I unaware of the grouping of questions 12 and 15, but the hon. Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), whom the grouping directly affects, was also unaware of it, as he is not present.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): Does the Minister not accept that the very good progress made in recent years in reducing the number of deaths and injuries on our roads is partly due to speed cameras, and that the income generated has been less than the money spent by the Government on speed cameras? Will he consider the introduction of more average-time distance speed cameras and making the existing speed cameras less conspicuous?

Mike Penning: The hon. Gentleman, a Minister in the previous Government and a former firefighter, is well aware of how speed cameras can protect the public. As a former firefighter myself, I know that speed has been part of the reason for many road traffic accidents, but not the sole reason for them. The growth of speed cameras has been so great that the public are concerned

about whether they are there for safety or to raise money for the Treasury. The Government will not put any more money in; if local authorities want to do so, that is okay. Intermittent and average speed cameras are in use, particularly on motorways, and are an excellent way of easing congestion on our motorways.

Topical Questions

T1. [2731] **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Philip Hammond): The Government's first priority is reducing the budget deficit left us by the previous Administration, and I am determined that the Department for Transport should play its full part in that process. Against that backdrop, my Department is focused on building a modern and sustainable transport system that will contribute both to future economic growth and to the achievement of the Government's climate change targets.

Fiona Mactaggart: When does the Secretary of State expect to receive Lord Mawhinney's report on Heathrow high-speed rail access? When he receives it, will he consult Slough, whose prosperity depends completely on its proximity to Heathrow?

Mr Hammond: I have asked Lord Mawhinney to let us have his preliminary conclusions by the end of July, and I will be happy to consult the hon. Lady's local authority once I have received that report from him.

T3. [2733] **Simon Hughes** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): As Ministers work out how best to transfer travel from plane to train, where that is possible, will they prioritise talks with European colleagues to make sure that the European rail network works and with colleagues in this country to make sure that high-speed rail will allow people to go through the capital without having to change trains?

Mr Hammond: I thank my hon. Friend, who makes a very important point. Now that we have made it clear that there will be no third runway at Heathrow airport, modal shift from air to rail becomes crucially important, including for journeys through to Europe. I have asked HS2 Ltd to look at the options and the costs of providing a direct link from the proposed HS2 to the existing high-speed rail network to the Channel tunnel.

T2. [2732] **Mr Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow) (Lab): I cannot stress enough the importance of the Tyne and Wear metro to the people of the north-east—in respect of the economy, the environment and the general quality of life. The previous Government pledged £350 million to upgrade the scheme, so will the Minister acknowledge the importance of the Tyne and Wear metro and tell us whether he is going to honour that pledge?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Norman Baker): I do acknowledge the importance of the Tyne and Wear metro, just as I acknowledge the difficult financial position the Government are in. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman wait for the Treasury statement later this morning.

Gavin Barwell (Croydon Central) (Con): My constituents do not want the pollution that additional runways at Heathrow, Stansted and Gatwick would entail, but they do want shorter queues, fewer delays and better service. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are plenty of ways of achieving that through improving operations at those airports?

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mrs Theresa Villiers): I very much agree with my hon. Friend. That is why the Secretary of State has established a taskforce to look into the ways we can make good on our promise to make Heathrow better. We have rejected a third runway because of the huge environmental damage it would cause, but there is more we can do to improve the regulatory structure and we are bringing forward legislation on that to incentivise the airports to focus on the quality of service for passengers. We need to keep security measures under review so that passengers are kept safe and we can mitigate the hassle that those measures cause. We need to work with the stakeholders and the airlines to get the right solution to integrate high-speed rail with Heathrow, to provide a viable alternative to having many short-haul flights and to relieve overcrowding problems at the airport.

T5. [2737] **John Robertson** (Glasgow North West) (Lab): What is happening about the sell-off of BAA, its monopoly—particularly north of the border—and the imposition on passengers, especially in Glasgow, of charges for being picked up after their holiday flights, and the requirement to walk for an exorbitant distance? It is an absolute disgrace, and it is time that such companies were brought to book and made to compete.

Mrs Villiers: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to a consumer issue which, I know, greatly concerns his constituents and many other users of that airport. It is just the type of issue that we hope our new airport regulation Bill will address. We intend to give airports stronger incentives to look after and respond to their customers.

The proceedings of the Competition Commission in relation to the ownership of various airports around the country are a matter for the commission, but we have often highlighted the benefits that diversity of ownership in the United Kingdom airport sector can yield to customers.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): Is the Minister aware that Arriva buses recently introduced a completely new network and timetable in Milton Keynes? At a public meeting last Friday many of my constituents, especially pensioners, told me that they had been greatly inconvenienced by the changes, and that they had not been properly consulted. Will the Minister do all that he can to ensure that operators consult their passengers properly before introducing such radical changes?

Norman Baker: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We ought to ensure that bus companies work with the grain of local people's interests. We are considering the period within which bus companies must give notification of new timetables.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): Will the Minister reassure us that in considering any spending review relating to funds for the Tyne and Wear metro, he will take account of the need to preserve an existing structure which—unlike many other capital projects—is more than 30 years old, desperately requires reinvigoration, and is vital to the community in Newcastle and throughout the north-east?

Norman Baker: As I said a moment ago to the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr Hepburn), we understand the importance of the Tyne and Wear metro to the area. I suggest that the hon. Lady wait for the statement that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury will make later this morning.

Mr John Leech (Manchester, Withington) (LD): May I urge the Secretary of State to accept the recommendations of the North review and, as a matter of urgency, present proposals for a reduction in the drink-drive limit from 80 to 50 mg?

Mr Philip Hammond: Sir Peter North has delivered a comprehensive report, containing 51 recommendations, on issues relating to driving under the influence of drink or drugs. The Government will consult other Departments on the implications of the recommendations, and we will announce our position in due course.

Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab): In April, when Jarvis was placed in administration, Network Rail cancelled millions of pounds of track renewal contracts on the east coast main line. We have recently been reminded of the Potters Bar rail accident. That track renewal work must go ahead. Will the Minister arrange for me to meet Iain Coucher—along with Members representing other constituencies where many workers have been made redundant as a result of the cuts—so that we can discuss with him the timetable for reinstating the track renewal contracts with other companies?

Mr Hammond: The Office of Rail Regulation is responsible for ensuring that the railway is managed safely, and that works that are required for its safety go ahead. The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that shortly before Question Time, Network Rail announced that Iain Coucher would be stepping down from his role. For that reason it would not be practical for me to arrange a meeting with him, but I should be happy to try to facilitate a meeting with another appropriate representative of Network Rail.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that he will protect runway alternation at Heathrow?

Mrs Villiers: I can give that confirmation. We support the current protections of runway alternation. We defeated Labour's proposals for mixed mode when we were in opposition, and we will not revive them now that we are in government.

Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): Does the new, post-bureaucratic age of transparency extend to a commitment to publish bus and rail timetables in digital format for open public reuse?

Mrs Villiers: We are looking at that issue at the moment. I think there are considerable benefits to be gained from a more open approach to timetabling, and I would be delighted to have a discussion with the hon. Gentleman if he wants to give me further indications of his ideas on this, so that we can ensure we get the maximum benefits for passengers.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Vehicle excise duty remains unpaid on 2 million vehicles, 80% of which are uninsured and 70% of which are owned by people with criminal convictions. Given that these vehicles kill 160 people a year and injure 23,000, may we have a crackdown?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Penning): My hon. Friend raises a very important point, but vehicle recognition technology is now moving forward. I have recently been in police vehicles where we have been able to pick up where other vehicles have not had MOTs and insurance, and I am asking the Association of Chief Police Officers lead on this, whom I met yesterday, to clamp down as hard as possible.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): Brake, the road safety charity, has said that cutting Government funding for speed cameras will lead to blood on our roads. Why is the Minister cutting the funding for them, given that they would raise revenue during the forthcoming age of austerity, and how is Wakefield council supposed to put new ones in when it has just had a £1 million cut to its road safety grant?

Mike Penning: Local authorities have the powers to spend the money as they wish, and if they wish to spend it on more speed cameras that is entirely within their remit. There are other ways in which lives can be saved. I have looked at what Brake says, but I disagree. Such cameras should not be a cash cow. This should not be determined by issues to do with raising tax. It should be about safety; that is the important thing.

Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): May I welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to his new position? Does he agree with me in principle that those people whose homes have been blighted by Labour's preferred route for high-speed rail should be fully compensated, rather than at the 85% of value as proposed by Labour?

Mr Philip Hammond: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question. One of the first decisions I took in my new post was to extend the consultation on the exceptional hardship scheme. That consultation closes today and we will publish our conclusions in due course.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

Parliamentary Representation

1. **Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Deputy Prime Minister on constitutional reforms to increase the representation of women and ethnic minorities in Parliament. [2700]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister for Women and Equalities (Mrs Theresa May): With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to notify the House that, given the cross-cutting nature of the women and equalities agenda, I may be joined on the Front Bench for future questions not only by the Minister for Equalities, but also by the Minister with responsibility for race equality, the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Andrew Stunell), who is present in the Chamber today, and by the Minister with responsibility for disabled people, the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Maria Miller) and the Minister with responsibility for pensions, the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Thornbury and Yate (Steve Webb), in order to allow Members to receive answers from the Minister with responsibility for the issue under discussion so that we can look at the wider equalities agenda.

On the question, I welcome the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) to the House, and I am pleased to say that following the recent general election there are now more women and black and minority ethnic Members of Parliament in the House. I am particularly delighted that across the governing parties there are now 56 women MPs and 11 MPs from an ethnic minority background, but we do need to do more, and I will be talking to the Deputy Prime Minister to ensure that this issue is a matter of concern when we look at our constitutional reform agenda.

Emma Reynolds: I am proud to be one of the 81 Labour women MPs in the House, and it is clear that my party has done more than any other to increase the representation of women and ethnic minorities in this House, but progress is far too slow still. As part of the apparently far-reaching constitutional reform package, what will the Government do to make sure this House reflects the people we serve?

Mrs May: As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made clear in his speech of 19 May, our agenda for constitutional and political reform will be a power revolution because it will be a fundamental resettlement of the relationship between the state and the citizen, but it would be a mistake for anybody to assume that constitutional reform in itself can bring about an increased diversity of representation in this House. The first responsibility for ensuring diversity of representation rests with political parties, and with political parties taking action to ensure we have a greater diversity of candidates, and I am very proud to have been involved in the action that the Conservative party took to ensure we have a much greater diversity of Members of Parliament on our Benches.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): The Minister is absolutely right to say that constitutional reform is not the only way to improve representation within this House. Many suggestions were put forward in the excellent Speaker's Conference report, which this House considered in the last Parliament, such as a democracy diversity fund to help candidates to stand for election where there might otherwise be barriers, and reforms to this House. Will she be taking forward some of the recommendations in the Speaker's Conference report?

Mrs May: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question and I pay tribute to her for the role that she played in the Speaker's Conference and to the work that was done by the Speaker's Conference. As she will be aware, the last Government responded to the report and we responded to it when we were in opposition. We will now consider how to take forward some of the proposals made by the Speaker's Conference—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members should have a little patience. They are shouting "What?" and I am just about to tell them, if they wait. We have made an early commitment as part of our coalition agreement to introduce extra support, particularly for disabled people who want to become MPs, councillors or other elected representatives.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The Home Secretary is absolutely right that there are now more Members from ethnic minorities in the House of Commons—26—than at any time in the history of this country. Sadly, the only party that does not have any ethnic minority MPs is, of course, the Liberal Democrats. The leader of the Liberal Democrats supported my private Member's Bill to allow all-ethnic minority shortlists. Would the Home Secretary support that Bill if I was to introduce it to the House? She is right—it is up to the political parties to make the changes.

Mrs May: In a sense, I think that the right hon. Gentleman has slightly contradicted himself by suggesting that legislation is the way forward rather than the encouragement of political parties. I am pleased that as part of the 26, we have 11 Conservative Members of Parliament from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, which is a significant increase at the last election. It is right that all political parties need to do more on this issue and that all political parties need to consider the processes that they are using to select their candidates. There is a role for us all in trying to go out there to ensure that people in black and minority ethnic communities see this place as somewhere that is for them, so that they want to come and represent constituencies in this House. That is a job that we can all do.

Parental Leave

2. **Julian Smith** (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): What recent discussions she has had on plans to reform arrangements for parental leave; and if she will make a statement. [2701]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister for Women and Equalities (Mrs Theresa May): I have had several discussions with Cabinet colleagues and these will continue. We are committed to encouraging the involvement of both parents from the earliest stages of pregnancy, including the promotion of a system of flexible parental leave. Indeed, as we speak my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is making a speech on families and family policy in which he will confirm this commitment.

Julian Smith: May I urge my right hon. Friend to consider the needs of and challenges faced by small business employers as well as employees as she develops this legislation?

Mrs May: I can confirm that we will do that. I am conscious that it is important that we ensure that business is consulted when we are introducing such changes to

ensure that we can introduce them in as bureaucratically and administratively light a way as possible so that the impact on small businesses is not too great. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will announce this morning that the childhood and families taskforce that he is setting up will consider this matter and consult on how to put it into place.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): Has the Home Secretary had a chance to read the Prime Minister's excellent article in the *Financial Times* in which he says that the priority for Europe must be full equality in the workplace? I welcome that. Is the Cabinet a workplace, and when will half of it consist of women?

Mrs May: That was a somewhat disappointing question from the right hon. Gentleman. As he will know, the proportion of women who are full members of the Cabinet under the coalition Government is exactly the same as the proportion of women who were full members of the Cabinet under the Labour Government.

Violence Against Women

3. **Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to tackle violence against women. [2702]

6. **Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to tackle violence against women. [2705]

The Minister for Equalities (Lynne Featherstone): I welcome the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) to his place. Violence against women and girls remains prevalent in our society. This is unacceptable and a cross-Government strategy is the best way to address this. I look forward to discussing with colleagues across Government how we will take forward our approach in this area.

Mr Jones: I thank the Minister for that answer. During the previous football World cup in 2006, there was a 30% rise in domestic violence on the days that England played. What assurances can my hon. Friend provide the House that women will be protected, especially during the current tournament?

Lynne Featherstone: The Home Secretary recently stated that such violence is not acceptable under any circumstances, and even the World cup does not give perpetrators the slightest excuse to be violent. The Association of Chief Police Officers wrote to all police forces in May to advise them that they should be aware of that and of the possibility of violence during the World cup. Forces were asked to consider what measures they could implement, and a range of recommendations were taken forward, including visiting the 10 most likely offenders from previous experience.

Andrew Stephenson: Does my hon. Friend recognise the advantages of taking a coherent, cross-departmental approach to tackling violence against women, particularly in relation to forced marriages?

Lynne Featherstone: Yes, we do recognise that. Violence against women cannot be dealt with by one Department alone, as it cuts across the whole of government. On forced marriage, we all supported the original Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007, which was brought forward by my noble Friend Lord Lester of Herne Hill. We will do all we can to work cross-departmentally to make sure that we attack forced marriage, which is unacceptable.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): Rape is an act of violence against both women and men, and for both women and men who are victims of rape, it is often their lack of confidence in coming forward that prevents people from being brought to justice. What are the implications of the proposals to extend anonymity to defendants in rape trials on the confidence of male and female victims in coming forward?

Lynne Featherstone: Obviously, the conviction rate in this country is not good enough and needs to be improved, and the last thing that we want is for fewer victims to come forward, but we have not yet seen compelling evidence that offering anonymity to defendants would reduce those reporting rates. The attitude that the victim is somehow responsible is prevalent in this country, and that is something that we will be looking at. I assure the right hon. Lady that we will be looking at all the options in terms of addressing this issue and debating it in the House.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Lynne Featherstone) on her appointment as the Minister for Equalities, and I congratulate the Home Secretary on hers as the Minister for Women and Equalities. The Opposition will be very keen to work with them on areas in which we can help to support women and to promote equalities.

I am sorry that the Home Secretary did not answer this question, as she will be aware of the extent of concern about the Government's proposals on rape. Will she therefore write to me in reply, in addition to her hon. Friend's response? I wrote to the Home Secretary on 27 May, in her capacity as the Minister for Women and Equalities, about the Government's proposal to introduce anonymity for rape defendants. I received a reply from her officials making it clear that this was not seen as her responsibility and that it was being sent instead to the Ministry of Justice. I urge her to rethink that approach because she will know, as the Minister for Women and Equalities and as Home Secretary, that according to the British crime survey, 93% of rape victims are women. Singling out rape uniquely as a crime for which defendants need greater protection against false allegations sends strong and troubling signals about the way that women should be treated in the justice system. I urge her to reconsider this issue and to say whether she thinks it is right for defendants in rape trials to be treated uniquely differently from defendants in other serious crimes.

Lynne Featherstone: I assure the right hon. Lady that we definitely see this as an issue for women and equalities, albeit that it resides ultimately in the Ministry of Justice legislatively, and that the Home Secretary will contact her directly regarding her questions.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Does the Minister accept that a large number of victims of domestic violence are men? Given that she is a Minister in the Government Equalities Office, will she confirm that the Government treat domestic violence against men just as seriously as domestic violence against women?

Lynne Featherstone: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpful contribution. I am, indeed, the Minister for Equalities, and both men and women are included in that. Some 4% of men are victims of domestic violence, and given that the figure for women is 6%, those figures are not so disparate.

Science and Technology

4. **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): If she will take steps to increase the proportion of people entering careers in science and technology who are women. [2703]

The Minister for Equalities (Lynne Featherstone): We are absolutely committed to working with teachers and careers advisers to encourage more young women to enter careers in science, engineering and technology, and to supporting British business to increase opportunities for professional women in this sector. The science and technology sector is critical to the UK economy, and women have an enormous contribution to make.

Chi Onwurah: I thank the Minister for her reply. When I entered Imperial college to study engineering, the proportion of women in engineering was about 12%. More than 25 years later, that proportion is almost exactly the same. Does the Minister agree that that represents a huge failure in the science and engineering establishment of this country and that now, when we need to rebalance our economy towards engineering and science, urgent measures are required?

Lynne Featherstone: Yes, I agree with the hon. Lady, who is an excellent role model in her field, and I should be happy to talk with her if she has ideas to share with me. It is important that we take this forward. Many companies have already taken action to increase the numbers of women in their work force, but we are clearly not moving fast enough. British Gas has been quite good. It has doubled its work force of women engineers by recruiting women and retraining them. We have to move further and we have to move faster.

Flexible Working

5. **Karen Lumley** (Redditch) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the effects of flexible working arrangements on gender equality in the workplace. [2704]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister for Women and Equalities (Mrs Theresa May): I thank my hon. Friend for her question. Flexible working is positive for businesses because it helps them keep valued members of staff. The evidence is clear that flexible working arrangements benefit women, by helping them to balance their caring responsibilities. The coalition Government are united on extending the right to request flexible working; indeed, we have a commitment to do so in the coalition agreement. We will launch a consultation with business at the earliest opportunity.

Karen Lumley: Will my right hon. Friend comment on what wider social benefits the Government believe will result from the extension of flexible working rights?

Mrs May: I am happy to do so, although we should make more of the fact that there are considerable benefits to businesses in providing flexible working, including keeping valued members of staff, attracting members of staff and being able to dip into the widest possible pool of talent. There are enormous social benefits for families when both women and men can better balance their home and work responsibilities through flexible working arrangements. We have seen that already. There are enormous benefits for children when parents are able to spend more time with them.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): Will the Minister consider looking at the experience of countries such as Norway and Sweden where, as part of promoting greater flexibility and general equality, the Governments have introduced a whole month of parental leave that fathers have to take? This has increased the number of men taking parental leave and helped promote greater equality in the workplace. Will she consider that, as the Government look at their reform of parental leave?

Mrs May: I welcome the hon. Lady to the House. The proposals that we put forward in opposition on flexible parental leave—we are now looking at how we take those forward and improve the arrangements for parents and maternity leave—gave a better offer to men than the one month's paternity leave that she cites from Norway. It enabled couples to decide who would take the leave that was available and stay at home with the baby after it was born. So I think we can offer fathers and mothers a better opportunity than the hon. Lady suggests.

Legal Aid Payments

11.33 am

Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will make a statement on the consequences of the timing of legal aid payments to the charity Refugee and Migrant Justice.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Kenneth Clarke): Refugee and Migrant Justice entered into administration earlier this week. It wrote to me a month ago warning me of the risk, and has since made requests for substantial assistance from public funds. The organisation was one of many that provide legal advice and representation to individuals on asylum and immigration matters funded by legal aid. The Legal Services Commission is confident that there is widespread provision of legal advice in this area and that overall capacity will not be affected by the closure of Refugee and Migrant Justice. More than 250 offices nationally are currently providing this type of service.

It may help if I explain the background to this unfortunate situation. The Legal Services Commission has worked closely with Refugee and Migrant Justice for the last few years to help the organisation to make the change to a system of payment based on units of work, the graduated fees scheme. As a result, Refugee and Migrant Justice has received substantial support—over and above the support given to not-for-profit and other organisations—to help it transfer to the current payment system.

However, it is crucial that the Government achieve value for public money. The fixed fee system introduced three years ago by the last Government is already being successfully used by the vast majority of not-for-profit organisations in this area of law. As other organisations have successfully made the transition, it is only reasonable to expect Refugee and Migrant Justice to do the same.

It has been suggested, and is implied in the hon. Gentleman's question, that under this system payments to Refugee and Migrant Justice have been delayed. It is not a question of any late payments. Refugee and Migrant Justice was paid what was due. However, it did not make the efficiency savings that other providers made.

There is significant long-term interest in the work from other providers, both not-for-profit organisations and private solicitor firms. The Legal Services Commission is currently running a tender round for new contracts for immigration and asylum services from October 2010. There has been an increase in the number of offices applying to do the work. Providers have also bid to handle more than double the amount of cases currently available. It would be wrong to divert legal aid funds to one of the bidders in the middle of the bidding process.

In my opinion, given this unfortunate situation, the highest priority must be the vulnerable clients of Refugee and Migrant Justice. Now that the organisation has left the market, the Legal Services Commission will work with it and other providers to seek to minimise disruption and ensure that clients continue to receive a service. I have checked this morning and I can assure the House that the LSC is working closely with the administrators to ensure that any disruption to clients is minimised. Even today, LSC staff have prioritised the approximately 20 clients of Refugee and Migrant Justice who have court appearances.

The Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly), will ensure that LSC staff continue to prioritise that area. He and I agree that the main task now is to ensure that the interests of that vulnerable group are properly protected and that no one is left without the legal assistance they require.

Simon Hughes: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his full and careful response. On behalf of colleagues who have huge numbers of asylum and immigration cases involving people who use those services, may I say that I hope he appreciates the importance of the subject to them and to our constituents?

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that currently—so I am advised—13,000 clients are being looked after by Refugee and Migrant Justice, including nearly 1,000 children, who are of course very vulnerable? Does he accept, too, that the reason for the financial problem is the change in the payment system? Although there has been a reduction in income because the payment system has changed, Refugee and Migrant Justice has also reduced its costs by the same amount—I am advised that it is by 40%—and is now being paid in arrears rather than up front, a system that the Law Society and immigration law practitioners have said is unsustainable. I should be grateful if, in time, the Secretary of State would discuss with those organisations how we might improve the system.

Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman give an assurance that he or his hon. Friend, the Under-Secretary of State will make sure that all clients who have been the responsibility of the organisation are given the assurance that their cases will be fully looked after in the immediate days ahead? Are there any other charities in the field with the same sort of problem? If so, there needs to be some continuing and widened support. Will he or our hon. Friend be willing to meet those of us with a direct interest, and the organisations where appropriate, to make sure that there is a stable and secure footing in the years and months ahead for this most important legally aided work?

Mr Clarke: I am grateful to the hon. Member. Certainly the problem arose as a result of the change to the graduated fees scheme in 2007, but I do not accept that the failure was necessarily caused by that. Every other organisation, including the other not-for-profit organisations, has coped with this. I do not criticise the 2007 decision, but it was designed to improve the efficiency of the use of public funds in providing large amounts of money to give legal aid to those making asylum claims or facing threats of deportation, or whatever. As far as I am aware, this is the only organisation that proved in the end unable to manage its affairs and its finances to avoid the demise that has occurred.

I know that the system is not popular; I know that the Law Society does not like it, but in these difficult times I am not going to go back on it, because it does provide value for money. We have just invited tenders under the system, and the number of people who want to provide services in this area has actually gone up.

Mr Speaker: Order. May I ask the Secretary of State to turn to address the House? I want to hear his mellifluous tones.

Mr Clarke: Amongst many others, Mr. Speaker, so I will certainly address the House.

I agree with the hon. Member that the main problem now is the vulnerable clients up and down the country. We think that there is a wind-off process going on; Refugee and Migrant Justice is still, of course, entitled to be paid for the work going on, but I have asked the Legal Services Commission to pay very strong attention to that. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will be giving more attention to that today, to make sure that there is no problem occurring. Certainly one of us will meet the hon. Member and other interested Members, although we may have to take advice on whether we can properly meet them in the middle of the bidding process. This is complicated by the fact that we were in the middle of a bidding contest, which means that one cannot suddenly divert lots of money to one of the bidders.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): May I first apologise on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw), who is out of London today but who takes an interest in these matters generally?

This is a major first: we have the deputy leader of one of the governing parties challenging his own Government on the Floor of the House. I look forward to more of that in the future from the Liberal Democrats.

The policy of returning people under 18 years old to safe places in countries such as Afghanistan was introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) when he was Home Secretary, and we support it, but it was introduced on the basis of ensuring that there was fair legal representation, of quality, for those who were potentially being deported. Will the Lord Chancellor take steps today to assess, as I think he has already, the viability of Refugee and Migrant Justice, and ensure that this is not just a cash-flow problem? If it is a cash-flow problem, will he ensure that he examines it as a matter of urgency?

Will the Lord Chancellor also meet his right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to look at the issues of joint tendering? I understand that there is tendering for this type of service involving both Departments, and I think there needs to be some consideration of that. Will he particularly look at the points made by the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes) in relation to the client group who are now potentially left without legal representation, so that we ensure that they receive proper representation of quality and are not forced to undertake representation with, potentially, providers who are not giving the level of service that we would expect?

Finally, in the longer term, will the Lord Chancellor look at the Legal Services Commission as a whole? One thing that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn wished to do was to look at providing for that organisation to become an executive agency as a matter of urgency. We noticed that that was not included in the Gracious Speech; had our party secured government, it would have been. I should be grateful if, in the longer term, the Lord Chancellor looked at those issues for the House.

Mr Clarke: First, I doubt that my hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes) was asking a particularly aggressive question; he was rightly seeking some more information about a worrying situation, and I do not think the two of us actually disagreed. In any event, coalition government should give us—certainly those of us in the House not bound by collective responsibility—the opportunity to give up the fatuous media convention that every member of every party automatically agrees with every other member of the same party on each and every issue, which the public have never believed anyway.

To return to the more serious question, the organisation is now in administration, so whether it is even remotely possible to rescue its finances is properly a question for the administrators, not for us. It appears to have got into very serious trouble because, over the past month, it asked for large sums to be paid from the legal aid fund for things such as rent. I have already stressed—I accept that the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) was making the same point as my hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark—that we must look at the client group and ensure that there is no hiatus in the representation of children and others who were looking to the body, but I think that that can be done.

We rather supported the previous Government's indications that the LSC should be examined and that consideration should be given to making it an agency, because we must be clear about where policy making is proceeding in the area. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that that is actively in hand, because we have to face difficult issues under the legal aid heading. The matter did not make the Queen's Speech because important though it is to him, me and many others who look for proper representation in our courts, it was a bit too detailed.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. May I appeal to Members for short questions and short answers? I remind the House that we have business questions to follow, as well as two further statements and a heavily subscribed debate.

Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): I was extremely disappointed by the statement. Complacency seemed to be there; the good samaritan was certainly not. On behalf of those who worked out of the Ipswich office, and in the absence of any other east of England Member wishing to speak, may I ask the Secretary of State to confirm that Members of Parliament who represent predominantly urban seats will find that their work load increases as a consequence of the situation?

Mr Clarke: With the greatest respect, we face a lot of demands on legal aid. Public money should be used to provide individuals with the legal representation they require, but we cannot suddenly start diverting huge sums out of the legal aid budget to bail out a voluntary body that got itself into a financial mess because it did not make the adjustments for the 2007 system that everyone else succeeded in making. I underline the point that plenty of people—both not-for-profit bodies and professionals—want to provide such services and that an increasing number are trying to get into the market. We are ensuring that no one is left without the representation they require.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Some of us on the Labour Benches did not support the previous Government's cuts to legal aid in this area because, as representatives of inner-city areas, we realised that there were few specialist immigration solicitors. Will the Lord Chancellor ask the LSC to consider an emergency franchising of those firms that have expertise so that the casework may be dealt with? The problem is the casework that is not being done by RMJ, so how do we help people now?

Mr Clarke: We will not go back on the graduated fees scheme. It might well be that the previous Government will not have been the only one who had to examine what could be done to improve the efficiency of the legal aid scheme and to address its costs, although I realise that that will not be altogether popular.

There are a lot of specialist firms, although there could no doubt be more. The number of firms bidding has gone up in the present contract round, with 330 organisations bidding for twice the amount of work available. However, I will ask the LSC to consider whether something like the right hon. Gentleman's proposal might be required in particular cities or areas.

Stephen Mosley (City of Chester) (Con): I think that part of the problem is that this is not an isolated situation. One of my constituents is owed £11,000 from the past financial year by the LSC. Yesterday, I received an e-mail from the policy consultant of NAGALRO, the professional association for family court advisers and independent social work practitioners, to say that some of its workers are owed more than £15,000 from the previous year—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I gently say to the hon. Gentleman—he is a new Member and these things take time—that an urgent question of this kind is narrowly focused on a particular organisation operating in a given area and that questions and answers must be confined to that? We have heard the hon. Gentleman, and I call the Secretary of State to make a brief reply.

Mr Clarke: We have inherited a few problems in this area, and we are reviewing policy, so I will take on board the very helpful comments of my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Stephen Mosley).

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I think the right hon. and learned Gentleman is confusing quantity with quality when it comes to legal advice on asylum and immigration. Just because there are lots of people coming forward to provide it, it does not mean to say that they are providing good services. Every day in my constituency work I see people who are not getting good advice. Does he agree that it is a false economy for people to go to firms that will not provide them with the service they need? It just means that they then go through the appeals process and make further representations, and that clogs up the system. We should focus on getting reputable organisations, such as the one in question, up and running and providing the services that people need.

Mr Clarke: The contract operation is based on both quality and quantity. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and I will certainly ensure that the Legal Services Commission follows through on the fact that there are meant to be quality standards; it is not just a matter of making bids for the work. However, we cannot intervene and take money out of the legal aid fund to rescue one voluntary body. That body is briefing everybody through very extensive public relations activity: archbishops are writing to me, and everybody seems to be informed that the body has gone broke, but someone is still producing a great deal of campaigning material on its behalf. It does very valuable work, but it is no good diverting money from the fund to it because it is the only one that has gone bust.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): What this high-quality body has done is highlight a problem that is not restricted to it. In my constituency, which has high immigration advice need, there is no LSC-funded adviser. Will the Secretary of State bring together those Members who have a large number of such cases to discuss with him whether there are better ways of funding immigration advice in our constituencies?

Mr Clarke: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and I will be only too happy to meet the Members of Parliament particularly affected by the issue. We will have to take advice on whether we will be subject to any kind of legal review if we do that in the middle of the bidding process but, subject to that, we would welcome advice from Members who have particularly large numbers of such cases to deal with, because we will have to look at the whole provision of legal aid in this and other areas.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): The right hon. and learned Gentleman has made much of the fact that this is the only voluntary body that has found itself in such difficulties. Does he recognise the volume of immigration and asylum work that has been done and that has to be done? He suggests that other comparable bodies have not found themselves in such a situation; can he name some of those that particularly relate to immigration and asylum?

Mr Clarke: The trust that folded had a 7% market share. It was, of course, part of the old advisory service, which was split up some time ago. The other half of the old advisory service is to get a much bigger market share—over 20%. We are talking about a policy of the last Government, and one with which I do not disagree. The graduated fee scheme was introduced in order to get better value for money out of the legal aid scheme, and everybody had to adjust to it. So far as I am aware, the body is the only one that is in great financial difficulties. In a way, it would have been very awkward for us if it folded after we had awarded the contracts. We would have been in a mess if we had discovered that we had awarded a contract to a financially insecure organisation that went down once we were relying on it to do the work. As far as I am aware, everyone else who is bidding is, I hope, in a sound financial state.

Mr George Mudie (Leeds East) (Lab): I accept the Secretary of State's calm approach, and his objective of looking after customers, but I wonder about the accuracy of that. In Leeds, vulnerable people have great difficulty getting representation. We are talking about matters of life and death to those individuals. Will he spell out how he will assure them and this Chamber that no one will

go forward without proper representation? In Leeds there is real difficulty, even with the organisation working, to meet the need in the market. How will pulling this firm out of the market help those people to get representation?

Mr Clarke: The LSC tells us that it has full cover for the work. It made a special intervention in 22 cases in which there were court appearances today to make sure that there was representation. I have no reason to doubt that the LSC is on top of the problem, but my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will spend the rest of the day reassuring us that the LSC and our Department are doing everything they reasonably can to make sure that there is no difficult transition for any of the vulnerable people concerned.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Very briefly from now on.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State provide me and other Members who have a real interest in this issue with regular updates on what is happening? I appreciate his offer to meet us, and the fact that he says he is working to make sure that people have the representation they need meanwhile, but we need that information, too, so that we can share it with our constituents and the organisations involved in providing help and support to asylum seekers and people with immigration cases.

Mr Clarke: We will certainly consider that request carefully. Of course, if the hon. Lady or any other Member asks for specific information, or says that they do not have enough information, we will certainly do our best to respond and give the information required.

Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State quantify the additional tax-funded resources that have been allocated to support asylum seekers who are affected by the problem?

Mr Clarke: I have to say that I do not yet have at my fingertips the precise increase in recent years in legal aid dependent on immigration cases, or the additional amounts that may have been provided in recent years, but initial amounts of funding were provided for a very large number of purposes by the last Government, and most of those cases are now having to be looked at again.

Business of the House

11.56 am

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster Central) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir George Young): The business for the week commencing 21 June will include:

MONDAY 21 JUNE—General debate on the strategic defence and security review.

TUESDAY 22 JUNE—My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will open his Budget statement.

WEDNESDAY 23 JUNE AND THURSDAY 24 JUNE—Continuation of the Budget debate.

The provisional business for the week commencing 28 June will include:

MONDAY 28 JUNE—Conclusion of the Budget debate.

TUESDAY 29 JUNE— Opposition day (2nd allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion, subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 30 JUNE— General debate on the progress and prospects in energy efficiency.

THURSDAY 1 JULY—General debate on global poverty.

Hon. Members will wish to be reminded that the House will meet at 11.30 am on Tuesday 22 June.

I should also like to inform the House of business in Westminster Hall:

THURSDAY 1 JULY—A debate entitled "Supporting carers to have a life outside caring".

Ms Winterton: I thank the Leader of the House for setting out the forthcoming business.

If there are any statements to be made next week, can we make sure that we do not have a repeat of last week's discourtesy to the House, when General Sir Jock Stirrup's departure was announced in the Sunday papers, and by the Secretary of State for Defence on television, but was not even mentioned in the Prime Minister's statement to the House on Monday? That is hardly the way to treat the Chief of the Defence Staff.

If there are not any planned statements, could the Leader of the House check with the Cabinet whether there ought to be, given that this week the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is becoming something of a serial offender in this respect, again had to be summoned to the House because once again he wanted to make a key announcement, but not to Members of Parliament? We understand that the Chancellor had suggested that the new Chief Secretary to the Treasury might have an airing, but thought better of it on account of the Chief Secretary being a bit nervy under fire. We are quite pleased that the Chief Secretary is to turn out today.

As it turned out, the Chancellor was announcing yet another commission. Just so that we know whether any decisions remain that are likely to be made by Ministers as opposed to being outsourced to a commission or review, will the right hon. Gentleman place details in the Library of all the commissions that the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government have set up, all the reviews that have been announced, the number of people who are involved in the reviews and commissions, their

[Ms Winterton]

terms of reference and their cost? Will he give us a pointer as to whether the Government need so many Ministers to carry out the business of government, given that there might not be a lot left for them to do after all the commissions and reviews have been set up?

I see that the Leader of the House spoke at the Hansard Society last night about altering party conferences. Obviously, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat conferences could be merged and simply called the Conservative party conference.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the shadow Leader of the House. Doubtless the subject is genuinely scintillating, but it is not a matter of Government responsibility. I hope that the right hon. Lady might want to move on to something that is.

Ms Winterton: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I simply wanted to ensure that if the Leader of the House intends to refer us to the Procedure Committee, as his speech suggested, there will be discussions with all the parties before that is done. I certainly have not been consulted and, as far as I know, nor have other parties. Will he ensure that consultation happens?

On anonymity for defendants in rape cases, we are now getting increasingly confusing and contradictory comments from the Home Secretary, the Justice Secretary and, indeed, the Prime Minister. Three weeks ago, the Government pledged to give defendants anonymity. Two weeks ago, the Prime Minister appeared to change that position to one whereby the accused would be named only if prosecutors brought charges, and this week the Justice Secretary blamed the Liberal Democrats, saying that they had adopted the policy in opposition. There was further confusion at questions to the Minister for Women and Equalities today.

Ministers keep saying that they want a proper, considered discussion, but it is extremely difficult for hon. Members to contribute to any discussion when it is completely unclear which Minister is speaking for the Government. The policy seems to be the victim of hasty negotiations, but the real victims will be women who have been raped. The need for a proper debate on the subject has now become urgent, and I ask the Leader of the House to give us an assurance that he will allocate one of the Government's general debates—we have a lot of them at the moment—to it.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady. On the Ministry of Defence, Sir Bill Jeffrey and Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup have announced to their staff that they will retire in the autumn. Both stayed on longer than they originally intended to see things through over the election period and to get through the strategic defence and security review.

The Government have made many statements—nine since the Queen's Speech. We have been very open with the House, and about five, perhaps even seven statements have been made this week. The Speaker has indicated that he wants more urgent questions, and that is a useful way to hold the Government to account and keep the House informed.

The Chief Secretary is robust under fire and can give as good as he can take.

I have answered a written question on reviews, referring to the coalition agreement, which sets out the Government's key reviews and priorities. It is then up to individual Departments to provide information about their reviews.

In my compelling speech last night to the Hansard Society, I said that perhaps it was time for an open and serious debate, in which hon. Members of all parties should be engaged, about sitting hours and sittings in September, to ascertain whether we have the right configuration and whether we are making the best use of our time.

Anonymity for defendants in rape cases is a serious issue, about which there is a wide range of views. The Government are determined to drive up the conviction rate for rape and ensure that those who are convicted get serious sentences. I agree with the right hon. Lady that it is right for the House to debate the matter seriously and calmly, and I will do what I can to provide for such a debate.

Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on planning guidance for local councils now that the regional spatial strategies have been abolished? In my constituency and many surrounding rural constituencies, there are many proposals to erect vast numbers of wind turbines the size of the London Eye. I greatly hoped that we could have some guidance about extending what happens in Scotland and many other European countries so that we have an exclusion zone of 2 km from dwellings.

Sir George Young: I understand that my hon. Friend is not a fan of wind turbines. The Government's view is that communities should be protected from the unacceptable impacts of development. Current planning policy in England is that the distance between a wind farm or turbine and a home should be decided on a case-by-case basis. However, I will bring my hon. Friend's concerns to the attention of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on competition among providers of liquefied petroleum gas to householders in rural areas? My constituents in the village of Llannon find themselves in an impossible situation because when one person has a contract with one company, no one else can go to another provider. That needs serious reconsideration.

Sir George Young: Like the hon. Lady, I have a rural constituency where many people are dependent on one supplier of LPG. Speaking from memory, I think that the Office of Fair Trading had been invited to conduct a review of the matter. I will draw her concern to the attention of the OFT and see whether the issue might be revisited.

Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know about the great success of the south of England show at Ardingly recently. Does he also know that I am president of the hounds show at Ardingly? Will he see what he can do to lay aside some Government time for a debate on the future of farming, particularly getting more young people into the industry, the security of the food supply in this country and essential research and development for the future of farming in Britain?

Sir George Young: I was not aware that my hon. Friend was president of the hounds show, but I am not surprised. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has attended several agricultural shows and I will draw her attention to the success of the one at Ardingly.

My hon. Friend makes a serious point about the future of farming and the need to increase young people's interest in that career. I will do what I can to see whether we can provide a forum so that he can share with the House his important views on the subject.

Mr Dave Watts (St Helens North) (Lab): Following my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House's question, will the Leader of the House state when he took over responsibility for setting Labour party conference dates?

Sir George Young: That is a wilful misrepresentation of what I just said. I said that I think the House should have a serious debate about its sitting hours, when it sits in the summer and whether the 82-day summer recess that we have had in the past is the right way forward. I think all parties might consider whether party conferences are immoveable or whether there is a more intelligent way of reorganising the political year. I accept that it is not a matter for one party, but one for all parties and the House. I hope that the House will engage in that debate in the spirit in which I launched it.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the actions of bailiffs? The subject was mentioned in the coalition agreement and I am sure that many hon. Members have examples of constituents who have been targeted by bailiffs. As I understand it, that area of law is unclear and it would be helpful to have a debate.

Sir George Young: The coalition agreement is specific on the matter. We will provide more protection against aggressive bailiffs and unreasonable charging orders, ensuring that courts have the power to insist that repossession is always a last resort and to ban orders for sale on unsecured debts of less than £25,000. Better regulation of bailiffs will be one of the strands of that policy as we develop it.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Last week at business questions, the Leader of the House, in response to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), indicated that allowances issues are no longer a matter for the House. Of course the administration of allowances is now a matter for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, but is the question of who is entitled to allowances still a matter for the House? Will he therefore correct the record, and in addition confirm that the administration of Short money is still a matter for the House, and that it will remain so?

Sir George Young: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right on that last point—the administration of Short money is a matter for the House—and I answered questions on that last week. IPSA is responsible not only for the administration of the allowances but for the policy on allowances, as a number of hon. Members said in yesterday's debate in Westminster Hall. IPSA has simply carried forward the regime that it inherited from the House on questions such as whether Members are entitled to pay or allowances. Under the current legislation, it remains a matter for IPSA to make any changes in the allowance regime.

Mark Lancaster (Milton Keynes North) (Con): May I add to the calls for a debate on regional spatial strategies? The Government's decision to scrap housing targets was most welcome, but it poses questions for the future of Milton Keynes Partnership—the unelected quango in my constituency—its role as a planning authority, the ownership of the land bank and the future of the local plan. A debate would help to clarify those points.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend makes a forceful case for a debate in Westminster Hall, so that Communities and Local Government Ministers can address the issues he has outlined, and see whether responsibility can be passed down to the locally elected local authorities in his constituency.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): There is growing concern that further increasing student fees will deter students from poorer backgrounds. I am meeting Luke Young, the president of the Swansea students' union, next week. When will the right hon. Gentleman timetable a debate on student fees, particularly when we should be tooling up all our young people, but particularly those from poorer backgrounds, for the recovery that we all hope is ahead?

Sir George Young: That is a devolved matter in Wales. So far as England is concerned, we are awaiting the outcome of the inquiry by Lord Browne of Madingley. One of the key things that the Government will be looking at is exactly what the hon. Gentleman mentioned—whether any changes would impede or promote access to higher education by students from low-income families.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Will the Leader of the House arrange an early debate on Members who refuse to take their seats and fail to give proper representation to their constituents?

Sir George Young: That is a candidate for debate, and a sensitive issue. I can give no guarantee that the Government will find time for such a debate, but it is a perfectly legitimate candidate for a debate in Westminster Hall.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): Yesterday the North report, which recommends reductions in drink-driving limits, was published. An hour or so ago, the Secretary of State for Transport said that there would be consultation in Government Departments on the proposals, yet newspapers have been full of reports—inspired, it would appear, by ministerial briefings—that the proposals would be rejected. One headline states: "Motorists escape bid to lower drink-drive limit". Will the Government agree to a debate in Government time to clarify their policy on drink-drive limits? The Leader of the House is a great supporter of road safety, so I hope he agrees to such a debate, and confirms that the Government will be positive about reducing drink-drive limits.

Sir George Young: This is an important issue and our priority is to tackle drink and drug driving in the most effective way. I listened to the Transport Secretary's response a few moments ago, and I did not detect the equivocation that the hon. Gentleman alleges. The Transport Secretary said that the report covered a wide range of issues and made 51 detailed recommendations, which the Departments concerned need to consider carefully. He also said that the Government would respond to Sir Peter in due course. However, on top of that, I agree that it is an appropriate matter for the House to debate.

Angie Bray (Ealing Central and Acton) (Con): One of my constituents recently turned up for duty in court as a witness and spent most of the day there, but was then sent home because no other witnesses turned up. He wasted most of his day but, more importantly, the court case had to be delayed again. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to consider more measures to ensure that witnesses are made to turn up when they are required, so that cases are not postponed or even put off altogether?

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sure the hon. Lady is seeking either a statement or debate.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is important that we use the resources of the court system effectively, so that the sort of waste to which she refers does not occur. I will contact the Justice Secretary and share her concerns with him, and see whether the Government have proposals for making better use of the available resources.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): On 26 May, the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury came to the House and said in answer to an urgent question on the future jobs fund that Government

"policy...has to be informed by the facts, and...advice...from the Department for Work and Pensions".

He added that that advice was that the fund

"was...not effective and that the money was wasted."—[*Official Report*, 26 May 2010; Vol. 510, c. 164.]

However, when I visited my constituency's district Jobcentre Plus office on Monday, I was told that it was far too early to judge the effectiveness of the scheme, because no data are yet available. May I suggest that we have a debate on the scheme, so that we can work out whether what we are being told about the DWP's view of the matter is a reflection of what is happening on the ground?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman makes a good case for a debate. The future jobs scheme cost about £6,500 per place, which is about five times the cost of other components of a similar programme. Many of the jobs were relatively low-paid and insecure, and many were in the public sector. The Government believe that we have better approaches to dealing with unemployment—namely, the Work programme—but I hope that it will be possible at some point to discuss the issues that he raises. That could happen in the context of the Budget debate, because I believe that the Work and Pensions Secretary will speak then.

Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): Mr Speaker, as the defender of the rights of MPs, I am sure that you were aware of the debate on the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority that took place in Westminster Hall yesterday, which about 50 Members attended, and of the excellent speech made by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley). The matter cannot be allowed to remain there; we need to take it forward. The Leader of the House will know that the right hon. Gentleman spoke of the

"interface between parliamentary privilege and IPSA's decisions"

and

"the privilege of freedom from obstruction in the performance of parliamentary duties."

He quoted pages 75 and 143 of "Erskine May", and referred to what it says under the heading, "Obstructing Members of either House in the discharge of their duty".

With that in mind, does the Leader of the House agree that it is time that we had a Minister at the Dispatch Box for a debate, because the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling concluded that IPSA

"is obstructing Members in the efficient and effective discharge of their parliamentary duties"?—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2010; Vol. 510, c. 144-145WH.]

Sir George Young: I attended that debate and heard my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) make that speech. The debate was, of course, replied to by a Minister from the Cabinet Office. If any Member believes that there has been a breach of privilege, a procedure can be followed, which involves an approach to Mr Speaker.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): During Transport questions, the Secretary of State made it clear that his priorities are encouraging economic growth and reducing carbon emissions, yet Transport for London is proposing massive job cuts and the closure of virtually every ticket office on the London underground. Those actions will impact directly against the Secretary of State's hopes. May we have a debate on that, and not least on what seems to be a marked lack of communication between the coalition Government and the Conservative Mayor of London?

Sir George Young: I understand the hon. Lady's concern, but the staffing of individual underground stations is a matter for TfL, which may be having to do what Departments are having to do: coping with the economic legacy that we have inherited. Perhaps at some point Opposition Members will tell us where the £50 billion of cuts they identified before the election would have applied.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the big society? Many community organisations in Harlow are keen adopters of the big society reforms that will do so much to transform voluntary groups up and down our country.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. The Prime Minister's speech on the big society has indeed whetted the appetite of voluntary organisations up and down the country for further development of that policy. I agree that the question of how we engage the resources of the third sector is important. I am not making a commitment, but I should like to find time for a debate if we can.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Two weeks ago, I asked the Leader of the House if he would kindly urge the Home Secretary to update us on the review of dangerous dogs legislation initiated under the last Government. He said that the Home Secretary would do so during the Queen's Speech debate, but unfortunately that did not happen. May I again urge him to ask the Home Secretary to come to the House and update us on the review of that legislation?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, and if there has been a discourtesy, I apologise. I will pursue the issue further, and Home Office questions will be held on 28 June, when she may have an opportunity to raise the matter again.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What is my right hon. Friend's thinking in changing the hours of Tuesday's Budget day to those of a Wednesday sitting? Should we take that change as a pilot for changes to future Tuesdays?

Sir George Young: It would be wrong to read too much into the changing of the time for the Budget debate. After consultation, we took the view that it would be for the convenience of the House to begin the debate a little earlier. My hon. Friend makes the point that at some stage we will need to look at the sittings of the House. We have many new Members and we have to operate within a slightly different regime, so there is an appetite for intelligent debate about how the House uses its time.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The Leader of the House raised the issue of the recess. Midsummer's day is in four days' time, but Parliament does not start its so-called summer recess until five weeks later. May we for once have a summer recess in the summer, a shorter recess and one that takes place during the Scottish school holidays, which are, of course, actually in the summer? That could help MPs to be more available to their constituents at summer events. May we have a debate on the timing of the recess?

Sir George Young: I do understand that for MPs with Scottish constituencies the summer recess does not coincide with the school holidays in Scotland. The hon. Gentleman reinforces the point made in earlier exchanges about the need to stand back and look at when the House sits and consider whether we make the best use of our time.

Mr Phil Woolas (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): In opposition, the Leader of the House was always a supporter of enhanced post-legislative scrutiny and, in particular, of finding time for debates on Law Commission reports. Can he update the House on what plans he has in that respect, and does he think that there is too much legislation or too little?

Sir George Young: I think that there has been too much legislation. We are determined to have less legislation and better drafted Bills, with proper time allowed for the House to reflect on them. That will be a transformation compared with what happened in the last Parliament.

Good governance involves post-legislative scrutiny, as well as the production of draft Bills and a pre-legislative stage. Every Department should produce a summary, a few years after legislation has been enacted, stating whether it has met its objectives, and Select Committees have a role to play in post-legislative scrutiny, as well as their other tasks. In a word, the answer is yes.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): For several weeks, I have been attempting to obtain support from IPSA to offer jobs to people who want to work in my constituency office. The failure of IPSA to respond to me by phone or e-mail is putting tremendous pressure on my office's ability to provide a service to the people of Chesterfield who sent me here. Will the Leader of the House make a statement on what support he can give to new Members who are attempting to staff their offices, but who are having to rely on voluntary contributions to provide a service to their constituents?

Sir George Young: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has not been able to provide the service that he wants because of difficulties with the allowance regime. The whole object of the allowance regime is to enable MPs to look after their constituents and hold Ministers to account. If it is not doing that, it is a serious matter. I will ensure that the interim chief executive is aware of the issues that the hon. Gentleman has raised and that he gets a prompt response.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The Leader of the House said that he wants less legislation, but there could not be any less legislation than at present, because he has announced none. When will we have a Second Reading on one of the many plans for legislation that the Government have announced, so that we can scrutinise it, and when will he set up the European Scrutiny Committee, so that we can scrutinise their plans on Europe?

Sir George Young: In the Queen's Speech, we outlined 22 Bills for an 18-month Session. We have already introduced three of them—one in the House and two in the other place—and I anticipate a finance Bill before too long. I also anticipate two more Second Readings before the summer recess.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): Will the Government arrange, in Government time, a debate on the effects on employment of Government policies? I estimate that the recently announced cuts will cost at least 30 jobs in Slough—a town where unemployment has fallen month on month since the start of the year. Will the Government give us a chance to discuss the effects of what they are doing?

Sir George Young: May I return the compliment and suggest that the Opposition use one of their Opposition days to explain where they would have found the £50 billion cuts that were factored into their pre-election statements? They never told us where those cuts would come from, and they would have included some £18 billion of cuts to the capital programme. They said that they would tell us after the election where they would find those cuts, and the time is now ripe.

Michael Connarty (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House arrange for someone from the Government to come here and tell us why they are afraid of scrutiny of their behaviour in Europe and why they have not set up the European Scrutiny Committee, which was the first Committee set up in the last Parliament by the previous Government? Are they afraid of the

[Michael Connarty]

Euroscepticism generated on their Benches when they were in pre-election mode, or are they afraid of the ESC, which of course won an inquisitor of the year award when we had a Labour Government and it had a Labour Chair?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the work that he has done on the ESC. I am aware that documents continue to arrive from Europe that need scrutiny and that, at the moment, there is no ESC. There is no conspiracy along the lines that he suggests. Urgent discussions are taking place along the usual channels, and I hope that it will not be too long before we can establish the ESC. I am sure that whoever chairs it will do a fantastic job.

Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): In the light of the Alston report to the United Nations, a debate on the conventions used in the deployment of advanced military technology would allow us to debate whether international law has to be reformulated as a result of that report. Do the Government believe that drone planes should be used for the targeted extra-judicial killings of suspected terrorists?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious question. I do not know whether it would be appropriate for him to make that point in the debate on the strategic defence review, but I will certainly pass his concerns on to the Ministry of Defence and ensure that he receives a reply.

Mr Speaker: Last, but not least, I call Mr MacShane.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): Thank you for the introduction, Mr Speaker.

Last night, Europe's Conservative party leaders and Prime Ministers met for dinner, with the exception of our Prime Minister, because he is in alliance with—as the Deputy Prime Minister puts it—"nutters, anti-Semites...and homophobes". May we have an early debate on rise of nationalist, populist extremism in eastern Europe, the worries of Jewish communities and the extent to which the Conservative party—not the Liberal Democrats—are giving cover by their alliance with these people?

Sir George Young: I am sorry that business questions are ending on that note. The right hon. Gentleman has been pursuing this issue for many months, but there is no substance in the accusations that he has made about our colleagues. I am sure that given more time he could have found a better question to ask on the business.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to right hon. and hon. Members for their co-operation.

Public Spending

12.28 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Danny Alexander): With permission, I wish to make a statement on the Treasury's review of the public spending commitments made by the last Government between 1 January 2010 and the general election. In the review, we examined the £34 billion of spending that was approved in their final few months of office. The aim was to test in each and every case whether those commitments are affordable, whether they deliver value for money and whether they remain genuine priorities for this Government.

The review is now complete, and my decisions on those commitments fall into three categories—projects where spending will be approved, because they are a high priority or because the money has largely been spent; projects that will be cancelled; and projects whose long-term affordability will be considered as part of the wider spending review process over the coming weeks and months.

A detailed list of the projects that have been cancelled or suspended until the spending review has been laid in the Libraries of both Houses.

For those projects that offer value for money and meet the Government's priorities of fairness and responsibility, or for those that it is simply too late to withdraw, we have acted quickly to confirm approval in order to avoid disruption. For example, we have approved the funding for essential medicines in the case of a flu pandemic, some hospital projects and support to post offices, as well as for spending on crucial equipment for military operations in Afghanistan. The House will be aware, however, that as a country today we have the biggest peacetime budget deficit in our history. We have a choice: we can act fairly, responsibly and decisively now, or we can follow the approach of the previous Government—deny and delay—which would only end in greater cuts being forced upon us. Given our priority to get the deficit under control, the Government collectively have looked at each project, and I am grateful for the support of Cabinet colleagues in this process.

Some commitments are simply unaffordable, do not meet Government priorities and will be cancelled. We have taken the decision to cancel immediately 12 projects that would have cost nearly £2 billion over their lifetime. They include the Department for Communities and Local Government's regional leader boards; the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' loan to Sheffield Forgemasters; the Department for Work and Pensions' low-value employment programmes, including the extension of the young person's guarantee to 2011-12 and the jobseeker's two-year guarantee; the Department of Health's active challenge routes, county sports partnerships and the North Tees and Hartlepool hospital project; the local authority business growth incentive; and the withdrawal of Government funding for the Stonehenge visitors' centre. Many of those are difficult decisions and, I fully understand, painful ones for some of the communities affected—communities whose hopes were irresponsibly raised by the previous Government. However, they are decisions that a responsible Government must face up to in these difficult economic times.

Other decisions should be weighed up against all the other significant pressures on public spending within the context of the spending review—a spending review

that the Labour Government delayed because they did not want to admit that painful decisions had to be made. For this reason, I can announce that there are a further 12 projects, with a total value of £8.5 billion, approved since 1 January that we will suspend and refer for consideration to the spending review process over the coming weeks and months. They include the health research support service, the Kent Thameside strategic transport programme, and the libraries modernisation programme. Any other new major hospital schemes will be assessed in the context of the spending review to ensure that they are affordable and represent the highest possible value for money. Only the highest priority schemes will be able to go forward. We will do this in the context of the approach set out in our spending review framework, which will include a fundamental review of all capital investment plans, to identify those areas that will achieve the greatest economic returns.

The Secretary of State for Education has already announced that he is looking at the whole Building Schools for the Future programme and will shortly set out the outcome of this work. That programme has been very heavily overcommitted, and we are in agreement that tough decisions need to be taken. Departments have also independently reviewed projects with budgets within delegated limits approved since 1 January, and they will report the results of those reviews in due course. Together, these decisions will significantly relieve burdens on departmental budgets that will be under major pressure in the spending review.

While conducting this review, I have discovered yet another black hole in the books that we inherited. I can tell the House that billions of pounds of spending commitments were made for this financial year that relied upon underspends or access to the reserve. There was no reason to suppose that underspends would have occurred on anything like that scale and there is insufficient contingency in the reserve to cover the remainder. I will therefore be cancelling at least £1 billion of commitments where there simply is not the money to pay for them. We will announce the action that we will take to tackle this further hole in the accounts in next week's Budget. As far as the reserve is concerned, I am sure the House will agree that our priority is that we keep this for genuine emergencies and new pressures that may result from military operations in Afghanistan.

The last Government committed to spend money that they simply did not have. They made commitments that they knew the next Government could not fulfil and in doing so cynically played politics with the hopes of our communities. The actions that I have set out today show that this Government will take responsible spending decisions, which, although sometimes difficult, will be guided by fairness and the overriding need to tackle the deficit. We did not make this mess, but we will clean it up. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I thank the Chief Secretary for early sight of his statement, which arrived a few moments ago. We were all impressed not to read his conclusions in the newspapers this morning. I congratulate him on his first statement to the House as Chief Secretary. I think that it was George Bernard Shaw who said that sometimes to succeed in politics one must rise above one's principles—and few have risen so fast and, I now see, so far as the right hon. Gentleman.

I start with a word of thanks to the Chief Secretary for finally nailing the myth that Labour generated some kind of scorched-earth policy, of which we heard so much in the first days of the coalition. The projects that he has decided to outline this afternoon amount to just 0.05% of this year's Government spending. At the beginning of the week, we heard from Sir Alan Budd, who told us that the outlook for public finances is £30 billion better than expected, but now the Chief Secretary, who cannot even claim the defence of independence, has smashed the coalition's claim that Labour spent unwisely. The House is united in its ambition to see the deficit paid down quickly. The defence of our country from the global recession did not come cheap, and now the bill must be paid, which is why we set out with such clarity £19 billion of tax increases and £20 billion of detailed spending cuts over the next two years alone.

I, too, have reviewed the spending decisions taken since January, and my thanks go to the Treasury staff for facilitating this review. I am glad that the decisions that we took on green energy, university modernisation, Airbus, Nissan, Ford, the automotive assistance programme, royal research ships, phase III of the Diamond science programme, the Tyne and Wear metro, the Leeds next generation transport scheme, Manchester Metrolink, the regeneration of Blackpool, accelerated development zones, Olympic park restructuring, hundreds of millions of pounds for the Ministry of Defence, £30 million for children's hospices and three new hospitals have been reaffirmed.

The country and the Liberal Democrats beyond, however, will be aghast this afternoon at the Chief Secretary's attack on jobs, his attack on construction workers, his attack on industries of the future and the cancellation of a hospital. What could be more front line than that? In five minutes this afternoon, he has reversed three years of Liberal Democrat policy, of which he was the principal author. What a moment of abject humiliation! He will no doubt claim that the markets forced his hand. These were the markets in which interest rates were falling, not rising, throughout the winter and spring. He claims there is no reason why the Government can assume to carry forward underspends from previous years, despite the fact that, as he well knows, billions are underspent each year, including last year.

It is customary on these occasions to ask the Minister a wide range of questions, but I will give him the luxury of answering only one, although I expect a straight answer: how many people will lose their jobs this year as a consequence of what he has just told the House? Do not beat about the bush—tell us how many.

Danny Alexander: I am grateful to the shadow Chief Secretary for his response and for welcoming me to my post. He is right that a number of projects have been approved, and Departments will set out details of those projects, or where they are seeking further savings within those approvals, over the next period. They are also, of course, reassessing those approvals given within delegated limits, as I said in my statement, so there will be further announcements to make on that.

The right hon. Gentleman's characterisation of the Office for Budget Responsibility's report was surprising, given that the report showed that, in fact, growth was

[Danny Alexander]

expected to be significantly lower than was forecast by his Government in the last Budget and that the structural deficit—that part of the deficit that can be paid down only by Government policy action—was considerably higher. He set out what he said were Labour's plans. We look forward to hearing more detail about that. If he is committed to a shared deficit reduction plan, I look forward to his party finally setting out in detail what it would take to meet the £50 billion of cuts that it proposed to set out.

As for consistency with the approach of the Liberal Democrats, which the right hon. Gentleman asked me about, the position is entirely consistent with the approach that we took during the election campaign, in common with our coalition partners, on ensuring that firm action is taken to reduce the deficit. That must be the overriding priority. He said that end-year flexibility is used year by year to meet commitments, but the volume of commitments that were made under the previous Government is so large that it calls into question the Government's ability to have a reserve at all. Therefore, we have to take action to reduce those claims in early course, and that is what we are going to do in the Budget.

The single biggest risk to jobs in this country is not taking action to reduce the deficit. If we fail to take action to reduce the deficit, we will see jobs lost across the country. We need to restore confidence to the economy.

What we have learned from today's statement is that the shadow Chief Secretary went on a pre-election spending spree when in office, in the full knowledge that the Government had long since run out of money. The House will be familiar with the shadow Chief Secretary's now infamous letter to his successor, but allow me to contrast that with the letter that I received on my desk from my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws). The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr Byrne) wrote:

"I'm afraid there is no money…good luck!"

However, my right hon. Friend's advice was rather more helpful. On leaving the Treasury, he left me a note saying:

"good luck, carry on cutting…with care."

Contrast the previous Government's approach with ours. They raised false hopes by promising the public that they would spend money on local projects that they could never afford to get off the ground, even under their own spending plans. We on the other hand have been candid about the scale of the task. We have made it impossible to fiddle the economic figures to suit our Budgets, and we are taking responsible and measured action on historically unprecedented levels of borrowing.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Many hon. Members wish to get in. We have another statement to follow and there is business after that. I will certainly try to call as many hon. Members as possible, but if we can have quick questions and succinct answers, that will be of benefit to all.

Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) (Con): Is it not pretty clear that some of those projects were hastily scribbled cheques on a long overdrawn account? Would not today's painful announcement have been completely unnecessary if Labour had carried out a proper comprehensive spending review last autumn, building into it a sustainable reserve?

Danny Alexander: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. If there had been a spending review, we would not be in this position now. As it is, out of the £34 billion of commitments that the previous Government made in that period, we have had to cancel £2 billion and put £9 billion into the spending review. The choice is obvious: profligacy on the one side, responsibility on the other.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): There will be fury in Wakefield and my constituency, where people are expecting schools to be rebuilt and where we absolutely must have the 70 additional hospital beds to make proper provision. Any cancelled patient operations as a result of today's decisions will be laid entirely at the right hon. Gentleman's door. His party have joined with the other coalition party in being the party of mass unemployment. Some 300,000 building workers are already out of work. What is his estimate of the increased unemployment that he will produce as a result of his statement today?

Danny Alexander: I understand that some of these decisions are difficult for communities and that there will be genuine anger, which the hon. Gentleman has expressed. However, that anger should be directed at those on his own Front Bench who took irresponsible decisions that could not be afforded. We are now putting that matter right.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Will the Chief Secretary accept my thanks for finding the money for the private finance initiative for roads in my constituency?

Danny Alexander: Yes, of course.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): The previous Labour Government agreed launch-aid investment for the Airbus A350, which will help to secure tens of thousands of jobs in the UK. Can the Chief Secretary confirm that that will be paid in full and that he will not revisit the matter?

Danny Alexander: As I said in my statement, spending Departments will make announcements themselves about the projects that have been approved.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I had hoped to hear the words "better health care closer to home" and "St Helier hospital" in the Chief Secretary's statement. Can he update us on the position in relation to that hospital project?

Danny Alexander: We have considered a number of hospital projects against affordability and value for money criteria. It has been agreed that the Epsom and St Helier, Royal Liverpool, Royal National Orthopaedic and Pennine acute hospital schemes will go ahead.

Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): There is a curious part in the right hon. Gentleman's statement on the successor deterrent extension to concept phase long-lead items on Trident. What is the value of that, and can he explain why he did not tell the House that he is reviewing Trident? Does he not know what he is doing, or is he embarrassed and ashamed?

Danny Alexander: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that, in the context of renewing the deterrent, the coalition has agreed a value-for-money review. In the context of that, spending £67 million on long-lead items in advance of the value-for-money review being completed would be utterly irresponsible.

Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con): I thank the Chief Secretary for outlining Labour's cuts. Will he take this opportunity to remind the House just why we face such a difficult spending round?

Danny Alexander: We are facing a difficult spending round for two reasons: first, we have the largest peacetime budget deficit since the war—£155 billion—with an 8% structural deficit, which is larger than had previously been estimated; and secondly, the previous Government took irresponsible spending decisions at the end of their time in office and that has added to the pressure on Departments in the spending review. I am seeking to relieve that pressure in today's statement.

Ann Coffey (Stockport) (Lab): In the last Parliament, the then Secretary of State for Transport agreed to part-fund the A6 bypass—a road that is important in relieving congestion on the A6 in my constituency. Will the Chief Secretary agree to meet me and other Members of Parliament who have an interest in the scheme, so that we can discuss with him the merits of the project?

Danny Alexander: A meeting would be better held with Ministers from the Department for Transport, who, I am sure, would be willing to agree to such a meeting.

Richard Harrington (Watford) (Con): Will the Chief Secretary enlighten us as to the number of projects that were approved by the previous Government in the month before the general election?

Danny Alexander: A significant number of projects—with a significant cash value—were agreed in the last month before the election, and I will happily give the hon. Gentleman more details later.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I note from the right hon. Gentleman's statement that a commitment has been given on crucial equipment for military operations in Afghanistan. However, can he confirm to the House today that he will also give a full commitment to the announcement that I made before the election on the £30 million for the Army's recovery capabilities, the costs of the armed forces compensation scheme and the extension of the veterans mental health pilots?

Danny Alexander: As I said in my statement, Departments will make clear the projects that have been approved, but protecting spending on front-line services in the armed services and support for our troops on the front line in Afghanistan is a priority for this Government.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Does not the shadow Chief Secretary's delay in coming to the Chamber for today's statement characterise the previous Government's delay in taking the tough decisions that are needed, and did not his response characterise their refusal to say sorry for the mess that they left this country in?

Danny Alexander: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, although I would not wish to cast aspersions on the shadow Chief Secretary's reasons for the timing of his arrival in the Chamber. That would be discourteous. However, it is fair to say that a spending review was delayed by the previous Government because they did not want to face up to the fact that some difficult decisions had to be made.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The Sheffield Forgemasters loan would have helped place the UK at the forefront of global nuclear production and enabled Forgemasters to install the country's first 15,000-tonne forging press, thus reducing our dependence on foreign imports. Is the Government's decision not a political one, made out of spite because South Yorkshire voted Labour, rather than a decision based on the long-term interest of UK manufacturing?

Danny Alexander: No, none of the decisions was motivated in the way that the hon. Lady suggests. I have received representations from Members from a number of political parties on this matter. The key issues are affordability and value for money, and that project does not meet those tests. However, we continue to be supportive of it and officials will continue to work with the company to help it to try to secure private investment, which we think is perfectly justifiable for that worthwhile project.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): In the run-up to the general election, Labour Ministers trotted up the M1 to my constituency to make all sorts of promises on issues that they had done nothing about for 13 years. Does the Chief Secretary agree that, instead of coming here and feigning anger today, Labour Members should walk out of that door and go to constituencies such as mine to apologise for raising people's hopes about projects that they never intended to fund?

Danny Alexander: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is easy for people to write cheques when they know they are going to bounce. Labour raised hopes in communities that certain projects would go ahead, for which there simply is no money left. As the shadow Chief Secretary said, there is no money left, and that should have been the approach that guided those decisions, not the need of Members to save their own seats.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Questions must be addressed—and the Minister must respond—not to the former Government, but to this Government and to today's statement.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): How much does this review bring into question private finance initiatives or public-private partnerships that, at their inception, had bogus public sector comparators and have cost the public purse a lot more over the period? Will the Chief Secretary also ensure that there is no threat to the service provided by search-and-rescue helicopters, despite the suspension of procurement for helicopters? That service is vital to island communities such as mine.

Danny Alexander: I will say two things to the hon. Gentleman. First, his point about PFI is not within the scope of this statement. However, in the context of the spending review, we will have to look at every single way in which public money is spent—including the operation of PFI—to ensure that we are getting value for money and not spending taxpayers' money unnecessarily when the spending settlement is going to be so tight.

The hon. Gentleman will see, when he reads the statement in the Library, that the search-and-rescue helicopter replacement is one of projects whose cost-effectiveness will be reviewed by the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Transport. Obviously, they will produce their report as and when that process has been completed.

Duncan Hames (Chippenham) (LD): In the light of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury's statement and of the fact that this will be a fixed-term Parliament, will he introduce constraints to prevent a similar spending spree in the run-up to the next general election?

Danny Alexander: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question, and I understand the motivation behind it. Given the scale of the challenge that we face in the form of the enormous structural deficit and the need to bring down that deficit further and faster than the previous Government proposed, I suspect that that task will consume all our time in the Treasury over the next five years, without having to worry about the question that he has raised.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): In the run-up to the election, we could hardly move for Labour Ministers making all sorts of spending commitments. Will the Chief Secretary tell us how many of them were subjected to value-for-money tests?

Danny Alexander: Having found the piece of paper that I was looking for earlier, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that a substantial number of those projects were agreed to very close to the election. In the week before the election was called, the Kent Thameside strategic transport programme was agreed, as were the Birmingham magistrates court programme, the Outukumpu project, Building Schools for the Future in Cumbria and the Sheffield retail quarter. That was all done in that one week before the election.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): The Chief Secretary has made a serious accusation in saying that Labour Ministers deliberately agreed expenditure or programmes of action that were not properly funded. If that were the case, the permanent secretary would have asked for a ministerial letter of direction. Will he place before the House the ministerial letters of direction for all the projects that he has referred to?

Danny Alexander: Having looked at the state of the books and seen the plans that the previous Government set out—at least in headline terms—to cut £50 billion from public spending over the course of this Parliament, I do not see how any Minister could responsibly have made those spending commitments and expected them all to be met after the election.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Is the Minister aware that, under the previous Government, the Department for Communities and Local Government spent £134,000 on luxury sofas? Is not that an example of the obscene waste that has led to the tough decisions that we have to make today?

Danny Alexander: I was not aware of that Department's spending on luxury sofas—perhaps I should have been. It is precisely that kind of expenditure on which we need to bear down heavily in the context of the spending review and through the efficiency and reform group that we have established, to ensure the maximum amount of space in Departments' budgets to spend on the front-line services that Members on both sides of the House care about.

Mr Dave Watts (St Helens North) (Lab): Can I try to get a straight answer to a straight question? What assessment has been made of the impact of this announcement on jobs and growth, and will the Chief Secretary publish that assessment and put it in the Library?

Danny Alexander: The position on that is as I set out to the shadow Chief Secretary: the biggest risk to jobs and growth in this country is failing to take appropriate action to deal with the deficit. That is the context of this Government's policy. If we continued with the irresponsible habits of the previous Government, we would soon be in a great deal worse a position than the one in which we now find ourselves.

Angie Bray (Ealing Central and Acton) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that job losses are the tragic consequence of 13 years of misgovernment and massive overspending?

Danny Alexander: That is at least partly the case. The challenge that we now face is how to tackle the fundamental economic problems that this country faces. The most serious economic challenge that we face is the scale of the deficit. We have seen in countries elsewhere in Europe and further afield the consequences of failing to act on fiscal consolidation. If we fail to act, the problems for jobs and growth and the prospects for our economy will be a great deal worse than they are today.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): In 1979, the then Government started destroying South Yorkshire's industry, and the right hon. Gentleman is truly an heir of that Government. Does he realise that the name of liberal democracy must hang its head in shame in Sheffield, now that Sheffield Forgemasters has no future? His right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister can now send back his Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority travel allowances, because he will never be welcome in Sheffield or South Yorkshire again.

Danny Alexander: I would say two things to the right hon. Gentleman. If he looks at the programmes in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, he will see that a number of grants to industry have been approved, having been judged on the tests of value for money and affordability. Also, as the Government make progress over the next few months and years, he will see that protecting areas that are particularly dependent on the public sector and that have been disproportionately affected will be a key priority for us.

Mr Aidan Burley (Cannock Chase) (Con): Which individual project was my right hon. Friend most surprised to see had been given the go-ahead?

Danny Alexander: It would be invidious to choose between some of the projects on the list. I realise that each of the decisions has difficult consequences for the communities affected. My surprise is not at an individual project but at the general approach to spending that was taken in the run-up to the general election.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): In the light of the bizarre suspension of the successor deterrent programme, will the Chief Secretary tell us whether the Trident value-for-money review will consider the overall question of whether the successor to Trident remains the most effective form of deterrent?

Danny Alexander: The hon. Gentleman has no doubt studied carefully the coalition programme for government, and he will know that we have agreed to proceed with the successor deterrent to Trident. The value-for-money review will do precisely what it says on the tin: we want to get the best value for money from the project and not waste taxpayers' money unnecessarily on the renewal.

Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con): I was surprised, but glad, to hear that Treasury staff have been able to help the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury to review the projects mentioned in the statement. It is a shame that he did not do that while he was in office. Will the Chief Secretary consider seconding some of his staff—if he can spare them—to help to educate Labour Members and to get them on the same page as the rest of the country, given the state that they have left the economy in?

Danny Alexander: I agree with the hon. Lady that the people of this country are ahead of the Labour party in realising the seriousness of the economic problems that we face. That consensus is now a global one—people will have seen the statement from the G20 summit on the need for faster fiscal consolidation. That is right, and the Opposition are wrong.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind Members to try to keep to the subject of the statement; the Minister is not responsible for previous Government policies.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): If the Chief Secretary thinks that the biggest risk to jobs is the deficit, why does Britain have a better employment rate among all other European countries than America?

Danny Alexander: The risk that we face is the fact that we have the largest budget deficit in the EU, with the exception of Ireland, that we have a very substantial structural deficit and that growth is lower than forecast. All those things argue for what we are going to do, which is implement a programme to reduce the deficit faster and further than the previous Government proposed. That is the only responsible course to take; profligate spending of the sort we saw in the final days of the previous Government is not responsible.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that, after their cynical attempts to buy the last election, the crocodile tears of Labour Members do nothing to raise the standing of this House in the public's eyes?

Danny Alexander: I share the hon. Gentleman's hopes for higher standards in Parliament, but Ministers of the previous Government ought to have known in the context of the financial situation that the country faces and of their own plans to cut £50 billion from public spending that these additional spending commitments and claims on the reserve were simply unaffordable. That chicken is coming home to roost today.

Michael Connarty (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (Lab): I note that £1.2 billion-worth of the cancelled projects, as they are called, are from the future jobs fund—for the young people of the right hon. Gentleman's constituency and mine. I wonder what the consequences will be for the Scottish budget. Can he tell us what impact there will be on my constituents in Scotland, or have his Conservative bosses—let us be quite frank—done a deal with the tartan Tories in the SNP in Scotland?

Danny Alexander: The hon. Gentleman will know that benefit and Department for Work and Pensions spending is a reserved matter, so does not have a Barnett consequential. He will also know that the Government have set out plans to establish a Work programme, which will replace those programmes during next year. That will be a more targeted, quicker and effective programme, based on paying suppliers by results to ensure that people get back into work quickly. I welcome that programme and I hope that he will, too.

Mr Rob Wilson (Reading East) (Con): Can the Chief Secretary confirm the good news for Reading and for my constituents—that the Government are fully committed to the Reading station upgrade, because it offers excellent value for money?

Danny Alexander: I have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said. It will be for the Department for Transport to announce the details of projects that have been approved.

Pat Glass (North West Durham) (Lab): I and the people whom I represent will be desperately disappointed that the new North Tees hospital is not going ahead. My understanding is that it was not promised in the last weeks before the election, but had been planned, committed to and expected for five years. The decision will have a massive impact on the Tees area, Cleveland and Durham. The hospital was to provide specialist services for the whole of that area. How does that sit with the promises made by Government Members not to cut health spending?

Danny Alexander: The hon. Lady will know that it is a foundation trust which is coming to the Government for additional funding. She may not be aware, however, that consent for the project was given on 10 March 2010, so it is within this period. Of course I accept that the decision will be very disappointing for people who have worked on the project for that time—I do not wish to belittle that at all—but in the context of the economic situation that we face and the decisions that we have to

[Danny Alexander]

make, it is right and proper to judge such projects on the strict value-for-money and affordability grounds that we have applied.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Which factors convinced the Chief Secretary to cancel the local authority business growth incentives scheme?

Danny Alexander: It was the fact that there is no substantive evidence that it has had any effect on doing the job that it was supposed to do or set out to do—to encourage local authorities to work with business.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): We have already heard from the new Prime Minister that the north-east of England can expect to suffer hardest from the cuts, so I want to know precisely why the North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust hospital, which is in my constituency, is not going ahead, particularly as we have seen tremendous progress in reducing health inequalities in my area, and that hospital was going to complete the job.

Danny Alexander: In the context of tighter budgets, it is essential that all major hospital buildings must be affordable and provide value for money. On that basis, the Government decided not to proceed with that scheme. It was assessed against a number of other major build projects that were at the same stage of development; those schemes are more urgent. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the previous Government set out plans to halve capital spending over the next few years. We have to make judgments about capital spending in the context of budgets that are a great deal tighter. I appreciate that that is disappointing, and I do not wish in any way to belittle the point that the hon. Gentleman is making quite fairly on behalf of his constituents, but in judging these things we have to apply the value-for-money criteria as we have.

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): During the general election campaign, the Prime Minister said that any Minister who went to him to propose front-line cuts would be sent back to the drawing-board, so may I suggest that the Minister goes back to the drawing-board, because that is exactly what he is doing? The people of the north-east, in Teesside and south Durham, want the Hartlepool and North Tees hospital, which has been under development for five years and is clinically-led but has been cancelled. On 6 May, people might have voted for the Liberal Democrats because they thought they stood for something; today they know that they do not.

Danny Alexander: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns on behalf of his constituents, but the anger should be directed at Labour Front Benchers, who irresponsibly agreed to spend money that, as the former Chief Secretary said in his letter, simply is not there.

Mr Phil Woolas (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I ask the right hon. Gentleman to look again at his decision on Sheffield Forgemasters. That £80 million, which is spread over some years, is in the form of a loan and has a huge multiplier effect for the nuclear industry, particularly in the north-west. Is he trying to make sure that if the expansion of the nuclear industry takes place, which I hope it does, the infrastructure for it will have to come from overseas? Will he look at this again, because he is doing what he has accused the banks of doing—not providing loans for investment?

Danny Alexander: I have looked very carefully at this and all the projects that we are cancelling or suspending. I believe that the decision that we have made is the right one on value-for-money and affordability grounds. I have discussed it with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills. In the context of the pressures on budgets and the affordability and value-for-money criteria that we have applied, I am afraid I am not able to go back and reconsider. Officials from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills will work with the company to try to ensure that it gets access to a private sector solution. As to the nuclear industry, the hon. Gentleman will know that the coalition agreement commits us to no public subsidy for nuclear power.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): This afternoon, the Chief Secretary has taken a further £1 billion out of the Department for Work and Pensions and the fact that one of the cuts is to the young person's guarantee demonstrates how empty is the Government's rhetoric about being concerned about the vulnerable. Moreover, both the Tories and the Liberals voted with the Government for the legislation in March that provided for the two-year jobseeker's guarantee. How can the Chief Secretary defend saying one thing in March and another thing today?

Danny Alexander: Well, there is no money left. The more important point is that we are cancelling programmes that we believe are ineffective and replacing them with the Work programme, which will start during next year and will be more effective at helping people who need help to get back into work quickly. That is an objective that we share; I believe our programme will be more effective in doing that. The hon. Lady will know that in the £6.2 billion announcement that we made a few weeks ago, one of the areas to which money was recycled was additional funding for 50,000 more apprenticeships. That is valuable additional support to help young people find jobs now.

Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con): Will the Chief Secretary remind us once again why we face such a difficult spending review? It is clearly something that the Labour party has failed to understand.

Danny Alexander: As I said earlier, the reason we face such a tough spending round is the overriding need to bring our deficit down further and faster than was planned by the previous Government. That is necessary to restore confidence in our economy and restore balance to our public finances. It is the overriding priority, and it will restore jobs and growth in this country faster than the last Government would have managed.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I wonder whether I can help the Chief Secretary by providing the answer that he failed to provide in response to an earlier question about value for money. Will he acknowledge that over the three years for which the Sheffield Forgemasters loan was under consideration, the Treasury conducted an extremely robust value-for-money exercise?

This Government talk a great deal about consultation, but before the statement I spoke to the chairman of Sheffield Forgemasters, who confirmed that over the period of the Government's review there has been no contact whatever with the company. Will the Chief Secretary confirm that fact?

Danny Alexander: What I can confirm to the hon. Gentleman is that we have applied value-for-money grounds to this as to all the other projects. With a restricted budget, however, we must make choices about where we can spend money, and unfortunately we simply cannot afford to provide funds for this project any longer. As I have said, officials from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills will continue to work with the company in helping to find a private sector solution to the challenge.

Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con): Will the Chief Secretary remind the House of the size of the structural deficit, and perhaps remind Opposition Members that these are Labour cuts caused by the state in which the last Government left the country's finances?

Danny Alexander: That is not a matter for my judgment; it is a matter for the judgment of the independent Office for Budget Responsibility, which we established to restore independence to the statistics on which budget judgments are based. According to the OBR, the structural deficit has risen to 8%, while the overall deficit is £155 billion. That is a vast sum. If we are to restore health to our economy we must narrow that gap, and do so quickly.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): When the cuts that the Chief Secretary has announced today—which his boss will no doubt announce again on Tuesday—lead to lower growth, higher unemployment and the collapse of the construction industry, with consequential reductions in the Government's revenue and increases in their benefit bills and, as a result, an increase in the deficit, what will he cut next?

Danny Alexander: I think that what the hon. Gentleman and, if I may say so, many Opposition Members fail to recognise is that the country faces a choice: a choice between taking the robust action which is needed and which we will take to bring responsibility to the public finances and reduce the deficit, and failing to take that action. The risk posed by the latter course is clear from what has happened in other countries. I believe that the action that we are taking today, and will no doubt take in future weeks and months, is necessary to ensure that in future we have the jobs and growth that we need.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Before his right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws) wrote the Chief Secretary his "Carry On Cutting Regardless" letter, he came to the House and told Members that he had been advised that the future jobs fund element of the young person's guarantee did not provide value for money. The former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), said that that conflicted with what she had been told when in office. Will the Chief Secretary now publish both sets of advice and place them in the Library of the House so that Members can make up their own minds about who is telling the truth?

Danny Alexander: What I know is that according to the Department for Work and Pensions the programme provides poor value for money, and that the Work programme with which we will replace it next year will give better, more targeted, quicker and more effective support to the people who are most in need. It will do what I hope every Member wants, and help those people to return to work.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): In the days when the Liberal Democrats were in a separate party from the Conservatives, did they not say in their campaign that they would not make cuts this year and pull the rug from under the feet of the economic recovery? Did the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) make any representations to the Chief Secretary about Sheffield Forgemasters, and when he stood for election did he make his constituents in Sheffield aware that a vote for the Liberal Democrats would lead to hundreds more people in Sheffield losing their jobs?

Danny Alexander: The hon. Gentleman has asked about four questions in one. I will answer the first. As he knows, the risks facing the country have changed over the past few months. Any survey of the evidence across the world suggests that the risks of sovereign debt crises are huge in other countries. That is reflected in the G20 communiqué, which agreed that faster fiscal consolidation was what was needed in major economies. I think that that is right. Only the Labour party is out of step with that international consensus.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): Again and again, the Chief Secretary, his predecessor and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions come to the House and assert that the future jobs fund is an ineffective scheme. How can the Chief Secretary say that when the Department for Work and Pensions has not collected the data concerned? The first cohort of young people to take part in the scheme have only just finished, and the data are not yet available.

Danny Alexander: According to my information, the programme represents poor value for money and is not delivering on the objectives set out for it, and our Work programme—which the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will be announcing—will give people a more effective, quicker and more direct route back into work by paying providers by results, and ensuring that people receive the support that they need.

Gavin Williamson (South Staffordshire) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend received one piece of slightly useful advice from Labour Members about how to sort out the mess that they created?

Danny Alexander: There was one—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): This morning, when I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker), for clarification of the Government's commitment to funding for the reinvigoration of the Tyne and Wear metro, I was told to wait for the statement from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Unfortunately, his statement has made it no clearer to the people of

[Catherine McKinnell]

Tyne and Wear whether that vital transport infrastructure will be given the investment that it needs in order to survive—investment that has not been made for 30 years—or whether it will be left to die on its feet.

Danny Alexander: The Department for Transport will be in a position to provide clarity on the approvals that it has. I suggest that the hon. Lady redirect her inquiries to that Department.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): On 11 March, the Deputy Prime Minister came to Newcastle and announced an investment of half a billion pounds in wind power in the north-east. Does the fact that that project is not included in the list of cuts in industry, jobs and front-line hospitals mean that it is going ahead, or was it never intended to proceed in the first place?

Danny Alexander: The last Government announced a project for a competition in the area. It is still undergoing a process with the European Union involving state aid, approval and so forth. I shall not be in a position to offer approval or otherwise until that process has been completed, but once it has been completed, we shall be able to make an announcement.

Banking Reform

1.18 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Mark Hoban): With permission, Mr Speaker, I shall make a statement about the Government's plans to reform the institutional framework for financial regulation.

The tripartite system of financial regulation failed spectacularly in its mission to ensure financial stability, and that failure cost the economy billions. The British people rightly ask how this Government will stop it happening again. That is why our coalition agreement committed us to reforming the regulatory system for financial services in order to avoid a repeat of the financial crisis. Let me now set out in detail the changes to the regulatory architecture that will make that possible.

At the heart of the banking crisis was a rapid and unsustainable increase in debt. Our macro-economic and regulatory system utterly failed to identify correctly the risk that that posed, let alone prevent it. No one was controlling levels of debt, and when the crunch came, no one knew who was in charge. For that reason, we need a macro-prudential regulator with a more systematic and detailed knowledge of what is happening not only in individual firms, but across the financial system as a whole.

Only central banks have the broad macro-economic understanding and understanding of markets, the authority and the knowledge required to make macro-prudential judgments. We will therefore place the Bank of England in charge of macro-prudential regulation by establishing within the Bank a Financial Policy Committee. We will also create two new, focused regulators: a new prudential regulator under the Bank of England, headed by a new deputy governor, and a new Consumer Protection and Markets Authority. All the new bodies will be accountable to Parliament, and their remit will be clear so that never again can someone ask who is in charge and get no answer.

First, we will legislate to create the Financial Policy Committee in the Bank of England. It will have the responsibility to look across the economy at the macro-economic and financial issues that may threaten stability, and it will be given the tools to address the risks it identifies. It will have the power to require the new Prudential Regulation Authority to implement its directions by taking regulatory action with respect to all firms.

The FPC will be accountable to Parliament in two ways: directly, as is the case with the Monetary Policy Committee; and indirectly, through its accountability to the Bank's court of directors. The Governor will chair the new committee. Its membership will include the deputy governors for monetary policy and financial stability, the new deputy governor for prudential regulation and the chair of the new Consumer Protection and Markets Authority, as well as external representatives and a Treasury representative. An interim FPC will be set up by the autumn, in advance of this legislation.

Secondly, we will create a Prudential Regulation Authority as a subsidiary of the Bank of England. It will conduct prudential regulation of sectors such as deposit-takers, insurers and investment banks. The PRA will be chaired by the Governor of the Bank of England, and the new deputy governor for prudential regulation will be the chief executive. The deputy governor for financial stability will also sit on the PRA board.

Thirdly, a new Consumer Protection and Markets Authority will take on the Financial Services Authority's responsibility for consumer protection and conduct regulation. The CPMA will regulate the conduct of all firms, both retail and wholesale, including those prudentially regulated by the PRA, and will take a strong proactive role as a consumer champion. It will have a strong mandate for ensuring that financial services and markets are transparent in their operation, so that everyone—from someone buying car insurance to a trader at a large bank—can have confidence in their dealings and know that they will get the protection they need if something goes wrong.

The CPMA will regulate the conduct of every financial services business, whether they trade on the high street or trade in high finance. We need to ensure that this body has a tougher, more proactive approach to regulating conduct, and its primary objective will be promoting confidence in financial services and markets. The CPMA will maintain the FSA's existing responsibility for the Financial Ombudsman Service and oversee the newly created Consumer Financial Education Body, which will play a key role in improving financial capability. The CPMA will also have responsibility for the Financial Services Compensation Scheme, but given the important role the scheme plays in crises, it will work closely with the FPC and PRA. We will also fulfil the commitment in the coalition agreement to create a single agency to take on the work of tackling serious economic crime, which is currently dispersed across a number of Government Departments and agencies. Before we set up these new bodies in their permanent form, we will conduct a full and comprehensive consultation, and we will publish a detailed policy document for public consultation before the summer recess.

Our goal is radically to improve financial regulation in the UK, strengthening the prudential regime by placing it in the Bank of England and delivering the best possible protection for consumers. During the period of transition to the new regime, the Government will also be guided by the following four principles: minimising uncertainty and transitional costs for firms; maintaining high-quality, focused regulation during the transition; balancing swift implementation with proper scrutiny and consultation; and providing as much clarity and certainty as possible for the FSA, Bank and other staff affected during the transition. In order to do that, we will ensure the passage of the necessary primary legislation within two years.

I am delighted that Hector Sants, the current chief executive officer of the FSA, has agreed to stay on to lead transition and become the chief executive of the PRA. He will be supported in his work by Andrew Bailey from the Bank of England, who will become the deputy in the new PRA. This is a strong team to ensure a smooth transition.

We all know that the financial crisis has cost taxpayers dearly. The regulatory system needs radical reform to make the sector more stable and stronger. The last Government could not do that because they were caught up in a structure designed by the former Chancellor and Prime Minister. The fundamental flaws in that architecture contributed to the failure in the banking sector and ultimately undermined economic stability. The continuing financial and economic uncertainty across the eurozone strengthens the urgency with which we must equip ourselves with better tools and arrangements to tackle any future financial instability.

We have already paid a high price for the previous Government's failings. We must do all we can to prevent this from happening again, and I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): May I thank the Financial Secretary for advance sight of his statement, and as this is, I think, his first outing in his new role, may I congratulate him and welcome him to his post—and, indeed, wish him well?

While no one can dispute that a failure to regulate effectively was at the heart of the global financial crisis, the key failure by regulators in monitoring agencies and central banks across the globe was in understanding the growing systemic risks in financial services. We also should not overlook the failure in bank boardrooms to understand what was going on. This was not just an issue in the UK. Does the Financial Secretary accept that in some countries the central bank had prime responsibility for regulation, whereas in others, including ours, responsibility has been shared, and in our case between the Bank, the FSA and the Treasury, and that the Bank has always had responsibilities for financial stability?

Specifically, who will appoint the new Financial Policy Committee? Will individual members have their own vote, or will that be merely advisory to the Governor? Will FPC minutes be published, and will the Governor or the chief executive of the PRA ultimately be responsible for the decision on whether to act? Does the Financial Secretary also accept that there will be concern—not least among those who were victims of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, of which my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) has consistently reminded the House—about the record of the Bank of England in financial services supervision, and will he now consider publishing part two of the Bingham Report?

Will the Financial Secretary not acknowledge too that the Financial Services Authority today is a vastly different regulator from the FSA of 2007—as, indeed, the Treasury Committee has acknowledged? Will he acknowledge that a significant level of better trained new staff and the new activism of the FSA in its supervisory role has led to a bolder, more vigorous approach to financial services regulation in recent times?

How, in practice, will the Financial Secretary avoid the very real risk of a loss of energy as regulators now focus on their own future, given that there continues to be considerable uncertainty and instability in global financial markets? Specifically, can he clarify who will be responsible for supervision and regulation before 2012, and will he acknowledge the profound risk, given the proliferation of new bodies he has announced, of ongoing regulatory confusion—of issues falling between the cracks? Indeed, is it not right that there will now be effectively two different regulators for many financial firms?

I was surprised by the absence of any reference to the Banking Commission in the statement. Does the Financial Secretary not accept that proposals to break up banks would not have made any difference to Northern Rock, a retail bank, or Lehman Brothers, an investment bank,

[Mr Gareth Thomas]

and that what is needed is increased capital held by banks and living wills to manage the possibility of future banking problems? Will he explain how the deliberations of this commission on a possible break-up of British banks, such as Barclays or HSBC, can be conducted in a way that reassures the markets and does not exacerbate financial instability?

Does the Financial Secretary recognise that the financial services industry employs over 1 million people and remains crucial to our economic future? Will he ensure that, whatever proposals he accepts—if, indeed, he does accept any from the commission—we do not put ourselves at a commercial disadvantage compared with other countries? Specifically, how will the proposals announced today impact on remuneration, and what ongoing effort is there to secure international agreement on banking levies again, so that Britain is not at a competitive disadvantage?

Is it not the case that while the work of each of the new bodies and the commission will be worthy of serious scrutiny on their own merits, as the shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Mr Darling), said yesterday, the Government risk creating a system that injects more, not less, uncertainty into the City? While the architecture of the regulatory system is clearly important, is it not the skills and judgment of individual regulators that matter most at the moment? Surely, it is not where they sit; it is what they do.

Mr Hoban: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new role and I am grateful to him for his welcome to me. Although I listened very carefully to his remarks, I am not quite sure whether the Opposition accept our proposals or whether they are stuck in the past defending to the last the former Government's regulatory architecture, which they put in place in 1997. It is time that the Opposition faced up to this problem: do they accept that the system put in place by the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown) was flawed and needs reform, or are they the last people to defend the status quo in this country?

The hon. Gentleman asked a number of detailed questions. Let me address them. He recognised the build-up of systemic risk in the economy over the course of the past 13 years, but he must acknowledge that the reforms introduced by his right hon. Friend in 1997 took away from the Bank of England the power to monitor and respond to those risks.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the appointments to the Financial Policy Committee, and they will be consistent with the approach currently adopted towards the Monetary Policy Committee. He referred to the Bingham report and the collapse of BCCI and, as he will remember from the exchange between the right hon. Member for Edinburgh South West (Mr Darling) and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor yesterday, the Chancellor is going to look into that matter.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the FSA has made progress, and that is one reason why we are delighted that Hector Sants has agreed to lead the FSA through the transition period and then to become the chief executive of the PRA. No matter how far the FSA improves in the execution of its role, the reality is that the flawed architecture that the hon. Gentleman's Government put in place undermines all that it does. This package of reforms ensures that we have the right regulatory architecture in place to identify and tackle the systemic risks to which he referred and ensures proper protection for consumers so that they will never again be let down.

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): Is it not clear that if public money is to be put at risk during a financial crisis, the only person with the moral authority to take a decision will be the Chancellor of the Exchequer? Surely the Chancellor of the Exchequer should therefore have the power to assume the chairmanship of the Financial Policy Committee during a crisis. Will my hon. Friend confirm that that will be possible under the legislation that will be brought before the House?

Mr Hoban: My hon. Friend makes a good point about who takes control in a crisis. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor was very clear yesterday that, given his responsibilities in respect of public finances, he will ultimately be in charge in such situations.

Mr Michael Meacher (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): Since the direct causes of the financial crash were colossal bonuses that drove recklessness, the use of fancy structured investment vehicles including sub-prime mortgages, the conflict of interest whereby credit rating agencies and auditing companies are paid by the company that they are supposed to be assessing and, above all, the overly lax culture of light-touch regulation, what precise, specific mechanisms is the Financial Secretary putting in place to deal with each of those underlying problems as opposed to merely shifting around the institutional infrastructure, which is all he appears to be doing?

Mr Hoban: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his comments. He takes a close interest in these matters. Of course, he will remember that in 2006 the right hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls) praised the system of "increasingly light-touch" regulation and claimed that he had

"resisted pressures from commentators for a regulatory crackdown."

The right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Mr Meacher) ought to take up some of these historical issues with his own Front Benchers.

As regards a change to the regulatory approach, we need to see a move away from the prescriptive, box-ticking approach that we have seen in a recent years to a system in which the PRA and the CPMA can make more judgmental decisions about what is happening in the markets they supervise and with the prudential decisions that individual institutions are taking. If we put judgment at the heart of the system, we are more likely to avoid some of the issues that we have seen arise in recent years.

Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): May I warmly welcome the Minister to his role? Will he tell the House about conversations that he has had with international colleagues about the need for radical reform of the regulatory system and the failure of the last Government's tripartite system?

Mr Hoban: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. There have been a number of conversations with other colleagues globally about the lessons to be learned from the financial crisis and from the regulatory structures. It is interesting to talk to people in other jurisdictions about their views. Christian Noyer, the governor of the Banque de France, said in July last year:

"Indeed, one of the main lessons of the crisis may be that those countries where central banks assume banking supervision took advantage of their ability to react quickly and flexibly to emergency situations."

Others have expressed a similar view and that is why I think that the reforms we are announcing today are in the mainstream of reforms in financial regulation—a mainstream that the Opposition seem quite happy to stay outside, yet again.

Mr George Mudie (Leeds East) (Lab): I welcome the evolution of financial regulation. I think that the present system was tested and found wanting, so the movement has to be welcomed. I want to press the Minister on the subject of the Banking Commission. It was interesting that he left it out of his statement and that worries me, because I note that it will take 18 months before it reports. If that is so, it will probably miss the Queen's Speech for the following year, which suggests that it will be three or four years before we see legislation and the much-needed changes that will deal with the banks that caused the crisis. They continue to flaunt their behaviour on bonuses and have continued to hurt small business by not lending in the last two years. Urgent action is needed, so why is there this long timetable and why was this subject missing from his statement?

Mr Hoban: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that question. He has been a distinguished member of the Select Committee on the Treasury and has taken part in many discussions in that Committee and in Public Bill Committees when we have explored some of these issues. I sense that he is much more engaged in the need for reform than his colleagues on the Front Bench.

The Banking Commission is important and it is vital that we ensure that we learn some of the lessons that arise from the structure of the UK banking system. We have a very concentrated banking structure and three out of the four principal banks in the UK are universal banks. We need to understand what risks flow from that and how best to tackle those risks, as well as considering the impact of competition in the banking sector. The appointment yesterday of Sir John Vickers as chairman of the commission has been greeted with warm applause across the business and consumer community. There are four other commissioners— Martin Wolf, Martin Taylor, Clare Spottiswoode and Bill Winters—who are equally distinguished in their own fields. The commission will provide the opportunity for a proper debate about the structure of banking in this county—a debate in which the former Prime Minister and former Chancellor did not want to participate. We think that it is time to have that debate and when we have had it, that will help remove the uncertainty about the structure of banking in the UK.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I take the next question, may I ask for short questions and succinct answers? That will help everybody to get in.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): I welcome the Minister's statement on these much-needed reforms. Will he tell the House how the reforms set out today will affect the insurance sector, which shares the same regulatory regime as the banks but clearly operates very differently?

Mr Hoban: My hon. Friend makes a good point about the role of insurance. In this crisis, we must ensure that we distinguish between what has happened to the banking sector and the relative success of the insurance sector in withstanding the storms of this crisis. It is an important sector to the UK economy and a huge wealth generator. We need to ensure that the insurance sector, when it comes within the remit of the PRA, has the right sort of prudential regulation that recognises its strengths and challenges. It will of course be regulated as regards its relationship with consumers by the CPMA.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): The people of this country want to see a bit of humility and payback on the part of the banks. One opportunity to do that would be through the so-called Robin Hood tax on banking transactions, with the money going to alleviate poverty here and to tackle climate change across the globe. Will the Financial Secretary urge his right hon. Friend the Chancellor to introduce such a tax and to influence colleagues worldwide to do likewise?

Mr Hoban: I must say that I think that some humility should be shown by the Opposition Front Benchers for landing this country with a system that led to the longest and deepest recession since the 1930s.

Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con): I welcome the Minister to his new role. Does he agree that these banking reforms will help to boost confidence in the British economy once they are enacted? That will help to keep interest rates lower for longer, boost investment and create jobs.

Mr Hoban: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's question. It is important to ensure that businesses have confidence that where macro-prudential threats arise in future, action will be taken to resolve them. They did not have that confidence in the previous regime and I hope that they will have that confidence following the reforms that we have put forward today.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Economic growth in the past decade was driven largely by consumption. As a consequence, £1.4 trillion-worth of personal debt is circulating in the UK economy, which means that the human cost of the current recession will be particularly severe. Will the new Consumer Protection and Markets Authority make sure that lenders have to undertake affordability audits so that individuals and families incur only debts that they can service?

Mr Hoban: The hon. Gentleman is right to pick up on this issue. One of the big challenges is ensuring that consumers are properly equipped to understand their borrowing and saving needs, and the Consumer Financial Education Body has a key role to play in improving financial capability in order to help people to make the right decisions. Also, there is an obligation on industry to make sure that it provides consumers with the best advice possible to help them to make the right decisions.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I very much welcome that direction of travel, just as I welcomed the decision of the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), in 1997, to set the Bank of England free to make decisions on interest rates. Will the Minister clarify whether the Financial Policy Committee will publish its minutes openly and on a regular basis, and how it will deal with a situation in which it is concerned about a specific institution?

Mr Hoban: It is important that the Financial Policy Committee is transparent in its dealings. It is a great strength of the Monetary Policy Committee that it is transparent and that it can be held to account by the public for its decisions. We need to ensure that similar arrangements are put in place for the FPC—while respecting, as my hon. Friend has pointed out, the confidentiality of individual firms.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Will one of the new organisations under the Bank of England, the Office for Budget Responsibility or someone else alert the Treasury if the housing market starts to get overheated again?

Mr Hoban: One of the roles of the Financial Policy Committee is to identify threats to financial stability as they emerge. I would expect the FPC, in its work of looking at overall trends in the economy, to identify that sort of risk and to make it known not just to the Treasury, but to the wider public through its regular reports.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman say how many people at the FSA and at the Bank of England currently earn more than the Prime Minister? Does he intend to apply the policy in the coalition document? If he decides to pay above the rate of the Prime Minister's salary, should that element of the pay be performance-related, given the gravity of the decisions that such people will be taking?

Mr Hoban: There is an issue about pay levels, which we will need to look at. I am intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that there should be a greater variable element in relation to performance, given that a critique of many is that an excessive bonus culture in the City contributed to the financial crisis.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Will the Minister please explain how today's announcements will end the confusion in the markets and make sure that there is proper focus on regulation to end that confusion?

Mr Hoban: The package that we have set out today, which was greeted with a great deal of support last night when the Chancellor outlined it to the City, ends any uncertainty. The transition process that we have outlined today in relation to legislation, and the team led by Hector Sants, the current chief executive officer of the FSA, will reassure the City about the direction of travel on regulatory reform. The new settlement, which takes into account macro-prudential supervision, micro-prudential supervision and effective consumer supervision, will ensure that we have the right package of regulatory structures in future to safeguard the economy and to give confidence to consumers and others in the markets.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his new position. I know that County Durham will be proud as he is a son of Country Durham. Has he given any advice to the regulator on the position of non-executive directors on banks' boards, particularly regarding their role, remuneration and qualifications? He will know that one problem with Northern Rock was the fact that the non-executive chair's only qualification appears to have been that he was a member of the Ridley family—he inherited it from his father.

Mr Hoban: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the qualifications of non-executive directors. That is why the FSA has already instituted a process of interviewing senior members of staff and directors, before their appointment to boards or positions of responsibility, to ensure that the qualifications and experience that they bring to those important roles is checked.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Minister seriously contending that had these arrangements already been in place, the financial crisis would not have occurred? If he is not making that absurd suggestion, will he accept that he cannot promise that such a financial crisis will not occur again with these arrangements in place?

Mr Hoban: It is clear that if the Bank of England had not lost its power to monitor and act upon the level of debt in the economy, it might have been in a position to consider what was happening in the housing market, to consider the role that Northern Rock played in fuelling the asset-price bubble and to take action to cool that down. The only person who tried to rule out boom and bust in the past was the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath.

Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree with the Governor of the Bank of England's assessment that there was little real reform of banking regulation under the last Government, and that the Opposition should therefore welcome the measures that we are setting out today?

Mr Hoban: I hope that the Opposition will welcome the measures, but their views were not very clear from what the shadow Treasury spokesman said. In the past three or four years, when we have debated the reform of parts of the banking regulation sector, the problem has been that the then Government were unable to engage in the fundamental debate about whether the architecture was right. They failed to address that question, and that led to a new Government addressing that question and putting things right for the first time.

Steve Rotheram (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Will the Minister invite hon. and right hon. Members who are interested in the future of Liverpool football club to a meeting with RBS officials fully to scrutinise the deal that props up its leveraged buy-out by two American business men?

Mr Hoban: The board and management of RBS are responsible for its day-to-day commercial activities.

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con): Given the global nature of banking, will the Minister advise us on how regulation will proceed on an international basis, bearing in mind the need to maintain as many jobs as possible in this country?

Mr Hoban: It is important to make sure that debates on regulation are co-ordinated at the global level, and my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister take an active role in those debates in the G20. I have recently taken part in ECOFIN's summit, at which we discussed new supervisory arrangements in Europe. I am absolutely certain that we will engage in the debate both in Europe and globally to ensure that the structure of regulation supervision going forward is right to make sure that the system is stable and to ensure that decisions that have a fiscal impact are taken here, by UK regulators, and not in Europe.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I will accept that the banking reforms will make it more likely that if exactly the same problems happened in exactly the same way in exactly the same countries, we might be able to spot them, if not to do anything about them. Does the Minister accept that by failing to address the institutional failures in the banking system that are outside regulation—such as pay incentives within banking, the role of the rating agencies, the failure of international information flows and the lack of transaction costs in international financial markets—our country is just as vulnerable as ever to banking failures?

Mr Hoban: I do not agree with the hon. Lady. The package of reforms makes a significant improvement to the regulatory architecture in the UK, and there is further work that we can do at the European and the global level to make it more effective. She is right, in part, to say that institutions need to change their behaviour. We need to look at the structure of banking, which is why we will set up the Banking Commission that the Chancellor announced yesterday. Those reforms will help to improve structure, but let us look at what is important. Let us get the architecture right in this country, let us remedy the flawed system that her party's Government introduced in 1997 and let us ensure that the Bank of England has the tools to do the job. That will make a significant contribution to improving financial stability.

Point of Order

1.49 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. In the Financial Secretary's address to the House today, he made the accusation that Labour Ministers, possibly including myself, made spending commitments that were not funded. My hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) made the point that, if that was the case, I and other Ministers would have had to send a letter to the accounting officer—that is to say, the permanent secretary in the Department. Could you use your offices to request that those letters be produced, to go against the accusation that has been made today?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): That is not a matter for the Chair, as the hon. Member well knows, but he has certainly got his point on the record and I am sure that everybody has taken on board his comments.

Building a High-Skilled Economy

1.50 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Mr John Hayes): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of building a high-skilled economy.

It is a delight, having spent so many years in the shadows, to come into the light and be able to speak in this House as the new Minister. Some hon. Members will have read today in the press of my endorsement for floristry and dance. I am wearing this perfectly coloured co-ordinated buttonhole to illustrate the first, but the House, and you in particular, Mr Deputy Speaker, will be relieved to know that I shall not be illustrating the second, at least not by example.

The performance in office of the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), once the man who called the tune, was rather more of a conga than a quickstep. You know the conga, I have no doubt, Mr Deputy Speaker. It comprises a group of hapless individuals linked by routine, hopelessly following one another on a journey to nowhere.

Adult learning is a subject that inspires in those hon. Members present—I know this is true of hon. Members across the Chamber—emotional attachment and personal commitment. At the same time, it is not a subject in which anyone or any party can claim a monopoly of wisdom, which is why I am interested to hear views from across the Chamber. However, a new Government offer a new chance of a fresh start, the opportunity to bring change and hope to adult learners. However, not everyone realises that there has been a change. Sitting in my office the other day in my new Department, I was surprised to receive an out-of-the-blue phone call from someone asking for Mandy. I had to break the news to him that Mandy had moved on. To paraphrase Barry Manilow, "Oh Mandy, well you came and you took without giving…but I sent you away."

Lord Mandelson was right in at least one important respect. He made the economic case for skills. The economic case for skills was by far the strongest case made by the previous Government. It is significant, of course—indeed it is vital—but it is not the only case for skills. The economic case, which I shall deal with first, has been thrown into sharp relief by the economic turbulence, by the rising levels of unemployment and falling levels of hope, especially among young people, and by the growing numbers of employers finding it difficult to stay in business. It will continue to occupy a prominent place in public discourse as we move out of recession and towards the renewed growth about which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke recently at the Cass business school.

Mark Lancaster (Milton Keynes North) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Hayes: I happily give way to my hon. Friend, who has been such a resolute champion of the Open university in his constituency, which does so much to foster learning.

Mark Lancaster: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I should like to invite him to join me in paying tribute to the Open university. The one thing that has not changed in recent times is the contribution that that institution has made to lifelong learning.

Mr Hayes: The fact that I anticipated my hon. Friend's intervention merely gives it more force. He is right to say that the Open university plays a critical role in that regard. I will happily visit that place once again to cement the relationships that I have already formed there.

The economic case for skills will continue to be important because of the link between skills and competitiveness. It is well established, and it was made clear five years ago in the Leitch and Sainsbury reviews. Already their analysis has become orthodox in the debate about skills and the economy. The essence of their case was, and it remains salient, that driven by new technologies, the pace of economic and industrial change is growing, not just here in the west but in Asia and increasingly in Africa and South America. Once, those countries either did not compete in the same markets as this country or could offer only technologically inferior products. That is no longer the case. The unequal competition between high quality and low cost has been replaced by what Lord Sainsbury called a "race to the top".

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): In the context of international competition, how worried is the Minister by the letter in today's *The Daily Telegraph* from senior executives of leading British companies, who warn against the dangers of cuts to university funding and the risk that we will be left behind in the international competitive league as a result?

Mr Hayes: There is no doubt that the relationship between research and development and the kind of dynamism that I have described is a profound one. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Universities and Science will take that very seriously indeed in the process of framing our policy in respect of higher education.

I know that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) is sympathetic to the argument, so I may be pushing at at least a half-open door when I say that further education matters too. Building skills from the bottom up, re-engaging young people who are not in employment, education or training, up a ladder of skills to the levels that he is describing—levels 3, 4 and 5—is critical. The hon. Gentleman will understand why today I want to speak particularly about further education, as that is my responsibility.

We need to provide workers with the skills they want and businesses with the skills they need to compete in this increasingly challenging world. The Leitch analysis pointed towards an intensive effort to raise skills in this country, and indeed the House more than once debated these matters when the Labour party was in government. It is easier perhaps to say on the Opposition Benches, but I will repeat it from the Government Bench, that I do not accuse the hon. Member for Cardiff West of anything worse than a mistake. I do not think that Labour Members are malevolent; I think their intentions are broadly the same as ours. I just think they are misjudged. This is not about malice; it is about error. I know that they will want to acknowledge that when they speak in the debate. They are big men, and I want to give them this chance, because I am a generous Minister, to rush to the Dispatch Box to say that they got it wrong. Wouldn't we welcome that? Wouldn't the whole country welcome it, too?

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Are you sure you didn't teach drama?

Mr Hayes: Well, I said I was interested in dance. I am interested in sufficient drama to add to the theatricality of this place, without which it would be poorer.

During the years of the Labour Government, Labour Members often alleged that the largesse for further education would end if we came to power. If the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), my opponent and friend, were to wish to repeat his unfortunate appearance on "Celebrity Mastermind"—I do not want to remind him of that too much—he could do worse than choose the Thatcher Government as his specialist subject. We came to realise during our time in opposition that the Labour party spent more time speaking about 1979 than about the present. They were preoccupied with that in their dark years, and perhaps that is not surprising for a party that usually looks backwards rather than forwards, whereas the Conservative party is committed to progress and taking our country to where it needs to be now.

As a consequence of that preoccupation with the past, we were left with another Labour Government who spent until they broke the bank. As a result, even before they lost office, they were already cutting adult skills. Last year's pre-Budget report said—I have it here for those hon. Members who have not had the opportunity to go to the Library to collect it—that £300 million would be cut from the adult skills budget if Labour returned to Government. When Members hear complaints about the new Government's performance, they should set them in that context. Mandy was first to the table to say he would cut his Department, and encouraged his colleagues to do the same. People are still making phone calls to my office to try to find him, to ask exactly where the cuts would have fallen.

While Labour Members were drifting further and further out of touch into a world populated by fictional numbers rather than real people, Conservatives were talking to adult educators and adult learners about their experiences. We were talking to employers about their skills needs and to union learning representatives about the obstacles they face in creating a learning culture among their members. So that it is unequivocal, so that there is no question and no doubt, let me say that I and the Government are committed to unionlearn; we celebrate all it does and all that it will continue to do with our support and encouragement.

As a result of the conversations we had and dialogues we enjoyed, we learned important lessons about the indispensability of further education as an engine of social and economic change. History teaches us that the better educated a nation's people are, the more economically prosperous they are likely to be—their general levels of health will be better, too, their communities will be more united and their family and social bonds will be stronger—and the more they will appreciate the things that money cannot buy, but without which life is colourless. All deserve their chance to see, hear, taste and touch beauty.

The conviction that education is the key to so much more than a wage packet drove pioneers, such as the founders of the Workers Educational Association, who sought to take learning, until then the preserve of the privileged few, out to the many. The impulse that promoted better manual skills also created the penny classics that did so much to spread the love of English literature throughout society, and the growth of choral and instrumental societies that brought great music virtually to the factory floor. The fire that drove adult education's pioneers still burns, and it drives the coalition Government's programme for further education and skills. The challenge we face in rebuilding a system fit for purpose is scarcely less imposing than was theirs in building a system from scratch.

In recent years, the link between skills and craftsmanship—I am not afraid to call it craftsmanship—the ideal of self-betterment and the pleasures of learning as a means of gaining wider and richer perspectives on the world have been allowed to wither. But not any longer: we in this Government will make a bold case for that relationship—a firm case for the cohesive power of learning, how it changes lives by changing life chances and increases prospects both to gain and prosper in a job, and in all the other ways that I have described.

No one denies that one of the key functions of Government is to create, as far as possible, the right conditions for economic success, and none would deny, I hope, that adult skills policy is one of the most powerful economic levers at any Government's disposal. But the time has come finally to acknowledge that a socialist model of centralised planning has failed, even in terms of its own narrow criteria for success. We really cannot continue the micro-managed, target-driven, bureaucratic regime that for years has dogged further education and damaged our prospects of raising skills levels.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I know that you and the House will not underestimate the scale of the challenge. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills reported in "Ambition 2020", published last year, that on recent trends we are likely to slip from 18th to 21st in the OECD rankings for intermediate level skills by 2020. Shadow Ministers will be familiar with the report.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

Mr Hayes: I happily give way to the new Chairman of the Select Committee, whom I welcome in that role.

Mr Bailey: I thank the Minister for his kind words. I welcome him to his position and look forward to seeing him in our Committee in due course. I congratulate him on his bravura performance—indeed, it has been quite theatrical at times. He commented on the top-down approach. I note that his colleague the Minister for Universities and Science has written to higher and further education organisations inviting them to publish employability statements. Today the hon. Gentleman placed a statement in the Library saying that the Government would be introducing measures to give

"learners the information they need to drive the system, through the publication of clear and consistent information."

If that is not an example of a top-down and potentially bureaucratic approach, what is it? Could he enlighten us?

Mr Hayes: I want to be generous; as you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, that is in my character. I know that the hon. Gentleman is new to the task, but he has been

[Mr Hayes]

an assiduous member of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, and a frequent contributor to debates in the Chamber. As such, I hoped he would have known that the key plank of my party's perspective on this subject—indeed, the coalition's perspective—is the need to inform and empower learners. It is critically important that people get the right advice and guidance, and part of that process is explaining to them the likely employment outcomes of pursuing courses of study and training. We are encouraging universities and colleges, and the reformed careers service that we will bring in, to give people a very clear understanding of what will happen if they embark on particular routes. What are their chances of getting a job? What sort of job will it be? What are the wage implications? How might they progress thereafter?

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Hayes: I give way to my hon. Friend, who in his maiden speech has already made his commitment to skills, and apprenticeships in particular, very clear.

Robert Halfon: I congratulate my hon. Friend on doing so much to push forward our policy for 100,000 apprenticeships. Why do only just 28% of British workers qualify to become apprentices or gain technical skills compared to France, where the figure is 51%, or Germany where it is 65%—the percentage we should reach in this country? What has gone so badly wrong in the UK that our skills level is so low?

Mr Hayes: That requires not so much an answer as a seminar, but I shall try to summarise in a sentence or two what I might say at such a seminar. The problem in Britain has been threefold. First, we have not promoted apprenticeships as effectively as we should. Although the brand is strong among potential learners, employers and the public, it is clear that the previous Government did not believe in apprenticeships as much as we do. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members complain but many people thought that the right hon. Member for Tottenham's ministerial predecessor—a valued colleague and a good Minister—did FA for FE and was sent to the FO. I do not know whether Fanny Adams is unparliamentary language, but it is certainly true that in debates with that Minister I made it absolutely clear that we wanted to grow the number of apprenticeships, yet the Labour Government insisted on retaining a strong emphasis on what they regarded as their flagship training and skills product—Train to Gain, about which I shall speak a little more in a moment.

The second point in answer to my hon. Friend's intervention is that although part of the problem is about marketing, part of it is about resource. We have decided to transfer a significant portion of the Train to Gain budget to apprenticeships, because we know the skills apprenticeships can confer. We know how long they take to learn and we know that people want them. We know employers like them. We know what they cost. That cannot be said of the Train to Gain programme, in which the previous Government placed so much faith.

Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr Hayes: I give way to the hon. Lady, who always takes such an assiduous interest in education matters.

Roberta Blackman-Woods: I am sure we are all enjoying the hon. Gentleman's theatrics this afternoon, but will he look at some evidence? In 2008-09, 240,000 people started apprenticeships, compared to 75,000 in 1997-98, so I do not think it is for Labour to take lectures from the Conservatives about the importance of apprenticeships.

Mr Hayes: The hon. Lady must not deceive new Members—*[Interruption.]* I know she would not do so—except inadvertently, of course; I take that as read—because newer Members might come to believe her suggestion—I put it no more strongly than that.

What the previous Government actually did was to reclassify what counted as an apprenticeship. In France and Germany, about which we heard a moment ago, all apprenticeships are at level 3, and they once were in Britain. When the Labour Government came to power, they reclassified level 2 qualifications as apprenticeships and then trumpeted the fact that there were more of them. As both the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen know, the level 3 numbers remained stubbornly rather less than was required, than the Government wanted and than employers knew they needed. So we should focus on level 3 apprenticeships if we wish to get a true comparison both of our previous performance and of international data.

Kevin Brennan: How many of the 50,000 new places that the hon. Gentleman is announcing can he guarantee to the House will be level 3 apprenticeships?

Mr Hayes: The hon. Gentleman is far too experienced a Member to expect me to give on-the-hoof guarantees of that kind, but what I will say is that I have asked my officials—my officials—to look closely at the definition and, indeed, the stratification of apprenticeships. I want to build the ladder of qualifications that takes people from re-engagement right up to level 4 and 5.

Let me tell the hon. Gentleman and the House about three things that we will do on apprenticeships. As well as putting the extra resource in, we will grow the number of frameworks at level 3 and 4 and we will explore frameworks at level 5, where there is a demand, I am told, in meetings with the high-tech industries such as advanced engineering. The hon. Gentleman will know some of the sectors to which I refer. We will look closely at those level 2 apprenticeships which, with redefinition, can be built to level 3—in other words, some of the high-end level 2 qualifications that with further work may become level 3—and we will think again about those level 2 qualifications that cannot. It is entirely appropriate that they might be regarded as a foundation to an apprenticeship, but I am not sure that it is right that they should be called full apprenticeships. This makes comparisons with our international competitors difficult, and I am not sure that it does not short-change employers and learners. Yes, of course, there is a place for level 2, but the emphasis will be on level 3, and that is what the hon. Gentleman needs to know.

Kevin Brennan: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that some of the new apprenticeships that he is announcing that he will create may not be classified as apprenticeships in future?

Mr Hayes: No; I am saying that some of the existing apprenticeships may not be classified so, and that the new money and the new emphasis will be on level 3. I want to return to the main text of my speech.

Steve McCabe: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Hayes: I want to make progress; I will give way later. The hon. Gentleman has had one turn, and although I am generous, my generosity is not without limit.

I want now to focus on the highly centralised and bureaucratic system that developed under the previous Government, whereby funds that could have been used for teaching and training were actually used detailing plans, complying with targets and formulating schemes. Instead of enabling colleges and other providers to respond to the needs of businesses and learners, Ministers thought they knew what was best. Excessive bureaucracy sapped precious energy from our education system. If I might, as a primer, offer advice again, particularly to newer Members, that if proof were needed of that assertion, it is to be found in the report commissioned as early as 2005 by the last Government under the auspices of Sir Andrew Foster. That report concluded that there was a "galaxy" of oversight, inspection and administration in the FE sector, and called for precisely the kind of streamlined and more responsive structure that we in this Government will now put in place.

Even worse, though, that centralised, target-driven micro-management led to a systemic failure in the form of an FE capital funding crisis from which the sector is still reeling. Members will know that the Learning and Skills Council encouraged bids that would have cost 10 times more than the available funds. Across the country, 144 capital bids were frozen. Members across the Chamber came to the House to complain about the circumstances in their localities and the effects on their local colleges, and rightly so. Seventy-nine of those projects had already received agreement in principle. Many colleges incurred considerable cost.

Andrew Foster was once again brought out of mothballs by the Government to produce another report, and he made it very clear that a top-heavy, bureaucratic system had failed. He concluded that the LSC was too slow to respond—

"there were straws in the wind, early storm warnings, but the problem was not crystallised fast enough."

So we will look closely at FE capital. Next week, I shall make it clear how we will spend on a bid basis with colleges the extra £50 million that the Chancellor has agreed to devote to FE capital projects.

Kevin Brennan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Hayes: I will give way once more, and then I really must make some progress, because a number of hon. Members want to contribute to the debate.

Kevin Brennan: Can the hon. Gentleman confirm that the extra £50 million that he describes as capital has been taken from the Department's revenue spending for skills, and that it will only be for this year, and that therefore in the long term, in perpetuity, it is a £50 million cut?

Mr Hayes: I have already celebrated the hon. Gentleman's assiduity, and his numeracy skills are obvious, too. He is right: the money is being taken from the Train to Gain budget, and it is being allocated to capital. The justification for that is the urgency of the problem. Had the Labour party organised the capital funding in FE in anything like a reasonable way, we would not have to take these emergency measures. That will bring some light to those colleges who were for so long, as I was, in the shadows—in the darkness.

The hon. Gentleman will also know that this is therefore a one-off programme, but we will now look at a longer-term set of proposals for FE capital, and in my estimation even this short-term measure will deliver benefit to 150 colleges across the country. There will be more details next week. I know that the hon. Gentleman cannot wait—the whole House is excited—but he must, because I cannot give all the presents out on the same day; some have to be saved for Boxing day.

There has to be a better way to take advantage of the immense human capital in the college system, to build a high-skilled, high-tech economy. We really must offer a new beginning. That is why I want to move to the four points that lay at the heart of the letter that I wrote today, and then to my exciting conclusion.

The letter that I have written today to the principals of all colleges sets out ways in which we will set FE free. First, I am removing the requirement to complete summary statements of activity, with a resulting reduction in performance monitoring of employer responsiveness. Secondly, the Government have already announced the removal of Ofsted inspections for schools with outstanding performance. I will work with ministerial colleagues to introduce the same way of working in the FE sector, removing inspections for colleges with outstanding performance.

Thirdly, I will remove the regulatory requirement for college principals to undertake the principals qualifying programme, not because I do not want appropriately qualified principals—I know that there are a range of development opportunities and qualifications that can enhance managers', leaders' and principals' skills to run colleges in the 21st century—but because individuals in our institutions should be free to decide what package of development is appropriate to support their individual circumstances.

Fourthly and most importantly, I will enable all colleges except those that are performing poorly to move money between adult learner and employer budgets, because they, rather than Ministers, know how best to meet the needs of local learners and employers. All those measures are intended to increase the power of colleges to determine how best to manage their affairs in the light of local training needs. I want not just to encourage them to listen to what local people and local businesses have to say, but to be free to act, to respond and to use that information with a minimum of fuss, delay and administrative cost.

This is only the beginning—a first indication of the Government's determination to deliver on the promises we made to providers when we were in opposition. We are drawing a line under the mistakes of the past and reaching for a better future.

It is true that our debate takes place in difficult circumstances and that the public sector will be obliged to make efficiency savings. It is also true, as I said earlier—I want to be honest about this—that no guarantees can be offered about future funding. With freedom comes a fresh challenge, so as unnecessary compliance costs are reduced, I will be looking to colleges to find

[Mr Hayes]

efficiencies. They would expect that, as would the House. That will include encouraging colleges to find more cost-efficient ways of conducting their affairs, such as by merging back-office functions and streamlining their procurement processes. If the Government had done that earlier—when Labour Members controlled the purse strings—we could have made more progress to match and beat the performance of the competitor countries to which I referred that have outpaced us on apprenticeships and driven up the skills of their work forces to an extent that we have not. The Train to Gain programme was part of the problem. I know that former Ministers are obliged to defend it, but they know what the National Audit Office said about its dead-weight cost. They know that assessment was too often dressed up as training and that the brokerage service at the programme's heart was, at best, only a partial success.

Before my appointment as Minister, I was fortunate enough to enjoy a long apprenticeship as shadow Minister. Over those years, I held countless meetings with college principals and visited innumerable colleges throughout the country. Everything that I said in opposition, and everything that I say now in government, has been informed by the views and opinions of the sector. We will continue that dialogue about shaping further education in this country—alongside the needs of business and industry, and combined with the Government's priorities—in a way that delivers opportunities to a new generation of learners.

The stakes are high. The ability of our economy to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances depends in no small measure on the capacity of workers to adapt. They need to be sure of the promise that new skills and knowledge will lead inexorably to new and better chances in life. My aim—and my commitment—is to make good on that promise for the next generation.

Today, a start has been made, but there is much more to do to build a country with the skills that we need to compete, a country ready to elevate the practical, and a country where learning is valued for its own sake and for its economic, social and cultural benefits: proud, confident learners, colleges free to respond and a dynamic, highly skilled economy—Britain being the best that it can be.

2.23 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): May I start by apologising to the House for the fact that I will not be able to be present for the wind-ups? I have already informed the Minister and you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I genuinely welcome the Minister to his post as skills Minister on his first outing since the formation of the new Government. Given his flowery rhetoric, it was kind of him to provide a visual aid in his lapel, which we all appreciated. He was somewhat ungenerous in his opening remarks, but that was slightly uncharacteristic. I know that he is a lover of poetry, and I hope that the speech that we have just heard will not be typical of his ministerial speeches, given that it contained no poetry. I am also a lover of poetry, so perhaps I may cite a line from Yeats:

"Those that I fight I do not hate".

That is certainly true of the hon. Gentleman, but as he might know the rest of the poem, I should emphasise that I do love my own side.

When we were in government, we said that the manufacturing of items constructed out of composite materials probably represented part of the future for Britain, but few of us anticipated that it would be possible to meld the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats to manufacture a composite Government. We can only begin to speculate about how quickly the already visible fissures in that composite construction will form into cracks, and then progressively and inevitably lead to critical failure.

The Minister is extremely fortunate to inherit his portfolio, because he has the opportunity to build on the Labour Government's tremendous record of achieving so much when we were in power, provided that his Department does not continue to be the Chancellor of the Exchequer's whipping boy in the frenzied search for cuts far beyond those necessary to bring down the deficit at a sustainable rate.

Let me briefly outline why the Minister is fortunate to inherit our record on skills. The performance of further education colleges and other providers has improved dramatically over the past decade. The satisfaction rates of employers and learners have risen. Since 2001, about 3 million adults have improved their basic skills and achieved a national qualification. Since 1997, more than 2 million people have started apprenticeships, which represents a massive increase in apprenticeship starts since the Conservative party was previously in power. Completion rates for apprenticeships have also more than doubled.

Despite the Minister's trashing of the Train to Gain programme—although I note that he has not completely axed it—employers and workers report strong satisfaction with the scheme. More than 1 million people have been able to start learning programmes at work that lead to a qualification. That has reduced staff turnover, improved productivity and engaged more than 140,000 employers in training. Earlier this year, I was proud to be able to meet Chris Scott, a process operator at William Blythe Ltd, a chemical manufacturer in Accrington, who, by completing his level 2 NVQ—yes, level 2—in business improvement techniques, became the one millionth learner from the Train to Gain programme to gain a qualification. I should also mention the record number of students in higher education, although my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) will say more about that later.

Robert Halfon: The hon. Gentleman talks about the importance of Train to Gain, so why did the previous Government cut £1.3 million from the Train to Gain budget for Harlow college?

Kevin Brennan: It would be remiss of me if I did not welcome the hon. Gentleman to the House. I also pay tribute to his predecessor—a former skills Minister. I shall talk about the priorities for skills spending later. However, I note that although the current Minister has tried to cut the Train to Gain budget and to trash the programme comprehensively, he has not yet completely abolished it.

I am especially proud of the work that we did in government with the trade unions. Despite Conservative hostility, as even the Minister might admit, we introduced

the union learning fund, which is now worth £21.5 million a year. As a result, there are now more than 23,000 union learning reps. They get to the parts of the workplace that other trainers and providers sometimes do not reach, and they helped nearly 250,000 workers into learning last year. Latterly—I give this Minister and the Minister for Universities and Science credit for this—that even won praise from the Minister for Universities and Science for its effectiveness and efficiency. One day, the skills Minister might be able to mention the union learning fund and the trade unions in a speech and get the odd "Hear, hear!" from the Back Benchers behind him, rather than the blank looks that he got when he talked about them today.

The highly successful transformation fund for informal adult learning has also brought about a sea change in people's perceptions of themselves, and has helped to generate a marked increase in participation, particularly among those in the lower D and E socio-economic groups, and that is a legacy of the previous Government's of which I am proud.

There was huge investment of over £2 billion in building the colleges of the future, although the hon. Gentleman rightly mentioned the problems with the programme. That programme transformed the places in which people learn. He will have the pleasure, as Minister, of visiting many of those colleges and seeing the transformational impact of the capital investment in our further education colleges that took place under the Labour Government. He may also remind himself that not a single penny was spent on further education capital for colleges in the final year of his party's last term in office. So there is a substantial platform on which to build, and a clear strategy for the future was set out in the skills White Paper last November.

Mr Hayes: Given the spirit that has permeated our exchanges thus far, and indeed today, I know that the shadow Minister will want to welcome the extra £50 million. He was slightly critical when he said that it was to be taken from revenue and was a one-off, but he knows that that was needed and will be welcomed across the sector. Will he just say a word of welcome for that?

Kevin Brennan: I am always happy to argue for more investment and capital for our FE colleges, but later I may return to the issue of the £50 million and whether, overall, the Department should be welcoming the way in which it has been pick-pocketed by the Treasury over that measure.

As I say, there is a substantial platform on which to build. The skills White Paper, which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, was published last November, set out pretty clearly the skills challenges for the next decade and a clear set of proposals to meet that challenge, including an ambition to ensure that three quarters of people participate in higher education or complete an advanced apprenticeship by the age of 30. Included in those proposals were: the expansion of the apprenticeship system to build a new technical class by doubling apprenticeship places for young adults; apprenticeship scholarships; and the focus of the skills budget on the areas from which future jobs will come. I make no apology for that, although I agree with the hon. Gentleman's remarks about skills being wider than simply an economic matter. I make no apology for focusing on the areas from which future jobs will come.

The proposals also include: a joint investment scheme with sector skills councils; more national skills academies; skills accounts, to which I think the hon. Gentleman referred; user-friendly public ratings for colleges and providers, to which I think he referred in his written statement today; better skills provision for those on out-of-work benefits; promotion of apprenticeships as a priority in public procurement; reducing the number of publicly funded skills agencies by over 30; and focusing resources on key economic strategic priorities. A strong record of achievement and a clear and widely welcomed strategy for the future—that is the strong legacy bequeathed to the hon. Gentleman as Minister with responsibility for skills in the new Government.

Mr Hayes *rose—*

Kevin Brennan: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman rises to acknowledge that.

Mr Hayes: I do not want to interrupt the hon. Gentleman too often, and I will give him some poetry, if I get a chance, in a later intervention, but he talks about the legacy that his party left. I just want him to be clear with the House about where the £300 million reductions in

"funding not directly supporting learner participation and lower priority adult skills budgets"

would actually have fallen; that is in the pre-Budget report that his Government published.

Kevin Brennan: I am slightly surprised by that comment, because the hon. Gentleman seemed at first in his speech to be criticising us for making those necessary savings, but later to be saying that we should have made them earlier. I am not quite sure why that suddenly became the point on which he wanted to intervene. However, he can intervene as often as he likes; I am happy to give way to him on any number of occasions, as he knows.

What does the hon. Gentleman propose to do with the strong, powerful and compelling legacy that I have just outlined to the House? First, his Department is cutting by 10,000 the number of university places that would have been on offer this autumn. That is despite him and his colleagues persistently claiming—and actually bringing my colleagues and me to the House, when we were the Ministers, to boast about the fact—that they were committed to, creating an extra 10,000 university places over and above what the Government were committed to through a sort of "buy now, pay later" student loan early payback scheme, which we argued was entirely bogus, and which appears to have been wiped from the collective memories of Government Front Benchers during their coalition reprogramming course.

Perhaps when the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr Davey) winds up, he can tell us what happened to the pet scheme to conjure up more student places for free. The Minister for Universities and Science explained in the House on many occasions how it would work, despite our scepticism. Has the Treasury finally explained to him and his colleagues what we told him all along—that it was Mickey Mouse maths and would not work? I think that the Under-Secretary agrees that it is Mickey Mouse maths; he did when he was in opposition.

[Kevin Brennan]

What else have the Administration done on skills apart from announcing cuts to university places and budgets? They have tried to soften the Department's pain of being the Chancellor's whipping boy so far in the £6 billion in-year cuts package by recycling £200 million from the skills budget—from the Train to Gain programme—into additional apprenticeship places costing £150 million, and, as the Minister outlined, into capital for further education colleges of £50 million. The Secretary of State bragged about that yesterday in the Chamber. He tried to give the impression that it was year zero and that he was the first Minister ever to come to the Dispatch Box to announce anything about spending on further education capital and apprenticeships.

On capital, the Secretary of State has been done over by the oldest Treasury trick in the book—converting revenue into capital. He claimed that he kept back £200 million from the package when he is doing no such thing. The £50 million on capital, as the Minister generously admitted in his remarks, is for this year only. The Chancellor has picked the Secretary of State's skills budget pocket for future years to the tune of £50 million per annum and that should be acknowledged.

The Secretary of State should have made the case for capital separately, if he wanted to make such a case to the Treasury in the spending review. Instead, he has allowed the Treasury to deny the skills budget £50 million a year from next year onwards—in perpetuity—even before the Budget and the spending review. That is a little naive. He has been had and he ought to have known better.

Let us consider the apprenticeships proposal. There are no stronger supporters of apprenticeships than me, Labour Members and the previous Labour Government. No Government did more than the previous Government to rescue apprenticeships from the almost criminal indifference of the previous Tory Government, who allowed apprenticeships to fall to only 65,000, with a completion rate of only a third.

The Secretary of State should be more candid about the proposals. He is not trying to do the difficult, but most important, things on apprenticeships. He is after the low-hanging fruit—and I hope he will think carefully about that—because he hopes to claim a quick victory on apprenticeship numbers. For the benefit of the House and all concerned, let us be clear about what he is doing. Although he tried to give an impression to the contrary yesterday, he is not creating new training opportunities apprenticeships for the youngest and most difficult to place. He is not—as we pledged to do and he must still deliver, unless he wants to tell us that he will abandon the policy; I do not think that he will—trying to create more advanced apprenticeships for young adults. He is not aiming to support a particular number of new jobs. He is transferring funding in the training and skills budget from one form of funding for those who are in work into another—good, but more expensive—form of training, which he knows is overwhelmingly likely to be taken up not by employers looking to take on new young workers who are currently out of work, but by those who will train a smaller number of older workers currently in work than they would have done under Train to Gain.

Now that is fine—it is a legitimate decision for the Government to make—but the Secretary of State should not try to give the impression that the announcement and the programme is likely to result in 50,000 new job opportunities for young people, or even new jobs for older workers.

Mr Hayes: We cannot allow this to stand, can we? I hope that I wear the weight

"Of learning lightly like a flower",

in the words of Tennyson. I also hope that that learning might inform the thinking of the House on apprenticeships. Of course some of the new apprenticeships will be adult apprenticeships and some will be for young people, and of course some will be about upskilling and some about reskilling, but to suggest that the people involved will simply be those currently taught under Train to Gain is nonsense. The hon. Gentleman knows what the National Audit Office said about that scheme: 25% dead-weight cost.

Mr Speaker: Order. May I say to the Minister that the erudition of his intervention was equalled only by its length? Although it is a joy to listen to his mellifluous tones, I hope that not all such interventions will be of equal length.

Kevin Brennan: It is a joy to listen to the Minister, and I am glad that he at last came up with some poetry and quoted Tennyson's words that one should wear learning lightly. Perhaps I could come back with some Alexander Pope:

"A little learning is a dang'rous thing;

Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring".

The vast number of people who will take up the Minister's proposals will already be in work, and they will be in the older, not the younger, age bracket. He may prove my prediction wrong in future, but he does not have a rule to ensure that the apprenticeships are for younger workers—under-25s—or one to ensure that apprenticeships are for new starts only. If he wants to talk about dead weight, he should calculate the dead weight of his proposal in respect of the training that would have happened anyway.

The Minister also needs to tell us how he will drive up apprenticeships elsewhere—in the public sector, for example. How will he use procurement to help that? Unless he shows leadership—I say this to him candidly and sincerely—and knocks heads together in the Government, that will not happen. All he will get from his colleagues will be that one-note symphony that we have heard so far from the Government, like the vuvuzelas in the World cup, saying that nothing can be done on public sector apprenticeships because of cuts. That is what he will be told. My advice to him is this: he needs to fight, fight and fight again against Treasury orthodoxy on behalf of apprenticeships if he wants to make an impact as a Minister.

It is clear that the Minister's enjoyable and occasionally flowery rhetoric—if he will forgive me for saying so—hides a prosaic reality in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The Secretary of State really wants to be in charge of the banks but has been walked all over by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in that ambition and, in an age-old Treasury way, has had his pocket picked over FE, skills, capital and revenue; and the Universities and Science Minister, who really wants to be the Secretary

of State and deeply resents the Liberal Democrat succubus who now has his job, has, in his absent-minded, dual-brained, batty, professorial way, carelessly mislaid 10,000 university places since the election. It is no wonder that in the confusion, the Treasury has been able to bamboozle a Department that has two heads and three brains. Now we have proposals for capital and apprenticeships that are not all that they seem.

If we are going to build Britain's skills for the future, we need strong, united leadership from the Department, not weak, divided leadership hidden by the Minister's baroque oratory. His words are fine for now, but unless he starts standing up for skills, his flowery rhetoric will wilt under the heat of political reality.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. As I think the House will be aware, the debate is heavily subscribed, and I therefore impose a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches, to apply with immediate effect.

2.44 pm

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech as the first Member for the new Milton Keynes South constituency. I regret that I do not have any poetry to share with the House this afternoon, but I am pleased to contribute to this debate on building a high-skilled economy. The motto of Milton Keynes is "By Knowledge, Design and Understanding", and my constituency has always been at the heart of learning and technological innovation.

Before I turn to those themes, let me first pay tribute to my predecessors. I use the plural deliberately because, thanks to the work of the Boundary Commission, I have two. The bulk of my constituency was in the former Milton Keynes, South-West seat, represented for the last 13 years by Dr Phyllis Starkey. I got to know her quite well, having been her opponent in the 2001 and 2005 elections, as well as in the poll last month. Over the 10 years in which we were political sparring partners, it is fair to say that there were few policies on which we agreed. However, I pay tribute to her for her service to Milton Keynes. To represent such a diverse and dynamic constituency for more than a decade is no small achievement. I also know that she had a strong reputation in this House for pursuing her causes with tenacity and determination.

My other immediate predecessor is, I am delighted to say, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster). He was a diligent and well-regarded representative for the two wards that I have inherited from him—Danesborough and Walton Park—and I look forward to continuing his good work. Indeed, we are planning to work very closely together to provide a seamless service to the whole of Milton Keynes. In these financially challenged times, we are endeavouring to save on the public purse by sharing a constituency office.

Hon. Members may think that they know about Milton Keynes, but I would like to use this speech to challenge a number of misconceptions. In an economic debate, it would have been neat to follow the widely held view that Milton Keynes is named after the two distinguished economists, Milton Friedman and John Maynard Keynes, but that is not the case. The city takes its names from the historic village of Milton Keynes, which is in my hon. Friend's constituency.

It is true that Milton Keynes is a new city that is just over 40 years in age, with plenty of modern housing estates, and the roundabouts and grid road system with which hon. Members may be all too well acquainted if they have not followed the logic of the layout. However, that modernity belies a rich history stretching over many centuries. Stony Stratford, for example, is an ancient coaching town on the Watling street roman road. The House may not know that the origin of the phrase "cock and bull story" lies in Stony Stratford. On the high street, there are two hotels—the Bull and the Cock. Legend has it that, as travellers stopped to break their journeys between London and cities in the midlands and north, the ale flowed freely and stories became more and more embellished before being relayed, in their exaggerated state, to their destination. I pledge that my contributions in this House will have a sounder factual base.

Bletchley, which forms about one third of my constituency, is of course the home of Bletchley Park and the code breakers, whose brilliant work certainly shortened the second world war and saved many hundreds of thousands of lives. Indeed, it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that their work changed the outcome of the war and, had they not succeeded, we might not today enjoy the freedom of speech that we do. I am delighted to report that, after many years of neglect, important restoration work is being carried out at Bletchley Park, under the expert guidance of its director, Simon Greenish, and I shall do what I can to ensure that the restoration project is completed.

I also wish to use this opportunity to pay tribute to the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), for what he did to right the wrong against the brilliant code breaker and mathematician, Alan Turing, a national hero who was so persecuted for being gay that he ultimately took his own life. While the right hon. Gentleman and I share little political agreement—although, in the interests of full disclosure, I should declare that I was christened by his father—I pay tribute to him for making that national apology for the wrong done to Alan Turing.

Bletchley Park is also the home of the modern computer, which is just one of my constituency's major contributions to the UK's high-skilled economy. That tradition has continued with the Open university, which is also located in my constituency. Many hundreds of thousands of lives have been transformed by the Open university, and it has long embodied the vital principle of lifelong learning, reskilling people as their careers evolve and giving a second chance to those who have, for whatever reason, missed out on a more traditional form of higher education. The new vice-chancellor of the Open university, Martin Bean, is making an excellent start in preparing and updating the university to meet the ever-evolving challenges that lie ahead. His appointment is significant, because as a former senior director of Microsoft, his move from a high-end private company to the world of education illustrates the vital links that must exist between the two if the UK is to sustain a high-knowledge economy.

[Iain Stewart]

Milton Keynes is home to another pioneering model of higher-level learning that I believe will play a major part in the skilling of our economy—University Centre Milton Keynes, under the wise leadership of Professor Keith Straughan. When fully established, this exciting new concept will enable young people to access top-quality learning close to home and integrated with their learning at work. It is a model of partnership working and came about as a result of demand from the local community, local employers, civic partners and the voluntary and community sector. Will the Minister, as well as visiting the Open university, visit UCMK? I am sure that he will find a lot there that fits with the Government's agenda.

I have long believed that to unlock the full potential of people in the UK, we need to break down some of the barriers that sometimes exist between higher and further education, and the needs of skilled employers. To ensure that the UK can beat both our traditional economic competitors and the fast-rising challenge from emerging economies, we need much greater flexibility in our education system, and in that Milton Keynes is leading the way.

Milton Keynes has a high-skilled economy, with many exciting new projects, such as the electric car scheme being piloted there. However, our success does not rest alone on its dynamic economy. For a relatively young new city, we have a fantastic, positive, can-do attitude and enjoy a rich tapestry of civic society, with more than 1,200 voluntary and charitable organisations. That spirit is embodied by Milton Keynes' successful bid to be a host venue should England be successful in staging the 2018 World cup. And let this Scotsman put it on the record that I want England to triumph in South Africa and to go on to host the tournament in eight years.

After my electoral disappointment in 2001 and 2005, I could easily have moved on and sought a securer passage to this place, but I did not want to. Having made Milton Keynes my home, I wanted to be the Member for that area, and I feel honoured to be given a chance to represent it in the House. I began my speech by paying tribute to my immediate predecessors, but I would like to conclude with a reference to another former Member—Bill Benyon, who is the father of my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) and was Member for the Milton Keynes area for 22 years until 1992. Nearly two decades after he retired from this House, he is still remembered with great warmth and affection by many of my constituents as a kind, compassionate and hard-working man who believed in Milton Keynes and did whatever he could to champion this exciting new city on a wider stage. I hope that, in my time in the House, I can achieve a similar record of service.

2.53 pm

Steve Rotheram (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) on his maiden speech—a Scotsman supporting England, hey?

"Forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I stumble over the proprieties peculiar to the House".—[*Official Report*, 24 July 1991; Vol. 195, c. 1202.]

Those are not my words, but the opening salvo in the maiden speech by my predecessor, whom I shall cite more later, on 24 July 1991. Such observations are as true today as they were 19 years ago. Although I have only been in this place for a few short weeks, I have already started to take notice of the vagaries of the House. For example, I have noted that when a Member begins a speech with the words "I will be brief", an extensive and loquacious contribution is guaranteed. Similarly, when the words "This doesn't really need saying" are uttered, it is odds-on that an explanation of what it was that did not need saying will be given, in some detail, to those to whom it did not need explaining in the first place.

Mr Speaker, you may well have been able to discern from my accent—if not my haircut—that I am from the home of John, Paul, George and Ringo. However, it is also the home of Gerry Marsden, The Farm and China Crisis—to unashamedly mention just a few of my personal friends. Liverpool boasts too many politicians, musicians, comedians, poets, broadcasters, artists and so on to mention individually. Otherwise, my maiden speech might well have been one of the longest ever recorded.

It is also possible to find a Scouser at every level of our armed forces. One of my constituents, Craig Lundberg, who was blinded in an attack by insurgents in Iraq, is an inspiration to others. Like many Members from all parts of the House, I would like to pay tribute to all those in our armed forces who carry out such dangerous and commendable work on behalf of us all.

I represent a constituency that, uniquely, boasts two premiership football clubs within its boundaries. In our football-mad city, the achievements of Everton and Liverpool have a direct effect on the fortunes of our city. Historically, we have been no strangers to on-field success. However, for one of our clubs it is now fortunes of the financial kind that threaten its very existence. I urge hon. Members to sign early-day motion 197 on the issue, as the Minister concerned previously refused my request for a meeting with the Royal Bank of Scotland.

I should perhaps declare at this point that I am a dyed-in-the-wool Liverpool fan and a season ticket holder at Anfield. However, I would honestly say the same things if Everton FC had been the victim of a leveraged buy-out that had endangered its future survival and caused so many problems for my constituents living in close proximity to its football stadium. England's most successful football club is slowly being drained by the greed of two American asset strippers, and this is having a negative impact on regeneration projects for the whole area. Unfortunately, the beautiful game does not always attract those with beautiful intentions.

One of the great socialist philosophers of the last century—the great Bill Shankly—may have been mistaken when he said that football was more important than life and death. However, supporters of both of our sporting institutions at least understood his passion, and they will not stand idly by without being engaged in the future of their respective football clubs.

The reason Mr Shankly was, uncharacteristically, wrong is that our city unfortunately recognises more than most the life-and-death results of poor stadium safety and ineffective policing—primary causes of the tragedies at Heysel and Hillsborough. I can assure my constituents that I will campaign on their behalf against any plans to water down ground safety standards, and that I will fight tooth and nail to protect the inquiry set up to examine the Hillsborough disaster. I would like to

thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), on behalf of all the Hillsborough families, for pushing so hard to get the process started.

My predecessor may have been from the blue half of Merseyside, but he was certainly from the politically red half of this Chamber. It is traditional for Members making their maiden speeches to highlight the contributions of their predecessors. Some are faced with the unenviable task of waxing lyrical about a political opponent whom they may recently have put to the electoral sword. Others may have replaced a colleague in controversial circumstances, while some may have been complicit in their predecessor's downfall. I am pleased to say that none of those scenarios applies in my case. Put quite simply, I would not be in this place without the support, encouragement and friendship of Peter Kilfoyle.

Peter will go down as one of the great parliamentarians. He was widely respected in all parts of the Chamber, despite—or perhaps because of—the fact that he was independent of mind and voted with his conscience, sometimes controversially, as on the issue of Iraq, but also in his spirited opposition to the scrapping of the 10p tax rate. Peter's opposition to the Iraq war was not met with universal support on the Labour Benches at the time, but it appears that some of my right hon. Friends who are in the race for the Labour leadership are also now expressing reservations about that policy. As coalition Members will find out, hindsight is a wonderful thing.

In a world of political self-aggrandisement, Peter Kilfoyle sacrificed career advancement for ideological principle. It is refreshing that there are still men and women whose moral judgment and values override the dangled carrot of elevated office. I can only aspire to follow in Peter's footsteps. He dedicated 19 years to the service of this House and to his constituents in Liverpool, Walton. He also achieved his aim of doing justice to his predecessor, the late Eric Heffer, who gave 27 years to the same cause. I certainly have my work cut out if I am to follow two such political giants. I wish Peter's lovely wife Berni all the very best in coming to terms with having him under her feet 24/7.

It is an unbelievable privilege to have been elected by the people of the area in which I have lived all my married life, and I am delighted to represent them in this place. I do not intend to let them down. I am proud to be a Scouser and to represent Walton, where my mum was born. One of the best things about making my maiden speech is that my mum's name, Dorothy Rotheram, will now be recorded in *Hansard* in perpetuity.

I actually thought I had something in common with the Prime Minister when someone mentioned that he, too, had been brought up on an estate. On further examination, however, I discovered that his estate was not that similar to ours after all. I make no apology for stating on the record that I intend to be a strong voice for the people who elected me to the safest seat in the country, and for the city I love. I plan to be a constant thorn in the side of the present Government, and to ensure that Liverpool is not disproportionately affected by funding cuts, as it was the last time Tories sat on the Government Benches.

Both of my predecessors had connections with the construction sector, and I am delighted to keep up that tradition. I am guessing that I am among only a tiny minority of people in the Chamber who have completed an apprenticeship. I started my working life as an apprentice bricklayer, and my son Steven is an apprentice electrician. I am passionate about the building industry and about apprenticeships. The Labour Government breathed new life into apprenticeships, which had been all but killed off by the previous Conservative Government. A high-skilled economy is not just about graduates, and I therefore welcome the Government's road-to-Damascus conversion on that matter. I will campaign for parity of esteem between vocational and academic training routes.

As a serving Liverpool councillor, I would like to put on record my congratulations to Councillor Joe Anderson and my colleagues, and I wish them all the very best in the months ahead. My predecessor concluded his maiden speech by highlighting to the then Conservative Government that unless they took steps to tackle the social issues of the day, they would not be forgiven. Coalition Members should heed such lessons from history.

3.3 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to make my maiden speech today and, in so doing, to contribute to this debate on building a high-skilled economy. I congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), who is fortunate to be able to boast of two premiership football clubs in his home city. Sadly, in Southampton we can no longer do the same. I should also like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), who made an excellent contribution, enlightening us on the motto for Milton Keynes and challenging some of the misconceptions that even those who are relatively close to his constituency might have held.

A debate on a high-skilled economy is particularly pertinent to Romsey and Southampton North. In Chilworth, we have the excellent university of Southampton science park, where 14% of the employees are graduates of the university. It contributes more than £370 million annually to the regional economy. I was fortunate to visit one of the companies on the park just this week, and I can certainly attest to the importance of a high-skilled work force, given that they were testing high explosives.

My next comments are far removed from the high-tech world of Chilworth, as I turn to the heart of the constituency, Romsey town, several hundred years ago. On the edge of the town, being renovated this year, is Broadlands—the stately home where the 19th-century Prime Minister Lord Palmerston was born. Broadlands has been described as having a grandness that personifies the swaggering confidence of Palmerston. I can assure fellow Members that there will be no swaggering from me today.

Although Palmerston was born in Romsey, he never served as its Member of Parliament, so I will not pay tribute to him as a predecessor—and anyway, going back to the 19th century would be somewhat stretching the point. He did, however, have an interesting political journey as a Tory, a Whig and, indeed, a Liberal. It is interesting to note that he has been described in some biographies as having too strong a character to be overwhelmed by liberalism.

I would like to pay tribute to two predecessors in the Romsey constituency. Michael Colvin served the constituency of Romsey and Waterside from 1983 to 1997, and the Romsey constituency from 1997 until his

[Caroline Nokes]

untimely death in 2000. Michael was a good man, a farmer who understood the rural areas of the constituency well. He was a former Grenadier Guard, and was passionate about championing defence issues. He well understood the military issues relevant to the school of Army aviation in Middle Wallop, and he was also a parish, district and, indeed, a county councillor in Hampshire. As a serving borough councillor in the same district that he served, I can attest to that being a good apprenticeship for Parliament.

Also committed to Romsey was my immediate predecessor, Sandra Gidley. She worked hard for the constituency and was well known for her commitment to the NHS and to women's issues. She is, of course, also well known for having dragged Mr Speaker to his Chair last year.

The recent election saw significant boundary changes, and further parts of Southampton are now included in the new Romsey and Southampton North constituency. It now includes the Ford plant at Swaythling. Southampton is well known as the home of the transit, and Ford is committed to using innovation and technology to make Britain's best-selling light commercial vehicle as green as possible. It has been successful, and its ECOnetic transit has the lowest CO_2 emissions in its class.

Even in an area where we are fortunate to have good schools, an excellent university and companies like Ford committed to Britain's manufacturing base, there is still a disconnect between what employers want and the skills of our school leavers. It is critical that the two are matched, and that our education system works with employers to make sure there is no skills gap.

Having a strong and productive work force is about many things, and one of the key strengths of the Romsey and Southampton North constituency is the quality of life and the quality of the natural environment. As a remedy for stress and tension, there really is nothing better than some of the countryside and open spaces in the constituency. If the restorative qualities of the River Test could be bottled, there would be a far reduced need for pharmaceutical products. We also have a small corner of the New Forest national park in the constituency. Although the park and its authority do not come without some level of challenge, it is at least an area where dog walkers and native ponies still prevail.

The River Test, one of the finest trout rivers in the world, runs north to south through the constituency, and it has been appreciated over the years by prime ministers and presidents from across the globe. It has a fine tradition of fly fishing, and a wonderful tranquillity and beauty, which can give amazing solace.

Even in the more urban parts of the constituency, there are pockets of open space that enormously enhance the quality of life. Residents in Swaythling have worked hard to preserve and maintain Monks Brook. One of our local wildlife photographers delights in sending me pictures of adders and slow worms from this tiny patch of countryside right next to the motorway. In Bassett there is the sports centre, Daisy dip and the golf course, and I appreciate how hard the city council works to maintain these areas and secure their future.

Romsey has a real gem with the Memorial park proudly flying a green flag for the second year running—and we have our fingers crossed for an announcement next month about its third. It is home to the community orchard, the bandstand and a team of volunteers from the friends of the Memorial park who make sure the park is one of the best in the region. There is also one of the pair of Japanese field guns that Lord Mountbatten of Burma brought back to Romsey at the end of the second world war.

Other parts of the constituency, however, are not as well protected as those public open spaces, and it is inevitably of concern that some areas are at risk of being swallowed up by development. I welcome the news from the Government that regional spatial strategies are to be consigned to the dustbin. We cannot allow the gaps between settlements to be eroded so that local character is diminished as neighbourhoods coalesce and individual identity is lost. The residents of Halterworth, those close to Hoe lane in North Baddesley, and the residents of Redbridge lane in Nursling have a commitment from me to ensure that local strategic planning really is put back in the hands of local people.

Of course, building a high-skilled economy is not just about the urban centres of the constituency. There are many beautiful rural villages in the north, where problems are inevitably caused by the lack of high-speed broadband—or indeed any broadband at all—but where there is also a good strong farming tradition. The fact that agriculture is traditional does not mean that it is not high-skilled; far from it. Those skills manage and maintain our countryside and, very importantly, keep us fed. While focusing on the high-skilled, we must ensure that we do not let Britain's farming tradition wither.

Let me end on a lighter note. Romsey is claimed to be one of the most haunted parts of Hampshire. Florence Nightingale allegedly still walks the corridors of her old home at Embley Park, and both Romsey abbey and Wherwell priory are said to be haunted by nuns. One of the best known ghost tales is that of two Roundhead soldiers who were hanged from the iron bracket outside the former Swan Inn. The building now houses the local Conservative club. One managed to cut himself loose, and then ran to his death in an alleyway in the town. Apparently he can still be seen repeating his failed escape attempt. However, although the bracket remains to this day, I can assure Members that it has been some while since there has been a public hanging in Romsey.

3.12 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Let me begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) on an entertaining and well-informed maiden speech. I am sure that she will make a great addition to the House and will serve her constituents well. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram). I must tell my hon. Friend that I am another Scot who hopes that the England side does well—but I look forward to hours of arguments about football in the years ahead.

I welcome the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), to his post and wish him well, although I see that he has just left the Chamber. I thought that his speech was a

wonderful performance. I have concluded that if the pressures of government grow too great for him, as they inevitably will at some point, he will have a great future in amateur dramatics.

I was pleased to hear the Minister's plans, some of which I think deserve consideration. For instance, I was glad to learn that he plans to look at the careers service with a view to possibly revamping it. I was surprised and worried to read in a briefing that I received from Edge—the independent foundation that promotes vocational qualifications—that in response to a survey conducted last year, more than 50% of secondary schoolteachers admitted that their knowledge of apprenticeships was remarkably poor.

Mr Hayes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his tribute and for the information that he has just provided. The same survey revealed that teachers knew less about apprenticeships than about any other qualification apart from the Welsh baccalaureate. I have nothing against the Welsh baccalaureate, but the hon. Gentleman will understand the point.

Steve McCabe: I am glad to learn that the Minister has taken that information on board. As I have said, it worried me to read it, and also to read that many apprentices who were surveyed said that very little information had been given to them about apprenticeships either by secondary schoolteachers or, more importantly, by careers specialists. It seems pretty obvious to me that, if we are interested in promoting apprenticeships, we shall have to convey some basic good information to young people. Both the careers service and the information available to secondary schoolteachers must therefore improve.

I am not quite sure what the Minister was attacking in his comments on level 2—I am not sure whether that was code for a cut in numbers down the line. It seems to me that £50 million could buy an awful lot of opportunities for young people, and if that sum is taken out of the budget in the years ahead, perhaps the Minister has to prepare the way by telling us that he will downgrade certain qualifications and opportunities.

I welcome, however, the Minister's acknowledgement that level 2 can provide a very useful foundation. I was struck by the statistic in the CBI report, "Ready to grow" that 32% of employers found it remarkably difficult to recruit people with the necessary intermediate skills. It seems to me that those people will never be available unless we can provide them with a basic foundation to start with, and the general definition of level 2 is that it provides people with a solid grounding and a basic set of skills from which they can begin to build and develop their chosen careers.

I do not particularly want to quibble with the Minister about the definition of apprenticeships, but level 2 is very important in getting some young people on the path. Whatever the Minister's comments today about level 3 were intended to mean, I hope he will bear in mind that it is essential that youngsters have a route in, and that the only way that we will be able to provide employers with people with the requisite skills is by giving young people that starting point.

I also welcome the Minister's plans to set further education colleges free, although I am not sure how free they will be if they are starved of funding, as it strikes me that that can be a fairly empty form of freedom, and I noticed that there was very little detail about exactly what this freedom will amount to. I would like FE colleges to be encouraged to develop programme apprenticeships—they already have a great deal of skill in that respect—and those apprenticeships are a way of enabling young people in particular to begin their apprenticeship at a time when it may be quite difficult for them to find an employer to take them on. Employers, particularly small businesses, are struggling to develop apprenticeships at present because of their fears about the economic future.

Mr Hayes *rose—*

Steve McCabe: I will happily give way to the Minister again.

Mr Hayes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way for a second time.

For the sake of clarity, let me repeat something that I have already said: I am writing to every Member to describe these freedoms to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and they are all things that have been specifically requested by further education representatives in numerous conversations that we have had with them over a period of years.

Steve McCabe: Well, the detail is obviously in the letter then, and I look forward to reading it.

I was slightly disappointed that the Minister did not make any specific reference to small businesses. If we want to grow meaningful apprenticeships, small businesses are the obvious sector that we need to target, but we all know that they have difficulties in dealing with apprenticeships. I was glad to hear that the Minister is enthusiastic to cut through the red tape, but when I talk to small employers, they tell me that they need help in developing apprenticeships; they need help with the basic training and assessment. That is the other side of what needs to be done. One side is to encourage youngsters by ensuring they have the necessary information and by promoting apprenticeships, and the other side is to make it possible for small employers in particular to take on young people.

I wonder whether the Minister has considered the idea of group apprenticeship schemes, which I understand have been particularly successful in Australia. I believe that there are some pilot schemes in this country. The essential idea is that the apprentice is employed by a group and is sent out on placement to various employers. It then becomes possible for a group of small employers to get together and to save on the administrative costs and overheads. A number of youngsters can therefore be placed on an apprenticeship scheme and get real practical experience with employers.

Has the Minister any plans to consider university technical colleges? There is one in the Birmingham area, at Aston, and I think there are about four around the country. That model seems to bring universities together with employers. In the engineering and manufacturing sectors in particular, it encourages the development of a steady skill development path. It builds on vocational levels through to level 5, and the previous Government sought to encourage it. I would like to know whether the Minister has plans to pursue it.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware of other initiatives coming out of universities that also help to build the high-skill economy? I cite, for example, Wendy Sadler's scheme out of Cardiff university, of which my Front-Bench colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), will be aware. They have used "Science made simple" to reach out to 250,000 youngsters, getting them to understand science and how they can have a career in science and find employment through science in high-tech and high-quality jobs. Universities have a unique role in reaching out to young people before they make their career choices, perhaps involving universities or apprenticeships.

Steve McCabe: If we are going to create jobs for the future and to have a generation in work rather than unemployed, all such initiatives should be encouraged and explored. I agree with the Minister—I do not think that any of us has ownership of these issues—but it is pretty important that we get it right, because we have one chance.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the difficulties with apprenticeships is finding an employer to take the apprentice on for the third year, or even in some cases for the second year? In the benign balmy days of a sophisticated Labour Government who had the economy moving forward, that was quite easy, but now, as the chill winter of Conservatism starts to freeze the economy from all corners, might it not be an idea for us to revert to what the Conservatives did the last time that they were in power and introduce schemes such as the Manpower Services Commission scheme, the youth opportunities programme and so on to provide some support and encouragement to employers? It is easy to take on an apprentice in the good times, but very hard in the bad times.

Steve McCabe: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. Employers need help and encouragement, and the only people who can provide that are the Government. If we are going to get this to work, that is what has to happen.

The Minister struck a note of optimism today. As I said to him in an earlier intervention, I do not think that that is the view of the senior executives who wrote to *The Daily Telegraph* today; they struck a note of anxiety and pessimism about cuts in university funding and about being left behind in international competition. It was difficult to see the Minister's optimism when it came just after the speech from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, in which he told us that he was axing the young person's guarantee.

I wish the Minister well, but I warn him that this is going to take more than warm words. The last thing we need to see is a lost generation that does not even get the chance of work. That is the legacy that the Tory Government of the '80s left us, so I hope that he will learn from the mistakes of the past.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I know that hon. Members will wish to respect the conventions associated with maiden speeches, as we are privileged to have a number of them this afternoon.

3.25 pm

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): I welcome you to your position, Mr Deputy Speaker. Thank you very much for inviting me to make my maiden speech this afternoon. This is quite a nerve-racking occasion, but I feel a little more relaxed now that we have been talking about football, which I know a lot about. Like the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), who is a red through and through, I am a blue through and through: I am a fan of Huddersfield Town, who play in blue and white. There are some similarities between our clubs—for example, the great Bill Shankly began his managerial career at Huddersfield. I am not sure how many other similarities we will have over the years, but I look forward to talking to the hon. Gentleman about football for many years to come.

I should like to praise Conservative Members who made their maiden speeches earlier. Again, I will mention football, because my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) is one of those Members, and I certainly enjoy travelling around Milton Keynes trying to find the football ground. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) also spoke, and I wish Southampton football club good luck in the forthcoming season without the deficit of 10 points that it had last season.

I want to pay tribute to two of my predecessors. Speaking of football, it was at Millwall football club, three weeks ago, that I ran into Graham Riddick, who was the Member of Parliament for Colne Valley between 1987 and 1997. While I was cheering on the Terriers in the play-offs down at the New Den, I looked along the terracing and, lo and behold, there was Graham Riddick cheering them on too. It was great to catch up with him and he gave me many words of advice and encouragement, so I thank him for that.

I should also like to say a few kind words about my direct predecessor, Kali Mountford, who spent a lot of time helping me and my office manager by talking us through all the casework that she so pleasingly handed over to us; she looked very relieved as she did so. I praise Kali for her work with the Anthony Nolan bone marrow trust, which she has promoted in recent years. As a result of her hard work there, I have signed up to the trust and I encourage all hon. Members and members of the public to do so. That campaign was motivated by the death of a campaigning journalist from *The Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, Adrian Sudbury, and I congratulate Kali on highlighting it. She has suffered from poor health in recent years and I wish her and her husband Ian the best of luck in the years to come.

Colne Valley is not the best name for a constituency, because those coming from south of Watford, for example, think that it is related to a town called Colne in Lancashire, but it is not. We are in West Yorkshire, and we are proud to be Yorkshire folk. The Colne valley itself is one of three main areas of the constituency. It has some lovely little mill towns on the River Colne, including Marsden, Slaithwaite, which we call "Slawit", and Linthwaite. I also have some of Huddersfield's suburbs, from leafy suburbs in Lindley to more densely populated areas such as that of my Kashmiri population at Thornton Lodge.

Then we get to the valley where I live—the Holme valley, which includes my village of Honley, as well as Brockholes and the big market town of Holmfirth. It

really is a beautiful part of the world with lovely countryside, stone walls, lots of sheep and lots of traditional folk. That brings me to Cleggy, who has had a bad time in the past month. He has had an absolute nightmare—*[Interruption.]* No, not that Cleggy: I am talking about Cleggy from "Last of the Summer Wine", who, along with his pals Compo, Foggy and Nora Batty, is no more because the BBC has ditched the long-running television series that graced our screens on Sunday evenings on BBC1. That gentle comedy about Yorkshire folk, usually going downhill in a bathtub, was very much a mainstay of our television and it helped to promote tourism in my constituency. In Holmfirth, which is just a mile up the road from where I live, we have a Compo's caff and there is a Wrinkled Stocking café just two doors down from my new constituency office, so we will really miss that opportunity to promote tourism.

All that brings me to the subject of this debate: the high-skilled economy. Many people say to me—other Members of the House probably hear this too—that we do not make things any more, but I am proud to say that in my constituency we do. It is not on a large scale, but I have a number of enterprising, entrepreneurial and innovative businesses that have set up, sometimes in old mills, to create products that have a niche market and that are exporting around the world. I shall mention just a few. There are little engineering companies such as Dathan in Meltham, which produces specialist gear cutting equipment that is used in the Formula 1 motor racing industry. Allsops precision sheet metal work, which uses the latest laser-guided cutting tools, is taking on apprentices. It is not on a massive scale, but it has more than 100 employees and it is looking to expand.

I also have David Brown Gear Systems in Lockwood, which I visited with the then shadow Minister for Universities and Skills, my right hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr Willetts), before the election campaign. It has its own in-house training scheme called the Gear Academy and it is training some wonderful youngsters up to work on making gear equipment. Those gears are now being used not only in our submarines but in the wind turbine industry. I also have pharmaceuticals, with Thornton and Ross on the River Colne. I have an ice cream factory, Longleys Farm, which makes the most wonderful ice cream. It has just opened a new ice cream parlour in Holmfirth.

Talking of "Last of the Summer Wine", we even have a vineyard now—a real live Yorkshire vineyard. A wonderful enterprising young couple called Ian and Becky Sheveling gave up high-flying careers, bought a lovely plot of land and planted their vines. They have just produced their first bottles of rosé and have obtained planning permission for a tasting centre and an eco-lodge. That will help promote tourism and we shall have real bottles of wine from the area of "Last of the Summer Wine". That is fantastic.

It is these sorts of little enterprises that we, in a high-skilled economy, must try to promote. We have to cut the red tape; we should support them with lower taxes; we must give them the skills in the work force and the local infrastructure so that their workers can live and work locally. We have got to support local rural post offices. In my village of Honley, I have a most wonderful couple, Brenda and Duncan Bodenhem. The post office is not only their livelihood but their way of life. They organise the Christmas lights; they help all the old people come in and out; they do dry cleaning. They do not provide just the usual post office services.

Post offices, especially the rural ones, are struggling, and our post office network was decimated in the last decade. It is important that we support them, because once they are gone, they are gone. We also need to support things such as rural bus services, so that people can live in my rural communities and work there as well. We need to support the health centres and health services. I am trying to get full maternity services back in the area of Huddersfield. That is really important.

I am proud to have been elected the Member of Parliament for Colne Valley. It is a beautiful part of the world with some enterprising businesses and a fantastic football team in Huddersfield Town. We also have just down the road in Huddersfield the birthplace of rugby league, so I have to mention the Huddersfield Giants, who are striving hard this season. They are having a bit of a poor run at the moment, but I hope that they will turn the corner.

Before I sit down, I should like to say that many of us here in this House, especially the new Members, have been through a gruelling and hard-fought election campaign. I and all my family and friends went through a lot to get me here. I know that the Speaker himself had a bit of a tough election campaign. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) had a straightforward election campaign; his is the safest seat in the House. I would love to know what that feels like, having stood in a three-way marginal.

I was lucky to have my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister visit my constituency—not so lucky to have the Deputy Prime Minister—during the election campaign. I finally pay tribute to my fantastic campaign team. John Travis was my campaign manager. I have a fantastic family. My parents live just up the valley from me. I pay tribute to them. My mum and dad have never walked so much in all their lives. It takes about an hour to deliver to just three cottages because they have such long walkways. It is a privilege to be here today, but I am itching to get back up to the constituency this evening. The office is up and running, and I am looking forward to being out in Holmfirth and through the valleys over the weekend, representing the people who sent me here. There is a lot to do and I hope that I can do it with vigour and vim—and cheer on Huddersfield Town to promotion next season.

3.34 pm

Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) for his maiden speech. He had no need to be nervous; it was an extremely entertaining and informative maiden speech. I thank him for his kind comments about his predecessor, Kali Mountford. On the Labour Benches, we think of Kali with great affection, so we thank him.

I am pleased that mention has been made of the "Skills for Growth" White Paper, which has been important in defining our skills needs for the next few decades. As the Minister knows, the White Paper put particular emphasis on vocational skills and argued for a dramatic expansion of advanced apprenticeships, particularly for young adults. It also argued for the skilling of adults

[Roberta Blackman-Woods]

who are already in employment and those seeking work, and for improving the quality of provision in our FE and other institutions.

At the same time, "Higher Ambitions" set out equally challenging demands for our university sector. It asked universities to work with the Higher Education Funding Council for England to devise new funding incentives so that we could deliver higher education programmes that were more acutely related to the needs of the economy, and to work with the UK Commission for Employment and Skills to identify where new programmes were needed to meet areas of low demand. It set out the need to improve the relationship between universities and businesses and, crucially, to build better relationships between universities and regional development agencies. I noticed that the Minister was very quiet on that subject today, but as the Government are about to destroy the whole RDA framework, I should be interested to hear what he has to say about how universities and FE colleges will work with whatever structure is set up to ensure that regional development continues.

Mr Hayes: The hon. Lady will want to know that we are entirely committed to ensuring consistency—indeed synergy—between the economic development functions of local authorities and the work of colleges and other providers. If she is straightforward, I think she will acknowledge that according to the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office, RDAs were not terribly effective in some of the work they did.

Roberta Blackman-Woods: I hear what the Minister says, but the new Government still have some way to go in setting out more generally how they propose to build on Labour's progress in upskilling and reskilling our population, and particularly in outlining how some of the more strategic objectives on skills shortages will be met at regional level. That may not be easily deliverable at local authority level, so the Government have some more thinking to do about our regions.

The progress made under Labour was recognised by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills in its national skills audit, published earlier this year:

> "Significant progress has been made in raising the qualifications levels of the workforce and stimulating supply over the last ten years, so that compared to other OECD nations our supply of highly skilled people is likely to place us 10th in the OECD by 2020."

When Labour left office we were on track to move up the OECD league table in terms of the advances we had made in skilling our population. There is thus a considerable challenge to the Government to maintain that progress.

Similarly, recent publications from Universities UK and the Russell group comment on the strength of the university sector, while arguing that if current standards and quality are to be maintained investment must continue. We may hear something about that in the Budget next week, but it remains to be seen whether protection will be given for education not only pre-19, but post-19, so that we continue to be internationally competitive.

Not only did the Labour Government invest heavily in education generally, including further and higher education, but that investment was accompanied by a strategy to widen participation, to raise aspirations and to ensure that all young people who felt they could benefit from a university or a level 4 education had the chance to do so. I have not yet heard from the new Government whether they will continue to have that high level of aspiration for our young people. The Leitch review very much led us in that strategy. The Minister mentioned the review in his opening speech, but he did not mention whether this Government would keep the very demanding Leitch targets, which stated that 90% or more of the working-age population should have a level 2 qualification, 68% should have a level 3 qualification and over 40% should have a qualification at level 4 or higher. I would be interested to hear whether the Minister thinks those targets should stay in place.

Good progress was being made towards reaching those targets when Labour left office. The Liberal Democrats have often said—I often heard this during my election campaign—that although Labour had made advances in reskilling the population, those had been confined largely to the better-off. Interestingly, data from HEFCE show clearly that that is not the case. A HEFCE publication earlier this year, which looked at trends in young participation in higher education among different groups in England, stated that to overcome gaps in the data on disadvantage at an individual level, the study that it used looked at levels of disadvantage in local areas, taking figures from 8,000 census wards across England. The authors of the study also selected a range of indicators, and they said that, looking across the indicators, they had to conclude that since the mid-2000s young people from disadvantaged areas are substantially more likely to enter HE, that most measures of the gap in participation between most and least disadvantaged areas had fallen, and that the majority of additional entrants to HE have come from more disadvantaged areas. That means that Labour was not only upskilling the population, but it was extending access to higher education to those who had not previously been able to benefit from it. That is another substantial challenge for the new Government: they must—and we will be watching whether they continue to do so—extend opportunities and widen participation in the way that Labour did.

The audit that I mentioned earlier also talked about the importance of increasing skill levels further and identified key areas where there are skill shortages: in management and leadership, in professional skills, at the technician and equivalent level, at intermediate vocational levels and care services, and in customer service and general employability skills. It is important that we continue to make good those skill shortages.

The audit also identified key sectors where we need to be improving the skills levels of our young people and work force in the future if we are to remain internationally competitive. It was interesting to see the areas that had been outlined, which I think are familiar to all of us in the Chamber. They have been identified as low carbon; advanced manufacturing; engineering and construction; financial and professional services; the digital economy; life sciences and pharmaceuticals; the creative sector; care services; and retail, hospitality, leisure and tourism.

Our university and FE sectors are in a sense already embracing this brave new world, because they have already started to think of new ways of delivering courses that give much greater flexibility. I pay tribute to New College Durham for pioneering professional

apprenticeships, for leading the drive for good-quality HE in FE, and for developing partnerships between HE and FE. I would welcome a visit to the college from the Minister, because he could meet the staff and see some of the fantastic work that is going on.

The Minister talked about international competitiveness in his opening speech. If we are to remain internationally competitive, we must keep our levels of reskilling high, which means that we will need to know how many young people and individuals in the work force are being skilled and reskilled. If we are not skilling sufficient people, we will need to put additional measures in place. That will mean that we will have to retain some targets, so I would like to hear the Government's thoughts about that.

3.45 pm

Jane Ellison (Battersea) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech and to follow my hon. Friends the Members for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) and for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney), and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), who set such a high standard. To pick up this afternoon's running thread of football commentary, I am reminded by the presence in the Chamber of the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) that he, the hon. Member for Chippenham (Duncan Hames) and I fought a by-election in June 2000 against the backdrop of a major international football tournament. I will not put hon. Members through the pain of reminding them of the outcome; suffice it to say that I hope we last a great deal longer this time.

In common with many new Members, I am conscious of the enormous honour that the people of Battersea, Balham and Wandsworth paid me by electing me as their Member of Parliament. It is a particular pleasure to be making my maiden speech during a debate on skills because I spent my whole working life with the John Lewis Partnership, which takes its commitment to training extremely seriously.

Over the centuries, Battersea has evolved from a village on the Thames famed for its market gardens, and particularly for its asparagus and lavender—hence Lavender Hill—into a 19th century industrial hub criss-crossed by railway lines. The railway lines are still there, but the heavy industry is largely gone. The factories along the river have been replaced by residential blocks. The constituency now has a younger average population than most and it is bustling and diverse. Indeed, it provides a London base for many hon. Members.

Much of the change over the past four decades was witnessed at first hand by John Bowis, the previous Conservative MP for Battersea—a good friend who was a great support to me throughout my campaign—and by my predecessor, Martin Linton, who has lived in Battersea for many years and represented his area first on the council, and then for 13 years as its Member of Parliament. Martin worked hard on behalf of his constituents and was greatly assisted by his wife, Sara. He showed passionate commitment to the causes close to his heart. As a councillor, he was closely involved in setting up the justly renowned Battersea arts centre, and the arts repaid him amply at the recent election when a star-studded array of actors urged people not to vote for me.

As a Member of Parliament, Martin championed, among other things, the cause of the Palestinian people. He worked tirelessly in an effort to secure the release of the last former British resident in Guantanamo Bay, Shaker Aamer, whose wife and children live in Battersea. I hope that the new Government will make progress towards a successful conclusion for Mrs Aamer and her children, and I am sure that my predecessor would take satisfaction in such an outcome, given his sustained and energetic campaign.

Championing the unfashionable cause is very much in the Battersea tradition. The area has long nurtured radicals of all kinds, including many of the abolitionist evangelicals of the Clapham sect and John Burns, the firebrand union leader and MP. In the early 20th century, Battersea gave Britain its first black mayor and one of the first Asian Members of Parliament.

When I was selected to fight the constituency, someone who was not local to the seat asked me, "What's there other than a dogs home and a power station?" Of course, there is much more to the constituency than that. We have some wonderful green spaces—Battersea park, Clapham common and Wandsworth common—more than 125 listed buildings, an energetic civic life and an even more energetic social life. Despite its name, Clapham Junction, which is one of the most famous stations in the world, has always been firmly in Battersea. We were graced for years by Young's, one of London's oldest breweries, and we are now home to one of its youngest: Sambrook's. Battersea has also been the proud home of the London Regiment of the Territorial Army for many years.

Many of the radical social changes over the past 150 years in Battersea can be seen in the history of the Bolingbroke hospital in my constituency. The hospital was founded as a result of the energy and compassion of a great Victorian, Canon John Erskine Clarke, a notable Battersea vicar. He identified a need for a hospital for what were then described as the artisan classes of Battersea, who were prepared to pay, either wholly or in part, for their care. In 1880, the Bolingbroke Self-Supporting Hospital and House in Sickness opened, funded by a host of local beneficiaries and by public subscription. It was expanded and adapted over the years and was brought within the NHS, and it remains a much-loved local institution. Although it was earmarked for closure in 2006, a tenacious local campaign was conducted, led by the hospital's League of Friends—a group, made up mostly of women, which, for over 100 years, has exemplified the very best of British volunteering. Its members have quietly and consistently given their time to fundraise, and to provide support and succour to patients and their families.

However, the Bolingbroke closed its doors as a hospital in December 2008 and now awaits its fate. Many of us in Battersea hope that the next chapter in its life story will be as a school. For the parents involved in the Neighbourhood School Campaign, supported by Wandsworth council, the free schools legislation offers the best chance of realising their dream of a new state secondary school for south Battersea. A new school would be enormously important, giving further choice to parents in my constituency, irrespective of their means—an important factor in an area that has a lot of families on low incomes. I therefore particularly welcome the coalition's plans for a pupil premium and more

[Jane Ellison]

apprenticeships, and its determination to boost the private sector. All those things will greatly assist the many young people in my constituency for whom life is a struggle against the odds from the start, and for whom a good education and a skilled job are an essential way of getting on in life.

I return briefly, if I may, to the Battersea Dogs Home and the Battersea power station. The world-famous dogs and cats home celebrates its 150th anniversary this year, having been founded by the redoubtable Mrs Mary Tealby at a time when life for the human poor of this city was very harsh, and for the unwanted animal even harsher. The home remains on the front line of animal welfare in London and beyond, and has a key role to play in policy development, particularly in contributing to the debate about dangerous dogs and their often even more dangerous owners.

Battersea power station first provided energy to London in 1933. Its opening was accompanied by protests about pollution and widespread derision of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's now iconic exterior design—perhaps a salutary reminder to us about not rushing to judgment on new buildings. The largest brick building in Europe, the power station was listed in 1980 and last generated electricity in 1983. It has lain dormant ever since, as plans for its future use came and went. Most recently it starred in "Ashes to Ashes" and, of course, the Conservative manifesto launch, but most people in my constituency want to see the power station star in the regeneration of the Nine Elms area of east Battersea.

With over 200 acres of development land, right here in the heart of this great city, and merely a mile from this place, Nine Elms hopes to welcome the new American embassy and the underground in the next 10 years. The scheme will also mean the redevelopment of the New Covent Garden market, the largest fresh-produce market in the UK. It is a thrilling, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Battersea and for London. I know that there are sceptics, but I hope that they will be confounded, that Nine Elms will become an exciting new riverside quarter, and that the power station will live again.

When completed, the redeveloped Nine Elms area will host thousands more homes and businesses. That will also make my constituency bigger, so no need for boundary changes in Battersea. The construction of the new east Battersea is itself a fantastic opportunity. If one glances inside the derelict turbine halls of the power station, or at the art deco fittings in the control room, one is reminded of the care that was taken in its construction. As the daughter of an engineer, I feel passionately that the renewal of the power station and the wider area is a chance for hundreds of apprentices to hone their skills. I want many young people from our area to get their chance for training and employment in the transformation of east Battersea, so that they can look with pride on their area and say, "I helped to build that." This morning I visited the Astins institute, set up and run by a private sector company with a view to doing just that and equipping people with those skills. I hope that the Government will urge all employers to take their skills training responsibilities very seriously.

Battersea is also home to the South Thames college, an excellent higher education college passionate about equipping its students with the skills to take their opportunities in life. The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes) visited South Thames last year, and many of the measures mentioned today will be very much welcomed in that quarter, and in other further education colleges around the country.

A great parliamentarian, Benjamin Disraeli, vividly described the two nations of Britain in 1845. In some regards, they are still with us, but it is my hope and belief that the coalition Government's programme will retain at its core the goal of creating one nation, in which all young people can discover and fulfil their potential.

I pledge to do my very best for my constituents and to be a good parliamentarian. I commend the motion to the House.

3.55 pm

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): I welcome you to the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, and congratulate you on your elevation to such an important role. I also congratulate the hon. Members for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) and for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) on their maiden speeches. I particularly congratulate the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney), who, I note, has managed to get his office up and running, a feat that has defeated me so far—well done on that. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison). I note your reference to animal welfare, which is a passion I share, and I hope that, if and when the time comes, you will join Labour Members in voting against any attempt by your party to reintroduce fox hunting in our country.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Could the hon. Gentleman please direct comments through the Chair? If you say "you", it refers to me.

Chris Williamson: I beg your pardon and thank you for that correction, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will endeavour to ensure that I do not make that mistake in future.

Building a high-skilled economy is vital to the future prosperity of our country. I represent a constituency that is founded on a high-skilled economy. In a previous speech in the Chamber, I referred to the occasion when Jeremy Paxman said, "Why can't everywhere in Britain be like Derby?" That is because we have been successful in Derby in developing a high-skilled economy. We were fortunate in having Rolls-Royce and Bombardier, which have done so much to create a high-skilled economy, in the city. The country could learn a lot from Derby.

We have invested heavily in the city, thanks to support for training from the Labour Government. We have an excellent university and two new colleges, which undertake extremely important vocational training, preparing young people for the world of work. We built 13 new schools under the Labour Government and employed many new teachers and teaching assistants, who are essential to developing a high-skilled economy.

However, the Conservative party's policies are taking the country in the wrong direction if we want to develop a high-skilled economy. The Conservatives are making the same mistakes that were made in the 1980s, when the previous Conservative Government systematically

undermined and destroyed manufacturing—the bedrock of the greatness of our nation. They took away opportunities for young people to move into work and get the training that they needed.

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): In a debate that took place yesterday, the Minister for Universities and Science pointed out that manufacturing had collapsed even further under the Labour Government than under 18 years of the Conservative Government. I quote from memory, but it went from some 22% to 18% of GDP between 1979 and 1997, and had decreased to some 11% by 2009.

Chris Williamson: The hon. Gentleman is being a little unfair. He fails to recognise the huge expansion in the service sector. We can play with statistics, but in the 1980s, there seemed to be a clear policy of undermining manufacturing in this country. The car industry was destroyed and the steel industry was undermined.

Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Labour Members consistently harp on about how Conservative policies in the 1980s affected manufacturing, but will they say something about the damage done to industry by the aggressive trade unionism of the 1970s and 1980s, and might they take the plank out of their own eye before they look at the mote in ours?

Chris Williamson: Labour Members harp on about the 1980s because of what happened then. The policies of the previous Conservative Government damaged the car industry and shipbuilding, and manufacturing right across the piece in our country. It is completely wrong to blame trade unions for the systematic destruction of manufacturing in this country.

Gordon Birtwistle (Burnley) (LD): Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the actions of Red Robbo, who closed down the old Austin Rover plant in the 1970s?

Chris Williamson: Again, hon. Members on the Government side of the House are demonising trade union activists, but Derek Robinson, to whom the hon. Gentleman referred colloquially as Red Robbo, was simply arguing for more investment in the car industry. He was saying that if the car industry did not get the support that it needed, it would fail and be overtaken by our competitors in Japan and Germany. His predictions—dare I say?—actually came true, because the car industry in our country was completely destroyed as a result of Conservative policies.

The Conservatives are making the same mistakes not only in policy pronouncements, but in practical matters. Only this morning, the Transport Minister made it very clear that there will be no further orders for rail transport rolling stock. Many people in my constituency work for Bombardier, which is the last train manufacturer in the UK, and they were relying on the possibility of securing the Thameslink contract. However, it now seems, after what the Transport Minister said this morning, that there is no prospect whatever of Bombardier securing that contract this year. That will certainly lead to redundancies and make it much more difficult for young people in training colleges in my constituency—if they have been given that opportunity—to get the real jobs that are crucial to securing a high-skilled economy, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) said.

Dr John Pugh (Southport) (LD): The hon. Gentleman talks about the British train industry and construction in this country, but does he think it was a good idea that the previous Labour Government placed so many orders for extra carriages in Japan?

Chris Williamson: Clearly, we live in a global economy, in which orders are placed with different companies around the world—Bombardier won some contracts, but some went abroad—but the fact is that the Transport Secretary said this morning that there is now no prospect of Bombardier getting the Thameslink contract.

Stephen Pound: Does my hon. Friend agree that one tragedy of current British manufacturing and skills is that contracts occasionally have to go to countries such as Japan, which has invested more in Bullet train technology and other high-speed train technology, and that that underlines precisely the point he is making?

Chris Williamson: Absolutely—my hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. If we were to follow the lead of some of our competitor nations by investing appropriately in skills, we would put our country, our young people, and the people who work in those sectors, in a much better position to secure their long-term future.

The parties opposite have also made proposals for the regional development agencies. The RDAs have played an important role, and the East Midlands Development Agency has made an important contribution to supporting industry in the east midlands and in Derby. That has helped to create the job opportunities and the growth that are so desperately required.

We must not indulge in a race to the bottom. The Government seem to want us to move to a low-wage economy, but there is no future in that for this country. We simply cannot compete on that basis, because we will never match developing nations such as India, China and others and the wage rates paid to workers there. We must invest in those high skills that Derby excels in through companies such as Rolls-Royce and Bombardier. That is why I regret the announcement this morning about Bombardier, which will almost certainly lead to redundancies. If we do not support such companies, they could go elsewhere, because they are global, and they will simply bid for contracts from their European bases.

If there is a market failure, it is essential for the state to intervene and smooth out the difficulties, such as those afflicting the country as a result of the worldwide economic downturn. If we do not do that, it will cause significant problems for the economy—and for young and old alike. No jobs for people means lower tax revenues to support our public services, and we will end up in a downward spiral to disaster.

4.7 pm

Gordon Birtwistle (Burnley) (LD): Like other hon. Members, I wish to congratulate the hon. Members for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney), for Battersea (Jane Ellison) and for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) on their maiden speeches. I made mine a few weeks ago. Like the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton, I did an apprenticeship, and it is some 52 years since I turned up in my brand-

[Gordon Birtwistle]

new boiler suit and boots at a large engineering company in Accrington called Howard & Bullough, then the world leaders in machines for textile making. Regrettably, it is no longer with us, like so many other companies from that time.

I agree that it is critical to build a higher-skilled economy. We need to deliver the skills that will deliver the jobs of the future, in engineering, chemicals, medicines, nuclear technology—both commissioning and new build—and the internet. Such high-tech, high-value jobs will deliver the products and services that are needed round the world. Only 12 months ago, when I was leader of Burnley borough council, we heard that Rolls-Royce was developing a new engine for a new range of airliners. Hon. Members may not know it, but over the next 25 years the single-aisle aeroplanes such as the Boeing 737s and Airbus 320s will all be replaced. The cost of replacing these will be in the region of $3 trillion. The power packs and engines required for those aeroplanes will cost in the region of $600 billion. That is a hell of a lot of work for the people who produce the aeroplanes and the engines and power packs to go with them.

I approached the leader of Derby city council and we visited Rolls-Royce, where we asked the main board whether these engines would be developed in the UK. It said not and that it was hoping to develop them in Germany, Singapore and the far east. It also said that wherever it develops the engine it will most likely build it—$600 billion of work that could have been done in this country now might go abroad.

I asked the Rolls-Royce board whether there was a financial inducement to building the engine overseas, and it replied, "No, there is no financial inducement. In fact, it will cost us more money to develop this engine overseas." The question went back, "Then why are you doing it?", and the question was put back to us, "Can you deliver 3,000 to 5,000 qualified, highly skilled graduates to design, build and develop this engine?" The answer from all present was, "Unfortunately, no." Rolls-Royce replied, "If you can't deliver the skills we need, we have no alternative to going abroad to develop this engine." Some $600 billion of work over 25 years! That is an appalling situation and an indictment of the last 30 years in the development of the skills of engineers and technicians that we need in this country. It has to stop, and I am delighted that we are at least starting to deliver what industry needs for the future jobs of this country.

The town I represent has just got a brand new college on its university campus—a campus that is dedicated to advanced manufacturing. The borough council invested more than £150,000 in a brand new, high-tech machine shop, which I would like the Minister to visit. I invited Rolls-Royce representatives to come and see this new machine shop. They came all the way from Barnoldswick, and while they were there, they had a conversation with the people from the university of Central Lancashire and decided that because the new advanced engines would nearly all be made from carbon fibre, particularly in the cold engine section—the hot engine section will obviously still be made from metal—they would like to work with the UCLan campus to develop it. The university has therefore purchased an autoclave to develop carbon fibre turbine blades for Rolls-Royce. That is the advancement that this country needs and that will stop some of the work going abroad. We need to support colleges in acquiring the equipment that companies around the country need and in developing new technologies, and I am delighted that this has happened.

UCLan campus academics have developed what they believe to be the most efficient wind turbine in the world. It is only small—about 1 metre across—but they have found that it has the most advanced centre bearing in the world. We approached a local company, and it agreed to put £1 million into the development of the wind turbine to make it big enough to use onshore. It has a 15-metre autoclave in its factory and can make carbon fibre blades for the wind turbine. Through the borough council, I asked the previous Government whether they would support the development of the wind turbine, a vast number of which will be needed over the next few years. As everybody knows, we do not make wind turbines in this country—we buy them from abroad—but unfortunately the previous Government did not want to support the scheme, so it has died and the wind turbine is sat in an office in Burnley, waiting for someone to support its development. It would cost about £4 million, but would create thousands of jobs and save having to import wind turbines from abroad. The local company was willing to take up some of the loss, but unfortunately the scheme was rejected. That is very sad in these days.

We need to invest in new developments and in the people to deliver them. We cannot stand by and look back; we have to move forward and provide the skilled people of the future, and I hope that what we are doing with the 15,000 apprentices and what we are proposing to do about advanced manufacturing will deliver the people of the future, doing the jobs of the future and providing the work of the future.

4.15 pm

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I, too, welcome you to the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is the first time I have had the privilege of speaking in the Chamber while you have been in the Chair. May I also congratulate all those new Members who have made their maiden speeches today? I have not heard them all, but I have certainly heard most of them, and on the basis of what I have heard, those Members are going to make a significant and worthwhile contribution to the Chamber while they are here.

This debate, above all, is supremely relevant to my constituents. West Bromwich West is a traditional manufacturing constituency that suffered enormously in the 1980s from the policies of the then Government. Unemployment rocketed, which resulted in the creation of a generation of people who saw no prospect of employment, and a culture of low aspiration, low expectation and low skills and training. Members said earlier that we should not live in the past. That is quite correct. On the other hand, it is important that we look to the past and learn from the mistakes that were made, so that we do not replicate them.

The mass unemployment in my constituency in the 1980s and the substantial reduction in the manufacturing sector resulted in a skills gap that, despite all the efforts of the Labour Government, has not fully been closed. Even as the economy and employment opportunities improved, there was still higher than average unemployment in my constituency, and employers complained to me

that the skills they needed still did not exist locally. The reason was that in the 1980s, as the economy went into recession on two occasions and manufacturing collapsed, no efforts were made to pick up those who had been made unemployed and retrain them with the skills to fill the opportunities that would subsequently be created as our economy grew out of recession. The result of that was a drag on the local economy throughout the past 10 years of the previous Government, as they implemented policies that led to economic growth.

What we must not see is the recent recession and the fragile growth that we have seen since then operating in the same way. It is fair to say that the previous Government recognised that a recession provides an opportunity for those who cannot immediately get jobs or who have been thrown out of their jobs, given the right support, to get the appropriate training and skills that they have hitherto not had the opportunity to get, so as to equip them for the new jobs that will be created in the future. That I know was what was behind the previous Government's approach to dealing with the problem over the past two or three years.

The current situation presents an enormous problem in that respect, although I would not pretend that it had arisen entirely as a result of the cuts that have been announced over the past two or three weeks. There were potential problems beforehand, particularly with the number of young people wanting to go into higher education and the places not being available. However, it was the previous Government who made provision for 20,000 new places and who put a particular emphasis on providing the budget for the key STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths—which are vital if we are to equip manufacturing to take us out of recession. I have not heard any guarantees that this Government are going to ring-fence the funding for STEM subjects in universities to ensure that this area, which is so vital to our future, is sustained. This is particularly important because a number of universities are already reporting that, because the provision of those courses requires higher capital investment, they could be the first on the list to be removed. We could therefore be undermining our scientific, engineering and mathematical potential in vital sectors, at a time when it is so necessary to get us out of recession.

I also want to talk about a subject that I have not heard mentioned so far—the education maintenance allowance. In constituencies such as mine, where people have low incomes and, historically, low aspirations, the provision of that allowance is essential to give young people the confidence to go into further education and, eventually, higher education. With the increase in competition that is likely to arise for the lower number of university places—it might not be lower in absolute terms, but it could be lower, relative to the demand for them—there is a danger that young people from low-income and low-aspiration backgrounds could be crowded out of the competition for the scarce places. That will make the EMA strategically even more important than it has been in the past, if we are to ensure that university opportunities are open to people from all backgrounds and incomes.

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con): I wonder whether other hon. Members receive complaints about the education maintenance allowance, as I do. I, too, represent a constituency where there are people on very low incomes, but I get a lot of complaints that the allowance is badly applied and often abused.

Mr Bailey: Certainly in its early days there were some complaints, but they have not been reflected in my constituency. I had a meeting with the principals of my three local further education colleges only two weeks ago, and they stressed to me and my neighbouring Conservative MPs the important role that the allowances play in keeping young people between 16 and 19 in education in our area. I want to emphasise to the Government that they need to sustain the EMA as part of the infrastructure necessary to ensure that their stated policy of open opportunity for young people in universities can be maintained.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) mentioned the transfer of money from Train to Gain into apprenticeships and capital for colleges. I want to make one comment on Train to Gain. I find it odd that, if it is so bad—the National Audit Office certainly had criticisms of it—it has not been abolished and the money transferred elsewhere lock, stock and barrel. The Government seem to have created a hybrid system. My experience of speaking to local employers is that Train to Gain was extremely beneficial, and there is a whole raft of statistics that substantiate their claims for the programme. Train to Gain was also essential for many companies that had introduced short-time working, to help them to sustain a level of income for their employees to prevent them from going elsewhere or leaving the jobs market altogether, and to prevent the companies from losing their skills.

I also want to say a few words about bureaucracy. When Labour was in government, it was a constant theme among the Conservatives that we were strangling education with top-down bureaucracy. Certainly, when I went round schools, I heard complaints about excessive paperwork and bureaucracy, and I cannot pretend for a moment that we were able to solve that problem. I am concerned, however, that despite all the coalition Government's brave words, they seem to be heading the same way.

Earlier, I drew to the attention of the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), a statement he placed in the Library today about getting FE colleges to give

> "learners the information they need to drive the system, through the publication of clear and consistent information about performance, quality and standards."

That sounds like fairly top-down instruction, a recipe for extra research that has no particular relevance to the people being educated, and a whole lot of form filling and publications that will siphon off money that could well be used in other directions. I sympathise with the Minister up to a point, because it is a perfectly laudable objective, but the new Government have to realise that having laudable objectives and ensuring that they are translated at the local level involves some sort of imposition and resources that have to be calibrated and calculated to ensure that they are worth while.

I am coming to the end of my comments, but let me say that in my new position as Chairman of the appropriate Select Committee, I look forward to talking to Ministers and interviewing them on their policies. I wish them

[Mr Bailey]

well, as this matter is absolutely vital not just to my constituents but to young and unemployed people everywhere and to this country's future and its position in the global economy. Investment in skills is as important as investment in plant and machinery, and it has the additional benefit of improving the lives of those who are prepared to get involved.

4.26 pm

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): First, let me say how delighted I am to see in the Speaker's Chair a neighbouring MP who has given me so much support over the years. I should like to pay tribute to other hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today: the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) and my hon. Friends the Members for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) and for Battersea (Jane Ellison). The last is a good friend; she stood in my constituency back in 2005, and she is still remembered fondly in the local area.

To stand here and make my maiden speech is a tremendous honour, particularly in the light of those who have previously represented the constituency of Pendle, or, as it was formerly known, of Nelson and Colne—men such as Sidney Silverman, David Waddington and, for the past 18 years, Gordon Prentice. In fact, while researching for my own speech, I learned that Sidney Silverman's maiden speech back in 1935 lasted 22 minutes and was on the merits of socialism. I am delighted to tell you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I can both make a maiden speech and dismiss the merits of socialism within 22 minutes.

It is traditional to start a maiden speech by paying tribute to one's predecessor, and despite the fact that Gordon Prentice was my opponent in the recent election, I have no hesitation in doing so. Gordon Prentice was a principled politician and committed to many causes. He was an independent thinker who rebelled against the last Government on issues such as tuition fees, the Iraq war and post office closures. He was an active Back Bencher and I feel that Gordon demonstrated to us newer Members that we do not have to hanker after ministerial office to achieve something in the House.

As I said in my acceptance speech just five weeks ago, it is the greatest honour of my life to be elected to represent Pendle. Located in the hills of the Pennines in north-east Lancashire, and some would say beyond, Pendle offers some of England's finest countryside, including Pendle hill, from which my seat takes its name, as well as beautiful villages and busy towns.

The area is rich in history, not only with the story of the Pendle witches, which brings many visitors to the area, but with our industrial heritage with the Leeds-Liverpool canal, numerous mills and other incredible feats of engineering. The old industries of cotton and textiles have now all but disappeared, but the industrious spirit of the area remains as strong as ever.

Next weekend, my constituency plays host to one of the biggest events in the UK's cycling calendar, with the national road race championships taking place through the villages of Roughlee, Barley and Newchurch. It is a great opportunity for us to showcase some of our award-winning villages and boost the local tourism trade, which is an increasingly important part of the local economy.

Pendle is a place of contrasts, where we have severe deprivation next to relative affluence. It is a place where mosques sit side by side with mills, highlighting the large number of my constituents who came originally from Pakistan or Kashmir. One of the first issues with which I had to deal as a Member of Parliament was the senseless murder of three of my constituents, the Yousaf family. They were gunned down while tending a family grave in Pakistan. Their killers are yet to be brought to justice, and I am committed to doing whatever I can to ensure that the family obtain justice through the Pakistani courts. On that issue as well as many others that affect my constituency, I will be at the forefront in pressing Ministers and holding the Government to account, so that the people of Pendle always know that they have a strong voice here in Westminster.

The M65 ends in my constituency, in effect creating one of the biggest cul-de-sacs in the country. As a result, most of those who wish to travel cross-country by road take alternative routes. We also lack rail connectivity. I pay tribute to the work of SELRAP—the Skipton East Lancashire Railway Action Partnership. That group's aim is to reconnect Colne and Skipton, Lancashire and Yorkshire, and the north-west and the north-east, and I applaud its efforts.

We have some of the lowest house prices in the country. There is a high rate of empty and unfit homes, as people have moved away from the area and absentee landlords have bought homes and sometimes entire streets. It is clear to me, representing as I do some of the cheapest streets in Britain, that regeneration work remains vital to the long-term sustainability of the area.

We lack an accident and emergency department since ours was transferred from Burnley to Blackburn—which is 15 miles away—under the last Government, despite the protests of local people. The local primary care trust now wants the children's ward to be transferred as well, but I am encouraged by the assurances of the Secretary of State for Health that NHS service changes are now subject to review. I look forward to him visiting Burnley general hospital tomorrow, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Gordon Birtwistle), who made an excellent speech a few moments ago.

The people of Pendle are hardy folk, and we face up well to whatever situation we find ourselves in. That is probably best typified by one of Pendle's most famous sons, whose memorial in Colne is close to where I live: Wallace Hartley. Hon. Members who are not familiar with the name will, I am sure, be familiar with the story: Wallace Hartley was a violinist, but he was also the bandmaster of the Titanic on her maiden voyage.

I am proud to represent a seat where a higher proportion of the work force are employed in manufacturing than in any other constituency in England, and I am delighted that manufacturing is back on the national agenda. I was also delighted to read in the coalition agreement that rebalancing the economy is a key Government aim and that the Government are committed to boosting the provision of work place apprenticeships.

More than 8,000 people in my constituency are employed in manufacturing, producing everything from Silentnight beds in Barnoldswick to the biscuits that are sold in

Harrods, which are produced in Nelson. It was a real pleasure for me, as a candidate, to visit so many of those firms over the past four years. It was a particular pleasure to take my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), now Chancellor of the Exchequer, to visit Rolls-Royce and Weston EU—two great British companies, working in the vitally important aerospace sector, that also have fantastic apprenticeship schemes. They are real companies providing real jobs that generate significant value added for the United Kingdom. That brings me to the topic of today's debate: the need for us to build a high-skilled economy.

Last Friday, I had the pleasure of visiting Nelson and Colne college. The college has a long-standing tradition of academic excellence, and since 2005 it has twice been judged "outstanding" by Ofsted. It provides academic and vocational sixth-form education for about 1,700 people—the vast majority of young people in my constituency—but I believe that among the things that make it so special are its unique pre-professional programmes and its outstanding apprenticeship provision, with success rates well above the Lancashire and national rates. Its tailor-made employer provision includes 14 individual apprenticeship frameworks to meet the needs of local and regional employers.

It would be far better to address the current skill shortages in the economy by supporting colleges such as Nelson and Colne and fostering their links with business than by pursuing the last Government's attempt to ensure that 50% of students went to university. However, we must also recognise that four out of five people who will be working in 2020 are already in the work force. Given the damage done to occupational pension funds by the last Government and the probable increase in the state pension age, people are likely to be working for much longer than ever before. So we must have a strategy that ensures that training is not just focused on young people but provides incentives to employers to support lifelong learning and celebrates the good employers who are already doing that.

We also need a fair deal for British manufacturers, so that we can continue to be a world leader in sectors such as aerospace. British industry has been hampered by too much tax and regulation for too long. We know that tough times lie ahead because of the legacy left to us by the previous Government, and that will make building a high-skilled economy even harder. However, I look forward to working with the Government to address the challenges that we face, while never shying away from speaking out on behalf of the hard-working people of Pendle.

4.35 pm

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): May I congratulate both you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your appointment and the other Members who have delivered their maiden speeches this afternoon? In preparing my notes for this speech, I turned, as I am sure colleagues also did, to the guidance; I noted that it says that it is best to be brief and non-controversial and—at least on this occasion, Madam Deputy Speaker—I shall try to be both.

It is, of course, a great privilege to be elected to the House, particularly for me as I represent the constituency that bears the name of my home town. That makes me both a Lincolnshire yellowbelly and a meggie. The explanations behind those terms are somewhat dubious, and although I appreciate that Members are on tenterhooks to know them, I shall leave that for another day.

Members and others who have been fortunate enough to visit Cleethorpes—which, as they will all be aware, is the premier resort of the east coast—are referred to by us locals as "trippers", and they are the lifeblood of the town's economy. The constituency is, of course, much more than Cleethorpes itself. It runs from the delightful market town of Barton-upon-Humber in the north through many villages in the Barton and Ferry wards of north Lincolnshire and on into north-east Lincolnshire and the major industrial centre of Immingham, which together with Grimsby has, when measured by tonnage, the largest dock complex in the United Kingdom. The seafaring traditions are strong, and Cleethorpes and Grimsby are, in effect, one town. Although there is an historic rivalry between them, they are bound together by their connections with the sea. The Humber estuary itself is a site of special scientific interest, and there is also a beautiful hinterland taking in many of the villages on the edge of the Lincolnshire wolds—an area that has been designated an area of outstanding natural beauty.

Cleethorpes is also the home of Grimsby Town football club, which therefore, strictly speaking, always plays away from home. The club has had a difficult few seasons of late, but I am proud to be a lifelong Mariners fan, and I am confident of better times ahead. Bill Shankly has been mentioned on two occasions this afternoon, and it is perhaps appropriate in a debate about training to mention that he served what might be called his managerial apprenticeship at Blundell Park before going on to higher things. I cannot quite remember the early '50s, but I did live within shouting distance of the terraces of the football ground. The area is also fortunate to be served by an excellent combination of newspapers, which together help to create the identity of the area. There are two dailies, the *Grimsby Telegraph* and the *Scunthorpe Telegraph*, and a weekly, the *Cleethorpes Chronicle*.

Having given Members a snapshot of the constituency, I wish now to pay tribute to my predecessor, Shona McIsaac, who represented Cleethorpes for 13 years, during which time she worked diligently on behalf of her constituents and tirelessly for the causes in which she believed. Having worked for almost 16 years for my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr Leigh), I know well that many individuals have cause to thank their Members of Parliament for taking up cases, trying to correct an injustice or bringing an issue to the attention of those in authority. On their behalf, I thank her for her efforts in that respect. She was, of course, bitterly disappointed to have lost her seat but was gracious in defeat. I wish her well for the future.

Cleethorpes, although it has been pushed from one constituency to another over the years, has had some notable, interesting and perhaps even colourful Members in the past. Before Shona McIsaac came Michael Brown, and before that Michael Brotherton and Jeffrey Archer.

I referred earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough, who has just completed nine years as a distinguished Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. I had the privilege of working as his constituency agent for 16 years, and he started me on the path that has led

[Martin Vickers]

me to the House: 10 years ago, after addressing the Cleethorpes Conservative luncheon club, he suggested that I might try to become the candidate.

Today's debate focuses on building a high-skilled economy, and that is of particular importance to my constituency, with its large concentration of industry along the Humber bank. As the new Member for the constituency of Cleethorpes, I shall aim to build on the work of my predecessors and the work done by local authorities, industry and the many different agencies that come together to reinvigorate and redevelop an area with which I have been associated throughout my life.

We must develop further a high-skilled economy that will benefit my constituency and the whole country. We can then progress out of this economic downturn more fully. We need to set the foundations for the future success that our young people deserve. It is our younger generations who will be the backbone on which the future of businesses relies. My fellow Lincolnshire Member, the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), described this in his opening remarks as a major challenge. I welcome the Government's pledge to increase the quality and quantity of apprenticeships that will be available.

I hope that such pledges will further the work of facilities such as CATCH—the Centre for the Assessment of Technical Competence, Humber—and training providers such as HETA, the Humberside Engineering Training Association, which operate there. During the election campaign, the Minister for Universities and Science, who was then a shadow Minister and is now, I am pleased to say, a member of the Government, visited the CATCH facility in Stallingborough and I think it fair to say that he was suitably impressed. It is a joint venture between the public and private sectors, and it has an extremely good success rate in securing permanent positions for the young people who train there, educating and training today's school leavers, so that they become not a lost and forgotten generation but a driving force behind the economic recovery that remains the key aim of Government policy.

With its industrial history and foundation along the Humber bank, the people of my constituency are hard-working people. Cleethorpes has a number of challenges and obstacles to overcome to secure the support and funding that is needed to ensure that the Government's vision of a fair and highly skilled economy is brought to all the constituencies of our country. As the Member of Parliament for the constituency, I hope to act as something of an ambassador, bringing together all the elements of the constituency—whether private, public or third sector—that will help to build the future success of our economy. If we work together, I am confident that my constituency will enjoy a brighter future.

4.43 pm

Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con): I offer you my congratulations on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker. I also congratulate all those who have made maiden speeches this afternoon, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), who spoke eloquently about his constituency and, like many others this afternoon, on the subject of football. As someone whose wife—who is in the Gallery today—is a fan of Liverpool football club and has, in my opinion, a rather worrying keenness on Steven Gerrard, I, like my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney), will be trying to make the early acquaintance of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram).

I am proud to address this House for the first time as the first Member of Parliament for Central Devon. My constituency was formed from parts of five others, so it could be said to have five predecessors, two of whom I am pleased are still Members of the House. First, there is my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox), who has set the highest standards in looking after his constituents—standards to which I aspire. Like most lawyers, he has never been slow to offer me wise counsel, but unlike most lawyers he has very graciously never charged me a penny for it. There is also the Minister for the Armed Forces, my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey). Although he is not a member of my party, he is often held by my constituents who were previously represented by him to be a bit of a Tory at heart. I am sure that that will be a good qualification for his new role as a Minister in our coalition, and I wish him well.

There are three other predecessors who are no longer Members of the House, the first of whom being Anthony Steen, who served as the Member for Totnes. I have found him to be immensely courteous always and sometimes marvellously eccentric. He is a compassionate man who has done a great deal of good, not least through his work addressing the dreadful situation of human trafficking, and I am sure that he will be missed by the House. Secondly, Richard Younger-Ross was the previous Member for Teignbridge, and a very hard-working and assiduous local Member of Parliament.

Lastly, and for me most importantly, I pay tribute to Angela Browning, the former Member for Tiverton and Honiton, who was held in great affection on both sides of the House. She could not have been more supportive, generous and helpful to me. She was hugely respected by her constituents, regardless of their political leanings, and I am delighted that she has now been elevated to the other place. In the coming months, I shall try to live up to these illustrious forebears, to be inspired by their example and to contribute to the House as they have done.

Central Devon is one of the most beautiful constituencies in the country. It is also one of the largest, covering some 550 square miles, including a third of Dartmoor national park, numerous beautiful and scattered villages and several fine market towns such as Okehampton, Hatherleigh, Chagford and Crediton, where, some Opposition Members might be pleased to learn, Ernest Bevin was schooled. They are welcome to come and visit, but strictly out of election time if they do not mind. Other market towns include Buckfastleigh, Ashburton, Bovey Tracey and Chudleigh.

My constituency is steeped not only in beauty but in history. In my home town of Ashburton, a once important stannary town occupied with the trading of tin, there still exist two venerable and ancient offices—portreeve, the representative of the monarch, and master bailiff. Both of those offices stretch back to the early 9th century, well before even your illustrious office had been conceived.

Madam Deputy Speaker, and indeed to a time when the ground on which we now stand was little more than a marshy outcrop of the River Thames. I offer my congratulations to Mrs J. Distin, Ashburton's newly elected portreeve, who is the 1,189th holder of that office, and to Mr W. Shapley, our master bailiff.

Although Central Devon is an area of outstanding beauty and interest, it is not without its challenges and hardships. It is a constituency in which agriculture matters, so events that hurt agriculture have a major impact upon my constituents. In 2001, the foot and mouth outbreak was centred around the market town of Hatherleigh, with devastating effects. The pall of smoke that hung over that part of Devon from cattle being burned on their pyres will never be forgotten. Today, there is the challenge of bovine tuberculosis, which costs 30,000 cattle a year in this country and causes untold misery to Devon's farmers. I am pleased that this issue is receiving the vigorous attention of our Government.

Many other serious issues affect my constituency, including the underfunding of our schools compared with other parts of the country. Devon is ranked 148th out of 151 local education authorities in terms of central Government funding. There are many reasons why that position is too low. I will continue to press on this matter for the sake of our local children, who have a right to a fair share of education funds.

In this debate I wish to focus on schools, not least because I have a strong belief that the greatest gift that any young person can receive, after a loving family, is that of a good education. For those who choose the vocational path, it is vital that education be provided with the same energy and vigour as that afforded to the more traditional academic routes. I welcome the statement of my hon. Friend the Minister of State responsible for skills and lifelong learning that there will be an extra £50 million of capital expenditure for further education and an extra 50,000 apprenticeships. He should be congratulated, as we should remember that education and skills are important not just in and of themselves but to the life chances of our young people.

Education is the great highway of social mobility—for individuals to move on and up, in many cases escaping poverty and deprivation in the process. I say that as someone whose mother and father left school at ages 15 and 14, and whose life was transformed by the winning of a free place at a grammar school. The greatest opportunity ever provided to me, that school became the foundation on which the rest of my life was built. I would like to see others have the opportunity that I was privileged to receive.

I have long admired the ideas and the reforming passion of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and my hon. Friend the Minister of State. They have fully understood the force for good that education and skills can represent, but they have done more than that. They have truly understood the disgraceful and inhumane waste that is represented by continued educational failure—the appalling destruction of life chances, especially among the least advantaged. It is they who have understood the extraordinary power of choice: that choice will drive up standards; that parents know better than bureaucrats; that giving power to those who otherwise just have to take what they are given is the key to raising up the less advantaged; that future generations must be sustained not just by hope but by taking control of their destinies; and most importantly of all, that there is an age-old truth that the quest to create a stronger and better society cannot be left to the planners, to the bureaucracies, to the well-meaning architects of the state, but must be gifted to those by whom the consequences of success or failure are most keenly felt.

The Government's radical agenda for education and skills will represent a vital journey—a true quest for equality, of a kind not that seeks to push down to some lowest common denominator, but that seeks to raise people up by providing choice and opportunity for every young person, irrespective of wealth, colour, race, creed and social background.

I thank the House for its indulgence and wish the Government every success in their vital endeavour.

4.53 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I feel privileged to have this opportunity to make my maiden speech; I might say that I feel 21 all over again. It is a real pleasure to do so during a debate that is so fundamentally important to my constituents. My constituents in Newton Abbott have a real issue, and that is deprivation. We need regeneration, and skills have to be the route to regenerating the local economy, but before I move to that, let me pay tribute to my two predecessors, whom I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride).

Mr Richard Younger-Ross was very much loved by his constituents. He was a hard-working Member, and he pushed forward a number of issues that I shall also push forward relating to the inappropriate water charges in the south-west and the A380 bypass, which has continually deprived our economy of the growth that it needs. My other predecessor was, as my hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon expressed, a colourful character. I reiterate my hon. Friend's comments about the real good that Anthony Steen did in putting human trafficking on the agenda. I am pleased that he is carrying on with that work.

Let me give the House a little of the colour and flavour of my constituency of Newton Abbot. If I could give the Boundary Commission some advice, it would be this: next time, can we change the name? Many people have told me that as they do not live in the town of Newton Abbot they feel completely disfranchised.

My constituency is two thirds urban and a third rural. There are four towns, and until recently one of them, Kingsteignton, was the largest village in the country. My towns have interesting histories, but they have suffered not just during the most recent recession but over the past 50 years because there has not been the investment in the south-west that it deserves. Newton Abbot has a proud history in engineering. In the days of the railways, in the 1950s, it was very prosperous, but I am sad to say that only one large company—Centrax—is left. It is a proud example, but we need more.

Teignmouth is a typical fishing village. We still have a small port, so there is a real challenge in making fishing sustainable. At present, our trawlers have to land at Brixham, a neighbouring seaside town—indeed, my original family home town—but that does not help my constituents.

[Anne Marie Morris]

Dawlish is absolutely beautiful. I encourage any Member who comes to my part of the world to pay it a visit. It is a typical tourist seaside resort, with some of the most beautiful views. It is probably best known for its long stretch of railway. I am sure Members have seen adverts showing the waves coming over the train. It is extremely picturesque, but things have changed and across my constituency tourism and retail are the main generators of economic wealth. Members will know as well as I do that they do not pay very well.

As the south-west is a beautiful part of the world, we have attracted a lot of retired people, and 30% of the population are more than 60 years of age. That presents a challenge, because there is great disparity between the cost of living and average income, which is why certain issues are particularly acute—water rates, for example. Many things need to be done.

I turn to regeneration and the vital role of the skills debate. One of the most important things is to help children to aspire. At the beginning of the Parliament, I heard a new Member make a very moving speech about how important it is that kids aspire, and in whatever we bring forward I should like to see a method for making that happen. It is partly about role models, so bringing in second careerers, perhaps people from the forces, is absolutely the right thing to do. We need those role models. We need to involve local businesses in schools much earlier. Simply introducing the connection in the fifth form—as it was in my day—is too late; it needs to start earlier. If we can do that, we shall make a big difference.

We should try to improve quality and variety in education along the line—primary, secondary and tertiary. There has been a focus in tertiary education on what I can only describe as the intellectual professions, such as law and accountancy. There has not been a focus on careers as plumbers, engineers and electricians. Those are all valid careers that require no less intelligence, just intelligence of a different variety. I should like some colleges to be the technical colleges that we all knew and loved when we were younger. They should look at proper hands-on training. When I visit colleges I am distressed to find that because of health and safety and all the other rules and regulation, education is all about bits of paper, not about students getting their hands dirty. Getting one's hands dirty is an extremely good and valuable thing. There is a skills college in my community. I want it to be properly funded so that it can become a proper technical college, but we are only halfway through the process, so the Minister on the Front Bench will be hearing from me about that issue going forward.

Then there is the issue of linking tertiary education with jobs, and for my money it is absolutely crucial that we give apprenticeships a real chance. When I talk to people with small businesses in my community, they say, "Anne Marie, one of the challenges is that we cannot afford to take on apprentices, because at the moment all of the burden falls on the employer and it is a huge burden." I am therefore very pleased to see new initiatives from the new Government that will share the cost of apprenticeships. I welcome that 100%.

Of course, we must not forget those who are coming to their second, third and fourth career—often those who have been made redundant, through no fault of their own. When I talk to people who have just been made redundant, I see that one of the challenges is getting extra training, which is really difficult. There is a lot of training out there, but it is very hard to find because there is no route map, and there is also not as much funding available as there used to be. So I am delighted to hear from our new Government that they are to streamline that and make it far more accessible.

For me, the skills agenda is a real opportunity for my constituency. It is a way of helping it to regenerate, and that is absolutely key. If I do nothing else in my term in this Parliament, I will work to regenerate Newton Abbot: to regenerate the four towns; to regenerate the villages; to make sure that farming, which my hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon has already mentioned, has a real future; and to put the south-west back on the map, because it feels very much the poor relation and that is not right. I will be here, banging the drum to make sure that is not the case, until I finally leave this House.

5.1 pm

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): I am very grateful for the opportunity to make this, my maiden speech, today. I understand that maiden speeches—first speeches in Parliament—are very like your first child: easier to conceive than to deliver.

Rossendale and Darwen, the constituency I have the honour of representing, was previously held by Ms Janet Anderson for 18 years. During that period Ms Anderson was a hard-working constituency MP, and will be well remembered by many people in my area. She will especially be remembered for her pioneering support and work for local Sure Start centres, and I take the opportunity to pay tribute to her.

Rossendale and Darwen was formed in 1983, and the first Member of Parliament was David Trippier—now Sir David Trippier—who I am sure is well remembered by many people in the House. Sir David still resides in the village of Helmshore, where my wife and I have our current home. This is apt, as Helmshore is the geographical centre of the constituency, with the Robin Hood being the actual heart of the constituency. For those Members in the House who are avid readers of our two local papers, the *Rossendale Free Press* and the *Lancashire Telegraph*, I should add that that is not Robin Hood's well, where I proposed to my wife; it is the Robin Hood public house at the centre of our village, where the beer, and the welcome, is second to none, especially on a Friday evening.

Rossendale and Darwen, being nearly 220 square miles, is formed of four separate towns—Whitworth, Darwen, Bacup and Rawtenstall. Each of these towns is separate from the others, and they are independent in both spirit and mind while being similar in many ways. Each is boarded by the lofty west Pennine moors, hemming them into deep valleys, with houses and mills alike with steep mountains rising above them; and streams rush through glens, giving the power that once drove the east Lancashire textile mills.

There are also many villages in my constituency, with small, close-knit communities, such as Belmont, Weir, Turton, Hoddlesden and Tockholes. Those villages doggedly cling limpet-like to the hillside during the winter months. Last winter, some were cut off from the outside world for several weeks. In the summer months, the villages

are marked by horses paddock grazing, and I am sure that the village of Edenfield, in the electoral division of Eden, conjures into Members' minds the appropriate visions of pastoral bliss and long summer evenings.

It is not the landscape, beautiful as it is, that binds together this area of east Lancashire, but the character of the people who live in Rossendale and Darwen. The first Member of Parliament to be killed in the second world war was from the village of Stubbins in Rossendale. Captain Richard Porritt, a member of the Lancashire Fusiliers, was killed in Belgium on 26 May 1940, and he is remembered in the Chamber with a shield to the right of your Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. Last November, I had the honour of attending a Remembrance Sunday service in Whitworth with two current members of the Lancashire Fusiliers just back from Afghanistan, who laid a wreath and cross in memory of their seven fallen comrades. Many families in my constituency continue to have a strong connection with our armed forces. I believe that we in this country have the finest armed forces in the world and I shall do all that I can to support them and their families while I am a Member of the House.

It is apt that I am making my maiden speech during a debate about building a high-skilled economy because I believe that Rossendale and Darwen can be in the vanguard of rebalancing our economy to that of a highly skilled industrial economy. Rossendale and Darwen were at the centre of the first industrial revolution. Rossendale was the centre of the world's slipper trade, while Darwen was the birthplace of wallpaper, and both were major centres for the textile industry. Such was Darwen's importance to the cotton trade that it was visited by Mahatma Gandhi in 1931 so that he could witness the effect of the Indian Congress party's boycott of Lancashire cotton mills.

This white-hot flame of innovation that led to the invention of wallpaper and the introduction of the first power looms still burns in the breast of every young person in my constituency, and we must do all that we can to foster their full potential. I applaud the Government's commitment to investing in workplace apprenticeships to ensure that our young people, especially in Rossendale and Darwen, have the correct menu of skills to continue our strong tradition of local manufacturing. There are still many well-known manufacturing companies in my constituency, such as J&J Ormerod kitchens in Stacksteads, James Killelea steel in Crawshawbooth, Crown Paints in Darwen and WEC engineering in Darwen, which was visited by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister immediately before the election. All those well-known local manufacturing businesses provide high-skilled jobs for our young people.

The rebalancing of our economy is a key aim of the Government, as is set out in the coalition agreement. With a fairer and more balanced economy in which we are not so dependent on the financial services industry, and in which economic opportunities are more evenly shared among our regions and industries, I optimistically predict that Rossendale and Darwen will prosper and become a regional manufacturing superpower.

5.8 pm

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to deliver my maiden speech. I congratulate all new Members who have spoken so elegantly and eloquently, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), whose maiden speech was well conceived and comfortably delivered.

I represent the constituency of Hastings and Rye. Of course, it is only us who call our areas constituencies. To my constituents, the constituency is home, where they live and where they bring up their families, and I will never forget that. Some six weeks since the general election, I still get a little lost going from one room to the next, and between staircases and lifts, but I remain impressed, humbled and not a little relieved to be in these historic corridors and as part of this historic coalition.

Part of my responsibility is to live up to the example of the previous Member of Parliament for Hastings and Rye, Michael Foster. He was the epitome of a good constituency MP. He was immensely popular, not just because of the individual acts that he did for local residents, but because of his high visibility locally and his successful lobbying of the then Government for additional funds for the town. Unfortunately for him, his popularity grew in inverse proportion to that of his Government, but I recognise that, through his service, he set a very high bar—one that I shall try to reach and, hopefully, at some stage exceed.

The fruits of Michael Foster's success are evident in Hastings. We have a new train station, further education college, and university centre, and two new state-of-the-art office developments. However, physical regeneration has not yet translated into economic regeneration. Our offices are still largely empty, the train services are still poor, and on the index of multiple deprivation, Hastings remains 29th from the bottom. We have some of the lowest wages and highest unemployment in the whole country, let alone the south-east. Cynics might be forgiven for thinking that Labour's regeneration has been a triumph of style over substance so far. The make-up is in place, but I am afraid that the wrinkles are still very much there.

But deprivation is only one part of Hastings, and Hastings is only one part of an area of contrasts and variations. My constituency feels very much like a microcosm of the country, with urban and rural areas, with farmland adjacent to idyllic estates, and with idyllic villages next to deprived wards. We are the custodians of England's most famous date—perhaps more famous than 6 May 2010.

Let me introduce colleagues to the wonderful aspects of my constituency. Hastings, Rye and the village of Winchelsea were all parts of the Cinque ports, which were put together in the 11th century to keep out seafaring invaders, and for the mutual benefit of trade and fishing. Each place has its own unique character. I urge Members to spend their summer holidays with us. They can enjoy local produce, the source of modern English history, top-quality entertainment, fresh air and exercise—and for the more sedentary among us, there are fish and chips and slot machines. They can even walk in genuine dinosaur footprints, which may appeal to some Labour Members.

Tourism is an essential ingredient of what we have to offer. Hotels and boarding houses boast that they have been popular with visitors since 1066—visitors, of course, have not always been so popular with them. We have fantastic beaches, wonderful countryside and arguably

[Amber Rudd]

the world's most remarkable heritage. We have flourishing language schools, visited by students from all over the world, and a community that welcomes them with open arms, not to mention open tills, because we need the business.

Like many towns, we suffer from the coastal problem of being at the end of the line. Looking at previous maiden speeches over the past 40 to 50 years, I see that there has been a recurring theme: transport. The A21 to Hastings needs renewing and improvement. Our survival and prosperity depend on access. There is no point having wonderful facilities if people cannot access them. It unquestionably puts off employers and tourists, both of whom we need, that it is so difficult to get to our part of the world. I am talking of a constituency where 43% of the work force are in the public sector. We are like an island. We know which way the tide is going; we need to attract the private sector to try to take up some of the unemployment. I fear that much of the money that has already been spent in my constituency will fail to improve the economy if we do not do something about that. For too long, we have been the underprivileged cousin of the south-east. Many of my constituents have suffered terribly from an economy that has simply left them behind.

I have two important considerations for my constituency of Hastings and Rye. The first is transport. I recognise the particular financial situation in which we find ourselves—there must be cuts; we have inherited a difficult legacy. However, I urge Government Front Benchers not to make them to vital infrastructure projects, on which everything else depends. In my constituency, they are a link road to open up the area to more jobs and more employers, improvements to the A21, and better rail transport. We must be accessible to prosper. Conservatives understand above all the importance of enterprise and encouraging private sector growth so that families and communities can grow on their own.

We have discussed the high-skilled economy, and I agree that we all need that for our country to advance. However, I would like to draw hon. Members' attention to a very old trade. In Hastings, we have the largest beach-launched fishing fleet in Europe. In Rye, we have an important port and fishing fleet. They have been treated shamefully in the past 15 years. In the 1990s, there were 44 fishing vessels leaving Hastings; now there are 20, and the fishermen eke out a precarious living. Those men earn their living in a traditional, honest and environmentally friendly way, battling with the sea and the dangers of the deep. However, the common fisheries policy, as enforced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, has made their lives impossible. In 2005, there were prosecutions of those fishermen. The role of Government must be to help people, not put them out of business. Their way of life needs bailing out. Our Fisheries Minister understands the issue and the urgency and has visited Hastings twice, but we cannot wait for a full renegotiation of the common fisheries policy. We need change now, with the cod season approaching and difficulties ahead of us. We need a Government who protect our fisheries and our fishermen. I urge particular consideration of coastal towns.

The Government recognise the importance of promoting private sector growth. I hope that we can demonstrate that in Hastings and Rye by supporting better transport links and securing a fairer deal for fishermen. All we ask is a fair wind and an even keel.

5.17 pm

James Wharton (Stockton South) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to address the House for the first time. It is a nerve-racking moment, made all the more so by following the excellent contributions from hon. Members throughout the debate, with constituencies ranging from Central Devon to Pendle, and Hastings and Rye to Rossendale and Darwen. I am therefore grateful for the courtesies that the House extends to new Members during their maiden speech. I promise not to detain the House too long.

Sitting in the House as Conservative Member for a constituency in the north-east of England makes me something of a rare specimen, thought almost extinct just over a decade ago, but I assure hon. Members that we are showing encouraging signs of life and energy once again.

I follow in the footsteps of Harold Macmillan and Tim Devlin, as well, of course, as my most recent predecessor, Dari Taylor. Ms Taylor represented Stockton, South for 13 years, during which time she worked hard for her party and gave energetic support to the charity Cardiac Risk in the Young.

All Stockton MPs follow in the footsteps of Joseph Dodds, the first Member of Parliament for the seat. He won it when it was first enfranchised in 1868. He built up one of the largest majorities in the country in the next 20 years, having won only narrowly when he was first elected. Unfortunately, towards the end of his career, there were what might be termed financial irregularities, and he had to resign his seat after being made bankrupt. However, that was reported rather more generously in the press of the time than might be the case today. I hope it will not be taken amiss, or as not in the spirit of the new politics, in which those of us on this side of the House are so energetically engaged, if I say that Joseph Dodds was, of course, a Liberal Member for Stockton-on-Tees.

It will be my aim over the coming years not only to represent the good people of Stockton South and its surrounding towns and villages, for whose support and confidence I am grateful, but to wave the flag for Teesside. My predecessor Tim Devlin said in this House 23 years ago:

> "It persists in the minds of southern folk who think that we northerners all live in back-to-back houses and keep whippets."—[*Official Report*, 4 November 1987; Vol. 121, c. 972.]

Although some progress has been made in addressing perceptions of the north, there is much still to do. I hope to play my part in ensuring that such perceptions are challenged and corrected. In my own constituency, we have vibrant towns such as Yarm and Eaglescliffe, which showcase the very best that this country has to offer. There are also things that must be done: Ingleby Barwick needs more school places, Thornaby's regeneration is not yet complete, and Stockton itself has a high street which, although not in my constituency, must be the focus of local efforts to secure real and lasting improvement.

The economy of the north-east of England is, and has for many years been, dependent on the public sector. I hope that over the coming years our private sector might take on a more significant role, and I trust

that the Government will make promoting and sustaining that private sector one of its key aims in these difficult times. By building on the skills that we in the north-east region have, with our manufacturing and engineering heritage, I believe that we can build a stronger economy, regionally and nationally, which will benefit many generations to come.

Teesside as a whole needs to re-establish its true identity. Half of my constituency has been in Yorkshire, half in Durham, all was once in Cleveland, and all was also once in Teesside, and now, confusingly, we are told that we are in the Tees valley, although I have yet to find the Tees valley on any standard highways map. In Stockton South we have Durham university and Teesside retail park, but we are served by Cleveland police and Tees Valley Unlimited, and we celebrate Yorkshire day. Should any hon. Members find that perplexing, I invite them to visit that wonderful part of the world, especially over the summer recess—I can assure Members on both sides of the House that even in the north-east, we do indeed have a summer. Of course, they could fly direct into Durham Tees Valley airport—or at least they could have done when we had a direct service, which is another issue I hope to address and be involved with over the coming years. Those of us who were born and raised in Stockton can occasionally be heard to joke that we do not have a county. That joke has worn thin over the years and I hope the new Government recognise the anomaly and work with myself and others to address the current confusion.

The people of Teesside are hard-working and industrious, and there are all the signs of real success and wealth, but all too often, as is the case in so many other places, they sit next to pockets of real deprivation and need. We must raise the sights of those who have looked down at the ground for too long, and realise the true potential hidden beneath the surface of the terrible jobless figures and levels of personal debt which, for far too many families, have become the norm. It is by training and education that that can be achieved. My part of the north-east has suffered more than most during the recent recession, with the mothballing of our local Corus plant at Redcar, and the recent announcement that Garlands, a previously highly successful local company, has gone into administration, so we must ensure that our voices are heard loud and clear from both sides of the House.

Our local entrepreneurs, such as Sir John Hall, Duncan Bannatyne and Steve Gibson, are key drivers for our economy, not just in the region but far beyond. We must support individuals like them, from the smallest new businesses to the largest and most successful of enterprises. I want the north-east to be known as a place where business can be done. We have the skills and the spirit; we just need the chance to prove what we can achieve.

Throughout history, the north has been a powerhouse driving this country forward. Since the days of the industrial revolution, Teesside has played its part—Sydney Harbour bridge was made from our steel, and our coal powered the engines of empire. My constituents have sent me here to tell that to the House, to speak out for a great place and to support the Government in their work to tackle many of the problems that we now face.

The people of the north-east will look to the Government and to their representatives in the House to ensure that the transition to a new economic model is successful, and that jobs and livelihoods are protected. We want to grow, succeed and impress. I am confident that the new Government will listen to what the people of the north-east have to say, and I look forward to working to secure a bright future for its people.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your indulgence in calling me this afternoon, and in particular I want to thank the people of Stockton South for putting their confidence in me and sending me here to speak to you today and on however many other occasions I have the pleasure to address the House. It is a real pleasure to serve the constituency in which I live and in which I was brought up. I look forward to serving, and to working with Members on both sides of the House to ensure that the voice of the north-east is always heard here in Westminster and elsewhere.

5.25 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): It is kind of you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and generous of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (James Wharton), to allow me to speak. I know that the clock is against me, but I am no stranger to that. For many year, I worked in television so I am used to the ticking arm and the fierce direction of a floor manager and director who told me, in no uncertain terms, to shut up. I also worked as a criminal barrister for 16 years, so I am also used to someone firm in the chair telling me in even firmer terms to shut up, and on those occasions I never argued.

This is a great opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessors and to give a short explanation of the constituency that I have the honour and privilege to represent. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister knows the answer to the question that many ask about the exact location of Broxtowe. It does not exist on any map, but I urge all hon. Members to look at Nottingham on the internet. If they zoom in to the western side, they will see a stretch of land between the city and the border with Derbyshire. I urge those who travel up the M1 to come off at junction 25 or 26 and experience Broxtowe. It is a fine place, as my hon. Friend knows because his mother is one of my constituents. She lives in the village of Bramcote.

Many people would say, on visiting Broxtowe, that it is part of the urban sprawl, but last bank holiday I spent two days walking—I had sore feet afterwards—across the constituency to enjoy the green belt. In that time, I saw all the places that I am so very proud to represent, including Beeston in the south and more green areas around Greasley, Giltbrook and Kimberley in the north.

I wish to pay tribute to another place in my constituency and thereby pay tribute to my predecessors. It is a hamlet called Cossall, which lies in beautiful rolling pastures. It has a fine tradition of mining, and D. H. Lawrence's fiancée had the joy of living there, but an unfortunate legacy from the mining industry is the threat of open-cast mining. The first Member of Parliament to represent Broxtowe—it was created in 1983—was Sir Jim Lester, who was well known and much loved in this House. He was followed by my immediate predecessor, Nick Palmer. Both men have many attributes in common, and I hope to share those in the years to come. They were moderate and reasonable in their politics, they worked hard for the people they represented, and both

[Anna Soubry]

joined in opposing any plans for open-cast mining in that beautiful green land. I seek to emulate both in my time in this House.

During my time here, it will be an honour and privilege to represent the people of Broxtowe, as others have said about their constituencies. There are many new Members and we bring diverse experiences to the House, but we all hope to play a real part here. We will challenge and hold the Government to account, and we will ask questions whenever we can, but most of all we will represent our constituents. Many of us were selected many years ago and getting here has been a long journey, so we are well aware of the responsibilities that we all bear. We will take great joy and pleasure in representing our constituents and do our very best for them by bringing forward the causes that they all hold dear.

5.29 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): Madam Deputy Speaker, may I welcome you to the Chair and wish you very well in your new role in the House? The House has been at its very best this afternoon, and I have enjoyed all the contributions, particularly the maiden speeches. The subject of education and skills always brings out the very best in Members. Indeed, for many of us, from whatever party represented in the House, it is the reason why we came into public life, and we have seen that today.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) on his contribution. He spoke warmly of his predecessor, Dr Starkey, who is remembered fondly on the Labour Benches, and of Milton Keynes' great heritage in higher education. I was pleased to visit the new university centre in Milton Keynes, and I hope that he continues to support it in its work to extend access and widen participation in that area. Of course, Labour Members are particularly fond of, and are keen to remember, the great Open university and the heritage of Jenny Lee and the Wilson era Labour Government.

We heard a fantastic and wonderful speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), who I know was a very effective mayor of Liverpool during its year as capital of culture. He included many of the football references that we hear in the House. He obviously has big shoes to fill—many of us remember Peter Kilfoyle fondly—and I particularly enjoyed his reference to growing up on an estate. Those of us who grew up in very humble circumstances wish him well in his endeavours to remind the House that there are many people a long, long way from this Chamber.

We also heard an eloquent and articulate speech from the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes). I hope that she will not be overwhelmed by liberalism, as she referenced in her speech. I am sorry that I was not in the Chamber to hear the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney), who made many football references, so I will look at them in *Hansard* tomorrow. He spoke warmly of his predecessor, who was well respected on the Labour Benches.

I know the hon. Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison) because she stood against me in Tottenham in 2000. She will remember that back then I looked a little more like Denzel Washington, but 10 years later I look a lot more like Forest Whitaker. She has championed the Conservative cause in London. I wish her well in her seat, and it is good that she mentioned Battersea Dogs Home—an institution of which we in London are very fond.

The hon. Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson) made me want to rush up to north-east Lancashire. I do not claim it is an area of the country I know well enough, but I thought he gave a very eloquent speech in which he reminded us of that city's manufacturing heritage.

The hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) also gave an eloquent speech. He was very kind about his predecessor and reminded us that we must continue to rediscover the importance of our industrial heritage—the Humber clearly played an important role in our history.

The hon. Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride) could have got a job with a tourism agency in speaking about his constituency. His effective speech reminded us not just of the industrial nature of so many of the areas that we represent, but of the importance of agriculture and the skills that we need to support agriculture in our economy.

Let me pay tribute to the hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris), who made a warm and passionate speech. She placed a great emphasis on role models—an issue that I have also championed in the House—and again, the beauty of the area that she represents came across.

The hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) also paid an eloquent tribute, not just to his constituency but, importantly, to our armed forces. Historically, they have always played an important role in this country, by providing so many men and women with skills who have not just served our armed forces, but gone on to serve the wider community once they left the armed services.

Like the hon. Member for Central Devon, the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd) reminded us of the importance of seaside areas and the work that we must continue doing, particularly in the south-east, where there remain acute pockets of deprivation.

The hon. Member for Stockton South (James Wharton) is a tribute to the north. He is keen to keep Stockton on the map, as his predecessor was, despite the boundary issues affecting his constituency.

I was not surprised that the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), being a barrister, managed to cram a lot into her speech in the time available. I look forward to her contributions in the Chamber over the years ahead.

Let me turn to the returning parliamentarians. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) for reminding us of the role of group training associations in extending apprenticeships and helping small businesses in particular to take part in our wider apprenticeship schemes.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods) has tremendous expertise in higher education issues, but she also reminded us of the importance of the Leitch targets. I hope that when the Minister winds up we might hear something about whether the Government remain committed to those targets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Chris Williamson) was right to remind the House that Derby remains an exemplar city, owing to its unique combination of both skills and manufacturing. There is much that we can learn from the success of that part of the country over the most recent period. We all want to replicate that success in different parts of the country.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) on his election as Chair of the Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills, and on his thoughtful speech. We all look forward to hearing more from him in these debates over the coming years.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Burnley (Gordon Birtwistle) on his advancement of the cause of UCLan university in his constituency and on reminding us of the industrial heritage of his area and the importance of companies such as Rolls-Royce.

We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), in an intervention. Importantly, she reminded us not just of the role of universities—she spoke about Cardiff—but of the many spin-out companies that emerge from universities, taking skills back into the community, as people graduate and create companies. They are illustrations of the huge success of "Science made simple".

Let me come to the contribution of the Minister of State, the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes). I have had exchanges with him across the Chamber for about four years—first in my role as the Minister for skills and then as the Minister for higher education. I look forward to the debates that we will have over the coming months. He has always described himself as a high Tory. As a consequence, he has an elevated—some might say levitated—status in the Chamber. I know his constituency well; I remember it fondly from my days as a Peterborough cathedral chorister. I suspect that he can be found on a Sunday engaging in amateur dramatics in the village halls around Spalding, playing Hercule Poirot or even Miss Marple.

Mr Hayes: Or a mix of the two.

Mr Lammy: Indeed.

I was disappointed not to see a reference to higher education in the motion and not to hear much from the hon. Gentleman about its importance. It is my view—I hope that it is his—that a world-class university system is central to a high-skilled economy. I grew up in Tottenham during a very difficult time in our history—and as an ethnic minority in troubled and difficult times—and I am very proud of all that we have done to widen access and extend opportunities for poorer and non-traditional families and for ethnic minorities across the country. It was a huge achievement for the Labour Government to widen participation to 44% and to enable more young people and more black and ethnic minorities to go to university than ever before.

When we look at constituencies in inner-city Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester and at the pockets of deprivation in the cities, towns and villages that we have heard about today, and we see young people—whose parents would never have dreamed of going to university—going into higher education, we realise the major contribution that the Labour Government made to our high-skilled economy. It is important that that should continue.

It is a great shame that the Minister for Universities and Science, the right hon. Member for Havant (Mr Willetts), recently referred to students and young people as a "burden on the taxpayer". Students are never a burden on the taxpayer. Underlying his statement is a certain view of the state and a suspicion of the contribution that the state makes to advancing the cause of a high-skilled economy. We will take every opportunity to challenge such assumptions over the coming months.

The Minister of State, the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings, has announced the creation of 50,000 apprenticeships, but he is not in opposition now, and he must remember that he does not have those 50,000 apprenticeships until he has delivered them. The people who will actually deliver them, however, are in business and industry. Achieving that will take a lot of hard effort over the coming months, because I do not think that he is suggesting that the money that he has set aside will pay the salaries of those young apprentices. He is still expecting business to do that. So, at the moment, he has delivered only one apprentice: the public apprentice, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. I wish the Minister of State well, but we will be looking hard at the detail over the coming months, and he will expect me to penetrate fiercely some of the hyperbole in his comments.

5.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Mr Edward Davey): It is a great pleasure to welcome you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the Chair. You and I debated with each other over many years while you were a Minister, and I particularly remember when you were Paymaster General. I know that, given your knowledge of the tax system, you will be looking forward to chairing a debate on the Finance Bill to take you down memory lane.

This has been a high-quality debate which has been conducted in a cross-party way, as different right hon. and hon. Members have made positive contributions. As my hon. Friend the Minister said in his opening remarks, he is listening to the contributions of all Members. We have also heard about football and have almost had an exercise in VisitBritain as we have gone around the country.

I will not be able to talk about every maiden speech, but their overall quality was superb. When I made my maiden speech, I was rather more nervous than those delivering the self-confident and assured maiden speeches that we have heard today. If I may, I shall take a tour d'horizon of those speeches. We had cock and bull from the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart); we had a Conservative club haunted by Roundheads from the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes); and we had a Yorkshire vineyard from the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney), as he talked about the "Last of the Summer Wine".

Two hon. Members showed great perception in how to represent their constituencies. I am thinking of the hon. Members for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) and for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), as they listed their local newspapers in their speeches. I have always found that when I talk about the *Kingston Informer*, the *Kingston Guardian*, the *Surrey Comet* and Radio Jackie, it is always a very good way of representing one's constituents.

[Mr Edward Davey]

As I mentioned earlier, we also heard about football, as Members talked about the various football clubs in their constituencies. I have to make a confession—I am a Kingstonian fan because they play in Kingston, and I am also an AFC Wimbledon fan, as the club shares the Kingsmeadow ground. I have to say to the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South that although he has the MK Dons, we have the real Wimbledon playing in my constituency. I also have to confess that, although I was born in Nottingham and my first team is Notts County, I am also a Liverpool fan. Let me explain why. I was the only member of the class who was a Notts County fan during the Clough years, so I had to support one team that was giving Nottingham Forest a hard time.

I therefore particularly enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), as I know her constituency fairly well. I have never lived there, but I used to go to Nottingham university boating lake. I will not go any further into that, but we had some nice times there. As a student, I worked in Boots, which has a factory in the hon. Lady's constituency, and during my student vacation I helped to make pork pies for Northern Foods. I am not sure whether politicians should confess to making pork pies, but when students were making them, complaints from consumers went up—I hope that it was nothing to do with my skills.

As Members from both sides of the House addressed the substance of today's debate, we heard about how they, and organisations in their constituencies, are playing a critical role in improving our country's skills. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes South was quite right to talk about the Open university. As we debate higher education, the model of the Open university is one that people will want to replicate. I speak as a former student, now a fellow, of Birkbeck college, where part-time education is also key. We really need to engage in a more flexible approach to higher education, and the Open university has a lot to contribute in that respect.

We heard about the university of Southampton from the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North, and we also heard how a number of Members had been apprentices. We heard from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) about his time as an apprentice bricklayer. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Gordon Birtwistle) about his apprenticeship as a textile machine manufacturer.

That is why this Government are so proud, in their very earliest days, to have put extra money into the apprenticeship scheme, and to have set a target of 50,000 new apprenticeships. The right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) seemed to jest—how could we be so bold as to want to create 50,000 new apprenticeships?—but we are very proud to have set that target. The right hon. Gentleman appears to consider it unachievable, but I can tell him that I have discussed it with my hon. Friend the Minister and with officials, and we are certain that we will meet it and do better as time goes on. I hope that in due course, when we have achieved our aim, he will pay this coalition Government the credit that they deserve.

Mr Lammy: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman can tell us when we will see those 50,000 apprentices.

Mr Davey: What I have noticed about the targets set by the previous Government—which the right hon. Gentleman mentioned in his speech—is how often they were not met. The Government set target after target which they then failed to meet. The right hon. Gentleman spoke of the targets that they set for apprenticeships, but they set those targets and never met them. We will meet our target, and I believe that we will meet it within the next 12 months. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will soon eat his words.

We heard an awful lot today about the importance of manufacturing industry. I believe that the Government's skills programme will ensure that it receives the support that it deserves, at the basic skills and education level. Labour Members may complain about the state of manufacturing industry, but they have a poor record in that regard themselves. The hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey), the new Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee—I welcome him to his post—made a thoughtful speech on the subject, but I think he should bear in mind that whereas in 1997 manufacturing represented 20% of the United Kingdom economy, by the time the Labour Government left office the proportion had fallen to 12%.

Mr Bailey: Will the Minister not acknowledge that one of the reasons for that was the huge increase in the service sector? It did not reflect an absolute decline in manufacturing.

Mr Davey: Of course that is true of many modern economies, but I think it ill behoves the Labour party to criticise this Government in their early days, given that its own approach to manufacturing industry was not to turn the tide and go against the trend.

Although we have a huge amount in common, when Labour Members talk about the skills agenda they sometimes forget some of the record of which they should be less proud. I am thinking particularly of the quangocracy that grew up around the skills agenda. There is currently a patchwork quilt of quangos involved in that agenda. Members may be interested to learn how the position has changed. In government, the Labour party did not just create the existing quangos, but created quangos, abolished them and created new ones, all within 13 years. The fact that that instability and reinvention happened time after time shows that the Labour Government never really had a true vision. They constantly spent large amounts on new quangos while failing to get some of that money to the grass roots—to our communities. A lot of money was wasted then.

When the last Government set up the Learning and Skills Council, I was sent strategy after strategy by that august body. At first I thought that I had a real duty to read every single page, but when I visited the LSC and talked to its representatives, I realised that most of those strategies would never come to anything. I am afraid that that happened time and again. Huge amounts were spent on quangos, reports and consultancy, but less money went to the companies and learners who needed it. We believe that the need to rationalise the quangocracy in learning and skills is a key issue, and we will deal with it. We will do so while also having to look at the spending issues in this area, and there will be huge challenges. I do not think there is

anyone in this House or involved in FE, HE or the education system in general who does not realise that we face difficult choices in this area, but we are absolutely clear that we will do our best with the money that we have got into apprenticeships and into the capital programme for FE to ensure that the priorities get the funding they deserve.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): As the hon. Gentleman has mentioned apprenticeships again, can he tell the House whether, in the 12 months he is talking about, if we take together what he and his colleagues are proposing on Train to Gain and apprenticeships, more learners will be funded by the Government or fewer?

Mr Davey: That is interesting. We have to compare that with what the previous Government were planning. When we looked at the funding issues facing us, and the very difficult choices, we saw that the previous Government were planning £340 million of cuts in adult further education and skills this year. That is actually happening this year, and I hope the colleges and students—and the employers—who are having to deal with the financial situation imposed by the cuts realise that the people who are to blame for that are sitting on the Opposition Benches.

Mr Lammy *rose—*

Mr Davey: Before I let the right hon. Gentleman in, let me say that I hope that when he gets to his feet he admits to the House that it is under the previous Government's plans that we are seeing a 3% reduction in funding rates for college-based provision, a 10% reduction for apprenticeships for those aged 25-year-old and over and a 6% reduction in other work-based learning. This is what we are having to deal with, and it is creating huge problems, as he ought to know.

Mr Lammy: It is the hon. Gentleman who is in government so I think he ought to answer the question put by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden): will there be more or fewer learners as a result of the announcements made today? The House has a right to know.

Mr Davey: Well, one of the things the House needs to understand is that we have a different approach to FE and HE. We do not believe we can sit here in Whitehall and have a centralised system that we micromanage, and that we can then suddenly guarantee that there will be x new trainers, x new learners and x new places, as the right hon. Member for Tottenham and his friends used to do. That is why they failed so often: they took a centralised, top-down approach.

We will ensure that our approach is employer-led and learner-led. That is why we are working with businesses to make sure our schemes and proposals get the support that they will need from those areas. That is a very different approach. We know that, as we meet the challenges ahead of us, the private sector will have to be involved and be working with the Government. Far too often, the private sector was too much of an afterthought in how the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues planned their skills agenda.

Change is inevitable and, as Dr Johnson said:

"Change is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better."

So there will be difficult choices. We will not shy away from them, but when we have to make those difficult decisions, it will be the employers and learners who are uppermost in our mind, not the bureaucrats and the quangos and the consultants, where all the money was wasted under the last Government.

We have had a constructive debate. I say on behalf of my hon. Friends and fellow Ministers in the Department that we are keen to listen, even to ideas from former Ministers who may at last realise that many mistakes were made and want to begin to confess. I hope that through working across parties and with the Select Committee and new Members, we can revitalise and invest in the skills our economy so desperately needs—

6 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order 9(3)).

Transport Infrastructure (Nottingham)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Miss Chloe Smith.)*

6 pm

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am very grateful for this opportunity to raise issues that concern not only my constituents but the wider Greater Nottingham conurbation and our region. May I say what a pleasure it is to see you in the Chair today? I also thank my hon. Friends the Members for Nottingham East (Chris Leslie) and for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) for coming along to lend me their support.

Nottingham is very fortunate to have one of the best integrated transport systems in the country, but that did not happen by chance. It happened because there was political will, because the city council worked closely with partners in the county and with local businesses, seeking to build consensus wherever possible, and because we are fortunate to have great people working in the city to deliver our collective vision.

Indeed, the Department for Transport has designated Nottingham as a centre of excellence for local transport delivery. More recently, the council received a comprehensive area assessment green flag for public transport improvement and was described as "getting better and better". However, it is not those warm words that I want the Minister to attend to today, but the real achievements that make Nottingham's case for further investment compelling.

Over the past five years, Nottingham has contained traffic growth and congestion levels. There has been increased public transport use, fatal and serious accidents have been reduced and we have encouraged many more people to walk or cycle rather than to jump in their cars. I am proud of our record, but we know that there is still much more to do if we are to have a transport system that is fit for purpose in the years ahead—one that supports economic growth rather than hampers it and encourages greener, eco-friendly choices.

When it comes to investment in infrastructure, short-termism just will not do. We have to think and plan for the long term, and that is why Nottingham has been developing three key capital projects to make the city an even better place to live and work, to attract inward investment, to create jobs and to get the local economy moving. These projects will regenerate neighbourhoods, link socially disadvantaged communities with training and job opportunities, improve the environment and cut carbon emissions. I know that they are not just objectives that the Minister will welcome but the stated priorities of the coalition Government, so I am very hopeful that he will give a positive response.

Let me say a bit more about the three projects on which I am anxious that he should focus. The A453 links Nottingham to the M1, the A50 and East Midlands airport. It is the main trunk road from Nottingham to Birmingham and is a vital link in our transport network. According to the most recent data, the A453 is the most congested road in the country. Delays are particularly bad at peak times and the 9-mile stretch between Nottingham and Kegworth is rated as the worst section of the national strategic road network, with the average vehicle delay doubling in the last five years. Delays can be expected of almost 15 minutes per 10 miles travelled outbound and more than 10 minutes per 10 miles travelled inbound. In 2007, the East Midlands Development Agency commissioned a study that found that the cost of congestion to Nottingham businesses came to £160 million a year, so it is no surprise that three years ago partners in the region agreed that it was the top priority for regional funding allocation. That was confirmed again in 2009.

There is also a human cost to the congestion. Driving through Clifton, one sees far too many flowers at the roadside that are a reminder of the A453's terrible safety record: accidents are 33% higher than the national average for rural roads and 23% higher than the national average for urban roads. Between 2003 and 2007, there were 167 personal injury accidents of which two were fatal and 31 serious. Residents and business leaders, city councillors, district councillors and county councillors, and Members on both sides of the House all agree that the A453 desperately needs improvement.

Nottingham has been waiting almost 30 years for something to be done. The latest scheme will provide a "civilised road"—one that provides extra capacity, but is sensitive to the needs of Clifton residents who live alongside it. Planned improvements have been delayed twice before and we need it more than ever—so please, Minister, do not disappoint us again.

I read in the *Nottingham Post* that the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) has already, as he put it, "had a go" at the Secretary of State for Transport regarding this matter. I hope that the Minister will work with his colleagues in the transport team to secure the scheme's future and, if necessary, to make representations to the Treasury on behalf not just of the 270,000 people who live in the city or the 750,000-plus people in Nottingham's travel-to-work area, but of the people who will be filling the 20,000 new science and technology jobs that we hope will be created in the city by 2020.

The second element of Nottingham's plan for a modern, integrated transport network that I want to raise with the Minister is Nottingham express transit phase 2—turning our tramline into a tram network. Tramline one opened in 2004, and its success has exceeded expectations, attracting 10 million passengers a year. Yes, it required considerable investment, and, yes, the construction work was disruptive, but I urge the Minister to come for a ride across Nottingham on the tram to see at first hand what a difference it has made. I urge him to come and see the park-and-ride sites, including those at Phoenix park and Forest recreation ground, which are full to bursting every day. Some 3 million car journeys have been removed from the city's roads and there has been a 30% increase in public transport use in the north-west corridor of the city. I like our buses, and they are a vital part of the mix, but on their own they cannot achieve that level of modal shift—getting people out of their cars and on to public transport. For the A453 scheme really to work, even with a widened A453, we need a significant proportion of the people who are coming towards the city to transfer to public transport at a park-and-ride site on the edge of Clifton.

I urge the Minister also to come and see the regeneration, inward investment and sustainable development that have been achieved along the line one route. Perhaps he will even share my enjoyment regarding the inspiration

it has provided to small local businesses. I admit that every time I pass the snack bar in Hyson Green called Tramwiches, it makes me smile.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend mentions Hyson Green in my constituency. Does she agree that as phase 2 of the tram project is a private finance initiative, funded in part not so much by grant but by revenues generated from some quite tough decisions having been taken about workplace parking levies and so forth, it is potentially less burdensome on public borrowing levels because of the re-phasing potential? As a consequence, it might be a good candidate when ranked against other schemes that the Minister is considering.

Lilian Greenwood: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention.

NET phase 2 received approval because it will deliver for the city and the conurbation. It will take a further 3 million car journeys off our roads and will provide at least 50% of the additional capacity needed to avoid the transport gap that threatens the economic vitality of the conurbation. There will be 2,500 extra park-and-ride spaces, better integration with the railway station and hugely improved access to and from the south and west of the conurbation. It will link people, some of whom live in wards in which 60% of the population do not have access to a car, with the Queen's medical centre, which is the city's main hospital, as well as with both our universities, with local college campuses and with 2,000 workplaces, including 20 of the city's 30 largest employers. It will also promote equality of opportunity, as line one has done, by improving transport access for the elderly, the disabled and those on low incomes.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Will the hon. Lady please explain which wards in the city council will benefit from the tram but are those in which she says 60% of people do not have access to public transport?

Lilian Greenwood: The wards are those such as Clifton South in the city and places such as the Meadows, which I wanted to talk about. The Meadows and Clifton are two areas of my constituency that suffer from significant social disadvantage, including high unemployment, low skills and low educational attainment. Clifton also has a disproportionate number of pensioner households and a large retirement village. The tram will transform those communities, regenerating their neighbourhood centres and offering full accessibility for people with mobility difficulties, including wheelchair and motorised scooter users, and it will provide a vital link to workplaces and training providers. But most importantly, it will bring jobs. The Centre for Economic and Business Research projected that between 4,000 and 10,000 new jobs would be created by NET phase 2. All this, and a hugely positive impact on the environment—cleaner air and a healthy cut in carbon emissions—make this scheme well worth investing in and excellent value for money.

I am delighted to know that the Minister is a fan of light rail, and I know that he is fully briefed on Nottingham's tram. I certainly welcomed his comments earlier in the week at the parliamentary tea for light rail when he said that local funding was a matter for local people. He knows that the local funding for Nottingham is secure. The mechanism is in place. So I hope that he will give his backing and the backing of his Department for this exciting expansion of light rail in the UK.

Last but not least, I want to draw the Minister's attention to the Nottingham hub—the £67 million station improvement project to be jointly delivered by the city council and Network Rail to transform our railway station into the sort of modern transport interchange that the city needs. Everything is in place between the city council and Network Rail. The only piece of the jigsaw that is in doubt is the contribution from East Midlands Development Agency. We in Nottingham value EMDA and the important role that it has played in the city and the region. Securing its future is a discussion for another day, but we hope that the changes to regional development agencies will not be allowed to undermine this project and the opportunity to create a wonderful new entrance to the city.

Earlier this week the Prime Minister spoke about the review of spending commitments and said:

> "Projects that are good value for money and consistent with the Government's priorities will go ahead."—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2010; Vol. 511, c. 868.]

I know that we in Nottingham can demonstrate that our plans meet this test. Can we afford to go ahead with these schemes? The real question is, "Can we afford not to?" and the answer is most definitely no. These transport schemes are absolutely vital to the economy of Greater Nottingham and the East Midlands region. They will deliver on jobs, on regeneration, on cutting unemployment and on improving access to training and skills. They will help us to meet the targets for a greener low-carbon future. They represent excellent value for money. If we need to be a bit more flexible on what we are asking for, tell us. We will be, but do not leave us stuck in the slow lane when it comes to economic growth. It would be short-sighted and very costly to delay these well-thought-out, well-planned projects for the sake of small savings now.

As I draw my remarks to a close, I would like to ask the Minister the questions that people in Nottingham are asking me. Have the Government produced an analysis of the impact that delaying or cutting these projects will have on local and regional economic growth? What criteria will the government use to assess which major projects to continue funding? When will the decisions be made and who will be making those decisions?

Finally, will the Minister accept my invitation to come to Nottingham to see the congestion we face on the A453, to enjoy a trip on the tram, to look at the exciting plans for the railway station and to hear from residents, businesses and councillors from all parties about why investing in our infrastructure is vital for the future of Nottingham?

6.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Norman Baker): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) on securing this debate on transport infrastructure for Nottingham and the surrounding area, and on the comprehensive and persuasive way she put her case this afternoon. I am aware that she made her maiden speech in the House a few weeks ago and mentioned both the A453 and the Nottingham tram. I am now pleased to be

[Norman Baker]

responding to her first Adjournment debate on a subject that is clearly of great importance to her, to other hon. Members and to her constituents.

No one doubts that an effective and efficient low-carbon transport infrastructure can help to support economic development and help to tackle climate change. Unfortunately, securing these outcomes in our current economic climate is challenging to say the least, but I am confident that we can meet these challenges and still deliver transport infrastructure that works for economy and the environment. I draw the hon. Lady's attention to the coalition Government's statement, to which she referred in her opening remarks, in which we have made clear our commitment to a modern low-carbon transport infrastructure as an essential element of a dynamic and entrepreneurial economy. She may also have noticed that light rail is specifically mentioned in the agreement. But we have also identified the pre-eminence of the deficit reduction programme at this time. The decisions that we take and the speed with which we are able to implement transport improvements will need to be determined in the light of the comprehensive spending review.

The hon. Lady asked about the criteria for assessing major projects, and I shall come to that point in a moment. She asked when and who will make decisions. Initially, the Treasury's comprehensive spending review will tell us how much money the Department has in crude terms, and we shall then use the criteria to take the decisions. I am conscious of the uncertainty not just in Nottingham but across the country. We want to get a move on and give people clarity as soon as we possibly can.

The Department for Transport is playing a full part in the spending review that will report in the autumn. We have already announced a range of measures aimed at delivering reductions in spending. On 24 May, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury gave details of savings of £6.2 billion in Government spending in 2010-11. The Department for Transport is contributing to those savings, which has meant taking difficult decisions on funding and deferring decisions on schemes, including the A453, until after the outcome of the spending review.

Last Thursday, the Department for Communities and Local Government published further details about local government savings, including £309 million that the Department for Transport had identified in respect of local transport. In making those reductions, however, we have maximised flexibility for local authorities to reshape their budgets according to local priorities and to identify where efficiencies can be found. Given current financial constraints, it is essential to ensure that any new infrastructure is affordable and offers value for money.

On the criteria for assessing major projects, the hon. Lady may be interested to learn that my Department is committed to reforming the way decisions are made about which transport schemes to prioritise across the country. We are looking at the formula used to assess transport schemes so that the benefits of low-carbon proposals are fully recognised. We hope that work will be complete to coincide with the outcome of the comprehensive spending review so that we can take sensible decisions at that time.

Before I respond to the hon. Lady's specific points, I acknowledge Nottingham city council's high reputation as a transport authority. It has successfully managed major innovative projects, including the building of the tram. It is a beacon council for accessibility and has taken great strides in managing congestion in the area, as the hon. Lady pointed out. By August 2009, vehicle journey times during the morning peak had been reduced by almost 7% on baseline figures.

The Greater Nottingham transport partnership provides a good example of bringing together the private and public sectors to promote understanding of and support for the integrated vision contained in the joint local transport plan. From that partnership has come the "Big Wheel" marketing campaign, which has worked successfully to influence the use of sustainable transport options.

Nottingham City Transport picked up the winning new customers award at the 2009 UK bus awards, and in May this year the biggest, and first area-wide, statutory bus quality partnership was launched. Nottingham has seen year-on-year increases in bus and tram use. There are now 47 million bus passengers per year in Nottingham and 10 million tram passengers. With that base from which to work, I am confident that Nottingham City Transport is in a strong position to respond to the difficult financial climate we are now facing.

I understand the concerns expressed on both sides of the House about the decision to defer spending for the A453 scheme until the next comprehensive spending review period. I do not want to introduce a note of discord, but I point out gently to the hon. Lady that the previous Government had 13 years to do something about the road, but did not. She might bear that in mind as we consider how to go forward.

Following consideration of the scheme orders for the A453 at the public inquiry in 2009, the inspector's report was submitted to the Secretary of State for consideration. However, no decision on the inspector's report and the scheme orders can be made until there is clarity about the availability of funding for the scheme following the forthcoming spending review. As the scheme is subject to statutory procedures, I hope the hon. Lady will understand that I cannot, for reasons of propriety, discuss the merits of the A453 project in the Chamber this evening. I can assure her, however, that the scheme will be given due consideration alongside other proposals. Her comments and those of other Members are noted.

On the proposed tram extensions, the Government announced last week that we would consider schemes funded through the regional funding allocation process as part of our commitment to review the way funding decisions are made on which transport projects to prioritise. However, as the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Chris Leslie) said—I nearly called him the hon. Member for Shipley—the Nottingham project is slightly different. The extensions to the Nottingham express transit tram scheme are proposed to be funded almost entirely through the private finance initiative. The Government, through the Treasury, plan to make an announcement shortly on how we are dealing with PFI schemes, and it may be that more clarity can be given on the tram scheme at that point.

I would just say that the feeling I have picked up from speaking to Members on both sides of the House is that whether people were for or against the tram, there is

acceptance—the route has been planned, it has been accepted, it has been established, and the issue now is really one of cost and finance rather than anything else.

Chris Leslie: It is entirely correct that it feels very much as though we have come so far—on the planning process, the commitment of all the legal fees and the consultancy fees, getting through the planning inquiries and so on—that it would be such a shame to decide not to progress at the eleventh hour, particularly when, as I said before, this scheme may not be so burdensome in its public borrowing aspects as perhaps others would.

Norman Baker: I do understand that point, and I am sure it is frustrating for Members all across the House, looking at various schemes in their own patches, to see this delay. I stress that it is a delay, rather than a cancellation—simply a deferral of schemes. We do want to get decisions as soon as we possibly can on all these schemes, but as to whether the PFI is good value for money, that is above my pay grade. It is a matter for Treasury Ministers to decide, although obviously the comments that the hon. Gentleman and others have made will be picked up and relayed to my colleagues in the Treasury.

I should record that the tram has been successful, carrying 38 million passengers—well above the projected figures. That is also a matter to take into account in looking at the future. So I can assure the hon. Member for Nottingham South that the Department understands the potential for trams, in the right conditions, to deliver a high-quality public transport alternative to the car. I believe that, as she rightly says, we have underplayed the potential of trams, and light rail in general, in this country. I am conscious that proposals have failed in the past, usually on the basis of high cost. She may like to know that I have asked officials to look at the reasons for the high cost of tram schemes, and to see whether there are any ways to reduce those costs to make trams a more affordable option in the future, particularly given the likely pressures on budgets following the spending review. That work is being carried out in the Department, coterminous with the work carried out in the Treasury, so that when the smoke has cleared, light rail will be in a position to benefit, potentially, from the new arrangements post-review.

As I mentioned earlier, the Department is taking forward work to deliver the coalition agreement commitment to ensure that low-carbon benefits of schemes are fully recognised in the transport appraisal decision-making process.

The hon. Lady mentioned the workplace parking levy, and of course it has been seen that the tram extensions proposed are closely linked to the plans for a workplace parking levy to be implemented in Nottingham, although of course there is no requirement for them to be so and it is open to the city council, if the tram did not go ahead, to introduce that levy if it wished to do so. Workplace parking levies are one of a range of measures available to local authorities for improving local transport and tackling congestion. Nottingham city's plan to implement a levy is very much in accord with the coalition's localism agenda, and I want to make it quite clear from the Dispatch Box tonight that whatever individuals in the House think about that levy, our view is that it is entirely a matter for the local authority to decide whether that goes ahead or not; it is not a matter for the Government to intervene in.

The hon. Lady also mentioned the Nottingham rail hub and improvements to Nottingham station. I know that work is in hand to develop plans and prepare for improvements in Nottingham railway station and the surrounding areas under the Nottingham hub scheme. That includes work to complete the necessary agreements to enable the scheme to proceed. I should deliver the usual health warning about the current financial climate, which the hon. Lady is well aware of, and the fact that we cannot offer assurances at this particular time about taking forward a scheme, although, as she referred to the contribution from the regional development agency, I would just say that obviously if the scheme could be reduced in cost in some way, that makes it more likely to proceed. I hope she might take that message back to colleagues and others in Nottingham. We in the Department do believe, however, that it is a good scheme, which has the potential to deliver wider benefits, including the regeneration and employment benefits that the hon. Lady mentioned, in addition to improving transport links in Nottingham.

It is clear that we face a challenging period. Tough decisions to tackle the UK's budget deficit have been necessary, and they are ongoing. I appreciate, however, that it is not easy for people to see schemes with considerable local support, that have been in development for many years, being put on hold and given an uncertain future. The Government have identified that the most urgent priority is tackling the deficit, and the Department for Transport must play its role in that process. The Department will be in a position to identify major investment that can be supported only after the Government's spending review has been concluded. In a period in which we face tight financial restraint, it is essential that we take a step back and consider which schemes should be prioritised. That is the only way we can put ourselves in a strong position to make the best use of available funds and to establish a strong base for the future development of the transport system.

I would not want the hon. Lady to go away from the debate with a negative impression, however. We face challenges, but we have a strong approach to address them, and the Department wants to work to deliver outcomes that meet national and local needs, and to improve the country's transport infrastructure. We are keen to use whatever tools we can to achieve that.

I thank the hon. Lady for the invitation to visit Nottingham, which I shall be happy to accept, because a tram ride with her is an irresistible suggestion. I look forward to seeing some of the excellent schemes that Nottingham city has been delivering.

Question put and agreed to.

6.26 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 9 June 2010

[Mr Clive Betts *in the Chair*]

High Speed Rail

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*(Angela Watkinson.)*

9.30 am

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): May I welcome you to the Chair, Mr Betts, and express my pleasure at having secured an Adjournment debate on such an important matter? Colleagues who were here before the election will know that this is not the first time I have spoken about high speed rail in Westminster Hall—indeed, it is not the first time I have secured a debate on the subject. High speed rail is a matter of particular importance to my constituency and my city, as it is to many other parts of the UK, which is why I am a long-standing campaigner for it.

As the years have gone by, the case for high speed rail in the UK has become stronger. In the past five years, the number of passengers travelling on the rail lines has risen by about 40% and freight has risen by 60%. Given the urgent need to tackle climate change by encouraging travellers to shift from air and road transport to rail, the case for investment in high speed rail becomes even stronger. The case for high speed rail relates not only to the new lines that it would create, but to the capacity that it would free up on existing lines.

I was greatly encouraged by the previous Government's announcement in March of a new line from London to Birmingham as the first phase of a network that would lead to Manchester and Leeds, and thereafter to Glasgow and Edinburgh. Members will recall that that was based on a report by High Speed 2 Ltd, which the Government established a year earlier. It was envisaged that construction would start in 2017, following the completion of Crossrail, and that the network would be opened in phases from 2026. The estimated cost of taking the line as far as Manchester and Leeds was £30 billion.

We seem to have reached a considerable degree of political consensus on the development of high speed rail in Great Britain. That will obviously be necessary because of the long time scale over which any such network will be developed. It will take many decades to build a complete network, which will obviously involve many Governments and, no doubt, many political parties. I welcome the fact that, along with the commitment from my party, there now appears to be a general political consensus on the need to develop a high speed rail network in the UK.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate and commend him for his support for high speed rail. Will he acknowledge that, even in the present circumstances, he and his constituents can travel from Edinburgh to London in about four hours, whereas the shortest journey time from Aberdeen to London, only a further 110 miles, is seven and a half hours? Does he therefore agree that a high speed rail link must also ensure that there are fast links to connect to any high speed network that is developed?

Mark Lazarowicz: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I do not want to intrude on matters that are the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament, but one of the important aspects of the debate on high speed rail is the need for discussions and co-operation between the UK Government and the Scottish Government, to ensure that the network will benefit not only the cities that it serves directly, but places further along the line, even if those places are not part of the network from the start. I will return to that point later. In due course the network should extend to not only the UK's largest cities, but most major cities. I am sure that Aberdeen would qualify as such.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Edinburgh is terribly important, but so are the English regions. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a real risk, rumours of which the previous trains Minister did nothing to dispel, that money will be leached from regional and provincial rail networks to fund high speed rail? High speed rail should be welcomed, of course, but we must also remember the needs of many of our constituents who depend on lesser rail networks.

Mark Lazarowicz: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments. I certainly did not hear those rumours, but his colleague the Minister will no doubt reassure him that she will be able to combine her commitment to high speed rail with the interests of his constituents.

I welcomed the fact that the Conservatives declared in their manifesto that

> "a new government will begin work immediately to create a high speed rail line connecting London and Heathrow with Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. This is the first step towards achieving our vision of creating a national high speed rail network to join up major cities across England, Scotland and Wales. Stage two will deliver two new lines bringing the North East, Scotland and Wales into the high speed rail network."

That was an unqualified commitment to start work immediately, not just as soon as possible. I welcome the Minister to the debate and congratulate her on her appointment. I know of her commitment to high speed rail. Indeed, so unqualified was her manifesto's promise that I am almost surprised to see her here today, as she might have been out on the building sites with a hard hat and a bulldozer, starting work on the line immediately.

The Liberal Democrats were, somewhat out of character, a little more cautious about their spending commitments on this issue. Nevertheless, they vowed to set up

> "a UK Infrastructure Bank to invest in public transport like high speed rail."

In the coalition agreement, the two parties stated:

> "We will establish a high speed rail network as part of our programme of measures to fulfil our joint ambitions for creating a low carbon economy. Our vision is of a truly national high speed rail network for the whole of Britain."

However, the agreement then stated:

> "Given financial constraints, we will have to achieve this in phases."

[Mark Lazarowicz]

The prospect of work beginning on high speed rail is not so immediate now, it would appear. By the time of the Queen's Speech, we were promised a hybrid Bill in due course.

To be blunt, one of my purposes in securing this debate was to test the strength of the coalition Government's commitment to high speed rail. I have no doubts about the Minister's commitment, but we need to know whether the coalition agreement means what it says. Did the coalition parties mean what they said in their pre-election manifestos, or was it just pre-election bluster? Will they really push it with the determination and leadership needed, or will they find excuses to delay it until some long-distant date? If the Minister gives the type of commitment that she gave before the election, she will certainly have support across the House for the development of proposals to introduce such a scheme, although the details may of course lead to debate.

I therefore have several questions for the Minister, which I hope she will be able to answer today. There are quite a few, but there are none that she should be surprised to be asked, so I hope that she will have answers today or at least some time soon. When do the new Government envisage bringing forward the necessary legislation for High Speed 2? I am not suggesting that the Minister should give an exact date, but a hybrid Bill could take years to go through Parliament so we need some idea of how it will fit into the Government's programme. Does she agree with the previous Government's assessment, as set out in their document on High Speed 2, produced earlier this year, that

"formal public consultation on the Government's proposals for high speed rail in the light of HS2 Ltd's recommended route for such a line should begin in the autumn"?

Does the Minister agree that HS2 Ltd should now begin similar detailed planning work on the routes from Birmingham to Manchester and Leeds, to be completed by summer 2011 with a view to consulting the public early in 2012? What steps do the Government intend to take to establish a company or other mechanism to deliver the project? What is their target date, in broad terms, for work to start on a new line?

Are the Government still committed to a high speed network that will serve the whole UK, including Edinburgh and Glasgow? I certainly hope that they are. If they are committed to that, do they have any views on the route that such a line should take, and when do they envisage that the line will reach Edinburgh and Glasgow? It will be unacceptable if there is not a commitment from the start that the line will reach Scotland, because high speed rail will bring real economic benefits to the cities and regions along the route, and those cities that are either not directly linked or that have indirect links with the network would certainly lose out.

Mr John Leech (Manchester, Withington) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. He suggested the need for a commitment that the high speed network would run to Edinburgh, but I do not recall ever hearing that commitment from the previous Labour Administration before the general election.

Mark Lazarowicz: The previous Government made it clear from the outset that high speed train services would reach Edinburgh and Glasgow in due course. As the hon. Gentleman should know, I have been pushing for high speed rail for some time. I pushed the previous Government, and I intend to push this Government as hard as I pushed the previous one. If he wants high speed rail to go to places north of Manchester, I hope that he will put the same kind of pressure on his Government as I used to put on mine. I believe that we all want high speed rail to serve the nations and regions of the UK, so let us try to keep up the consensus and the pressure.

As I said, there are real economic benefits for all the communities and cities along the route of a high speed line. Research shows that cutting the journey time between Birmingham and London from 84 to 49 minutes would increase Birmingham's annual economic output by £1.4 billion, or about 6%. The economic benefits of high speed rail would be more than £10 billion a year for the north-west and about £19 billion for Scotland. In total, 64,000 additional jobs would be created as a consequence.

There is an overwhelming case for extending the line to Scotland, to increase the number of business and tourist passengers travelling not just to and from London, but from the north of England to Scotland. Prosperity would spread much more than if the line were restricted to the south and south-east of England, and the UK as a whole would benefit as a result.

Mike Crockart (Edinburgh West) (LD): I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this important subject. He will know that my predecessor John Barrett also worked tirelessly on this matter, and I intend to continue his support for it in this Parliament. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the greatest argument for extending the high speed rail line is an environmental one? For example, if we manage to drive London to Edinburgh journey times down to two hours 40 minutes, which is eminently possible, there would be a similar switch from air to rail, as happened when the Madrid to Barcelona line opened. That resulted in a 50% reduction in the number of flights between the two cities. If the same happened with Edinburgh and London, there would be 700,000 fewer air journeys between them.

Mark Lazarowicz: The hon. Gentleman is correct. Indeed, there has been increased use of the Manchester to London service as a result of the upgrade to the west coast main line, and we have seen the same with the London to Paris and Brussels services as well.

The point that the hon. Gentleman made about the benefits from reducing journey times particularly applies in respect of cities that are further away from London. The greatest journey time reductions will allow the greatest benefits in environmental and economic terms—and, indeed, in terms of convenience to passengers. That is why I hope that the Government will give a definite commitment to extend high speed rail to the north of England and to Scotland.

As the hon. Gentleman said, environmental benefits will be particularly important. Transport currently accounts for more than 20% of UK carbon emissions, so high speed rail has a role to play in that respect as well. Reducing journey times from London to Edinburgh to just over two hours could result in 80% of the current travel market between Scotland and London being captured by high speed rail. Even at three hours, with a partial high speed rail network, 67% of the travel between

Scotland and London could be captured by high speed rail, so there are certainly environmental and transport benefits as well as economic ones.

In that respect, I have two other questions that I hope the Minister will address today or at another time. First, what is the Government's view on whether the line should run to Heathrow or a connector station at Heathrow, or simply offer a connecting service, as the previous Government advocated? I am aware that there were criticisms of that decision, and I believe that she shared them. Certainly she made such criticisms before she was a Minister, so I would be interested to hear her current view on whether the line should serve Heathrow directly.

I would also like to hear the Minister's views on whether there should be a link from a new high speed line north of London to the existing line from London to the south-east, France, Belgium and beyond. If there were no link—I hope there will be one—passengers from Scotland and the north would be less likely to use the high speed rail line for journeys to the continent, and travellers from the continent would be less likely to use it to travel north. Clearly, if there were no direct link, there would be less use of those services as well.

I hope that today the Minister can give some indication of how the Government will take the plans forward, and to answer the questions in their entirety, or at least to a great extent. I would like to hear a reiteration of the commitments that were given before the general election. I hope that today we will not hear from the Government any excuses that, because of the financial situation they claim to have inherited—we had all those excuses yesterday in the debate on the Queen's Speech—they cannot make any further commitment to high speed rail at this stage.

I hope that we will not get that line later this morning. It would be unacceptable for several reasons. First, it should hardly surprise the Government parties that a high speed line would require major expense. If they did not realise that, they should not have made such sweeping promises in their manifestos. Secondly, the spending on high speed rail would, of course, be some time in the future. There will be many years of preparation involving planning, legal and parliamentary approval and so on. We are talking about commitments that will last for 10, 20 or 30 years, and I do not believe that anyone—not even those in the Government parties who make the most pessimistic forecasts—would suggest that the current economic circumstances will last for 10, 20 or 30 years.

Thirdly, the commitments, although large in their totality, are not actually as substantial as many other Government commitments. The cost of a line from London to Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds is estimated at £30 billion spread over 10 years. Compared with many other Government commitments, that is not as expensive as might be thought at first. And, of course, there are the wider economic benefits that I have already set out and the fact that the costs of high speed rail do not all have to come from public subsidy. Some of the public subsidy would be recouped from commercial income from passenger and goods traffic if the traffic projections and estimates are reflected in reality.

On the extension to Scotland, there are issues around the role in linking up services and the financial commitment from the Scottish Government as part of the devolution arrangements. I would be interested in hearing from the Minister about what discussions the coalition and her Department are having with the Scottish Government on how high speed rail could be funded in Scotland, and on how it would link up with existing rail services in Scotland.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes a powerful case, and I look forward to the Minister's reply. The economic, transport and environmental benefits of a working high speed system are well known, but the gap between transport investment in the south-east and London and that in the rest of the country has been growing. It is not just that there is a gap but that it has been growing. Does he think that there is a case for starting to invest in the system not in London but much farther north, and then building south, rather than building north from the south?

Mark Lazarowicz: My hon. Friend makes a good case and raises valid points. He is right to point out that there has been a concentration of transport investment in the south-east of England. The Scottish Government have a role to play in developing services beyond Edinburgh and Glasgow, but, bluntly, it would be wrong for Scotland to pay for the bit from the border northward because, after all, it is part of the same UK-wide service. The same would apply to Manchester and the regions of England as well.

In this debate, I have avoided getting too involved in the exact details of routes, apart from the important exception of Heathrow, and exactly when and where they will start, because the case for high speed rail as a whole is in danger of being undermined by discussion of some of the detail. However, I accept my hon. Friend's fundamental point: there is no reason why work should start from London and move northward, or why it cannot start from some other city at the same time. Clearly, phasing would allow benefits to be brought to other places en route, and I would be interested to hear the Minister's views on that in due course.

The method of securing funding for a new line also has a bearing on another important issue in this debate, which is the environmental case to which the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Mike Crockart) referred. By itself, high speed rail does not guarantee substantial carbon reductions. Certain arguments and research make that clear. Carbon reductions depend partly on the energy source providing the electricity, how the route is to be constructed and, to a great extent, on the degree to which there is a modal shift from air and road to rail as a result of high speed rail services being developed.

A modal shift can be encouraged by shifting expenditure from new roads to high speed rail, which I support, and by using transport taxation to encourage that shift and raise the funds for public investment in high speed rail. The Liberal Democrat wing of the coalition suggested in its election manifesto that it would raise an extra £9 billion a year from airline and passenger taxation, and if that is taken forward in the agreement between the coalition parties it could provide substantial funds for high speed rail. I am interested in hearing the Minister, or any Liberal Democrat colleagues, respond to that point.

I am sure that the Minister is not surprised that I have asked a lot of questions. I hope that she will respond as far as she can. I pay tribute to her commitment to high

[Mark Lazarowicz]

speed rail before the election. Like all Ministers, she will no doubt have battles to fight in her Department and beyond to keep high speed rail firmly at the top of the Government's agenda, and I am sure that she expects me and other colleagues to pursue these matters vigorously if she does not. I hope that she gives us good news today—reaffirms the Government's commitment to high speed rail and tells right hon. and hon. Members how she will bring it about.

9.51 am

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): It is good to see my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Transport, who will respond to the debate. I hope that she will forgive me, and that hon. and right hon. Members will do so too, if I am unable to stay for the winding-up speeches. I am standing for the chairmanship of an all-party group, the annual general meeting of which is being convened this morning at a time to suit colleagues in another place.

The comments made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Mark Lazarowicz) and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Mike Crockart) demonstrate and reinforce a point about high speed rail that Lord Adonis made to me before the general election, which was that everyone wants the stations but no one wants the track. We will all have to manage that in bringing about a commitment made by both Government parties in their manifestos at the general election and in the coalition agreement, which is in the Queen's Speech and is expected to be delivered.

I shall not repeat any of the sensible questions asked by the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith, which I am sure my right hon. Friend the Minister will be able to answer. I wish to ask three specific questions on various points.

First, may I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Minister that it would help if, at some point in the near future, she wrote a "Dear colleague" letter to every colleague in the House, setting out in straightforward terms the legislative process and the timetable that the Government intend to pursue, so that we can share them with our constituents? It is a pity that the previous Government brought the project forward just before the general election. We all understand why: the previous Prime Minister wanted to make what he thought was a decent press announcement—he went to Birmingham to make it—but that meant that the process got rather confused. It would help if hon. and right hon. Members were able to share the relevant information with our constituents.

Secondly, on speed, Eurostar goes at 300 kph—186 mph—and those of us who have been on it know that that is pretty fast. High Speed 2 is due to go at 400 kph, which is 250 mph and considerably faster than Eurostar. More straight track is needed for a very fast train, which means less opportunity for mitigation or variation of the route to accommodate settlements, towns or important topographical features. I hope that, at some stage, there will be an opportunity to have an informed debate about what are the cost-benefits of a very fast train as opposed to a fast train, and what is the real benefit of 250 mph over 186 mph, so that we can consider the options between them.

Thirdly, on community engagement, my right hon. Friend the Minister will not be surprised that my hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), Mr Speaker, whose constituency adjoins our constituencies, and I will be working together with our local communities, which are concerned about the possible impact of the route on them. The route runs close to the sizeable town of Brackley in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire. Will the Government consider complete alternatives to the routes in the consultation, to what extent are they willing to consider mitigation or variation of the existing route, how will they engage with the communities and how can that debate be informed?

It is important to put on the record what the Campaign to Protect Rural England has made clear:

> "We welcome the vision of HS2 as a low carbon backbone of a sustainable transport system. By removing fast trains from the overcrowded lines north of London, space will be created for local passenger and freight services too."

Even campaigning groups such as the CPRE recognise that there are considerable benefits to be had from HS2. However, such organisations have long experience in engaging with Government on issues of this kind. It would help if Ministers said how they intend to engage with our constituents and communities on the impact of the track on individual communities and constituencies.

I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport proposes to walk the route later in the summer, which seems sensible. Will my right hon. Friend the Minister give an undertaking that, when that happens, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will engage with colleagues so that we can ensure that, in respect of each constituency or groups of constituencies, there can be positive, constructive engagement between him and local communities on comments people have to make about mitigation or variation of the route?

I would like to emphasise a point made forcefully by the CPRE. It is evident that people are keen on the stations, because those will make linkage between parts of the United Kingdom much quicker and obviate the need for a third runway at Heathrow. There are all sorts of self-evident benefits. However, the benefits are not so self-evident for those who have the track going through their parishes or back gardens.

The benefit to people of a motorway going through their county or area is that it is part of the local infrastructure, and they can join and leave it. There will not be a station between London and Birmingham, so those living in that area will have limited direct benefit from HS2. However, there may be other ways in which communities can be compensated so that damage might be mitigated—for example, undergrounding existing electricity transmission lines on the HS2 route, creating new local rail services and reducing noise from existing roads.

The CPRE suggests:

> "Some of the spare capacity freed up on rail lines could be used to create new cross-country passenger services",

such as a High Wycombe-Aylesbury-Northampton route. It is important that when my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister of State engage with local communities on the route of HS2 across England they consider the benefits that the initiative and project may have for local communities, so that we see not just

clear mitigation, but a clear and immediate local benefit, rather than just a contribution to an initiative for the betterment of the country as a whole.

If we engage constructively and sensibly in dialogue during the coming months and if we all have a clear understanding of what we are trying to achieve, that will assist the Government and substantially reduce the risk of numerous judicial reviews. As my right hon. Friend knows, nothing is more frustrating when timing a Government project than various parties feeling frustrated by the process and that they need to go to judicial review.

I welcome my right hon. Friend to her post and hope that, following our questioning today, she will write to us all in the not-too-distant future with a clear explanation that we can share with our constituents, who are, understandably, worried about the process.

10.1 am

Sir Peter Soulsby (Leicester South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Mark Lazarowicz) on obtaining this timely debate on an undoubtedly important issue. Those of us who use the midland main line—I know that you do, Mr Betts—are well aware of the enormous success of High Speed 1, not least because when we arrive at St Pancras we must fight our way through the crowds disgorged from trains from Paris and Brussels.

The prospect of another high-speed line in the United Kingdom is exciting, and I join my hon. Friend in welcoming that prospect and the fact that the new Government have picked up the previous Government's commitment to construct such a line. However, as the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) said, it will have an environmental price, and he was right to remind us that there will be a trade-off between speed and the environmental damage that that might cause. I urge the Government to examine that trade-off carefully, and to consider whether there are prospects for using existing transport corridors to achieve the same results at a lower environmental cost.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith referred to the difference between this Government's proposals and those of the previous one for the service to Heathrow. There are serious doubts about whether it is sensible to use Heathrow as a terminus for the high-speed line instead of somewhere that is well served with a link to the high-speed line. It is unlikely that someone travelling from London to Birmingham or Manchester would want their journey to be diverted via Heathrow. That would not make much sense to them. The benefits of serving Heathrow may be achieved in another way by ensuring an adequate link to the airport instead of diverting the line.

I want to take this opportunity, when welcoming the Government's commitment to high-speed rail, to press them for an assurance that construction of such a line in phases at some time in the future—who knows when it will be constructed?—should not be at the expense of continuing investment in the existing classic or conventional network. Parts of that network are undoubtedly under desperate strain and people who travel on it—often those who commute daily—must stand for much of their journey. Much could be done to relieve their suffering with continued investment in rolling stock, on which the previous Government had made a commitment, and in longer platforms and a generally better service.

Graham Stringer: My hon. Friend is going to the nub of the debate on future investment in the rail service. Given the time required for the development of high-speed rail, I do not believe that it is a threat to regional services. Does he agree that the real choice before the Government and the country is whether to continue with Crossrail or with regional services, and that we simply cannot afford Crossrail at the moment?

Sir Peter Soulsby: Having served for some 18 months on the Select Committee that considered the Crossrail Bill, I have a personal commitment to its completion. My hon. Friend argued earlier that investment in rail has been skewed towards London and the south-east at the expense of other parts of the country, but that is not an argument for ditching what is an important part of the transport infrastructure in our capital city.

There is concern that high-speed rail may be seen as a panacea. It should not be built at the expense of the investment that the Association of Train Operating Companies argued for to open lines that are unused or used for goods, and the opportunities that would be generated thereby for reconnecting to the rail network communities that are currently unconnected. Above all, it should not be used as a pretext for not continuing the investment in electrification of the main line network.

Like you, Mr Betts, I am keen that electrification of the midland main line should be completed as soon as possible. It is already electrified as far as Bedford, and completion of electrification through to my city of Leicester and to Derby, Nottingham and your city of Sheffield, Mr Betts, will provide considerable positive cost benefits to rail users, and to the economies of the east midlands and your area of south Yorkshire, with a boost to the economy and general environment of those areas. I am worried that even if the second high-speed link is ultimately achieved and goes to somewhere in the east midlands, it will be of little benefit to those who are currently served by the midland main line if electrification of that line has not taken place and there is no link to St Pancras International and High Speed 1.

I doubt whether anyone would oppose investment in further high-speed rail in the UK. There are doubts about whether its fares will be affordable and attract a significant proportion of air passengers who would otherwise pass through Heathrow. My real concern is that it should not draw funding that would otherwise go to the conventional network. It must not lead to postponement of electrification of the existing mainline network, it must not leave rail commuters standing in unacceptable conditions on their daily commute to work, it must not leave unconnected communities that could be connected to the network, and it must not leave passengers and the environment with the prospect of old and smelly diesel traction for many years to come when relatively environmentally friendly electrification is a real possibility.

In brief, users of the existing network are unlikely to be impressed by half-promises of high-speed rail in phases, perhaps a decade and a half away, while they continue to struggle to use an existing network that is overstretched, overused and in desperate need of continued investment.

10.9 am

Lorely Burt (Solihull) (LD): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Mark Lazarowicz) on an informative speech, particularly about the benefits of high-speed rail. I shall look up some of his statistics in *Hansard* for my own use. My constituency is in the west midlands and includes Birmingham International airport and the national exhibition centre. I shall take account of the comments made this morning, but I shall confine my remarks to the first phase of High Speed 2, for which I am a strong advocate.

Passenger numbers have risen by 40%, and freight has increased by 60% over the last five years. Clearly, there is a big appetite in this country for high-speed rail and the benefits that it can bring, which were so ably outlined by the hon. Gentleman. We need a dedicated high-speed rail line that is independent of the creaking Victorian network, although that network has served us well in the past and continues to do so. I take on board the point made by the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) that any improvements or new rail services must not be made at the expense of the existing network. We must ensure that the service improves for those who currently use our creaking commuter network, which should not be neglected in favour of high-speed rail.

We have the prospect of being able to travel from Euston to Curzon Street in Birmingham in 49 minutes. According to my figures, the train speed is 225 mph, although the hon. Member for Banbury mentioned 250 mph; either way, it is fast. We hope there will be a Crossrail interchange at Old Oak Common and we support the idea that Crossrail must go ahead; it is hugely important. Funding for Crossrail and High Speed 2 can be imaginatively secured, with a large proportion of investment coming from private industry or from some form of national infrastructure bank, as recommended by the Liberal Democrats before the general election. I am sure that it can be done and that the benefits can be proved.

We expect this phase of HS2 to start in 2017, and to have passengers on the trains in 2026. That is a long time, and I have a lot of sympathy with the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer), who intervened earlier to ask where we should start. If we can get the funding, perhaps we should start at both ends of the line so that it does not take such a long time to complete the network. I am sure the Government will look at that.

It is not all good news. There are many planning considerations and much of the investment in the first phase of HS2 will go on existing railway lines such as the Chiltern line, which will track the A413. I have a particular concern for parts of the Warwickshire countryside in the west midlands. People must be consulted properly, which, for me, means that there is no foregone conclusion—otherwise, it is not a consultation. There must be proper compensation for anyone who suffers as a result of these plans. When a second runway at Birmingham International airport was proposed, a terrible blight was created which in some cases still hangs over residents in the local area. It is important to avoid that blight, as it puts people's lives on hold and creates more misery than is necessary. On the bright side, according to research by the Department for Transport, which I read this morning, every reduction of one minute to a commuter journey adds £1,000 to the value of a house in the relevant area. Somebody will benefit, although I am not sure who that will be in the west midlands.

The justification for HS2 must be that it is part of a wider strategy. Like the previous Government, this Government are committed to a strong carbon reduction programme. We must show that we will shift people away from the roads and the air and on to rail. The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith mentioned the Liberal Democrat plans, and part of the coalition agreement was that we will move from passenger charges on planes to a charge per plane. That will help in the reduction of carbon.

Mark Lazarowicz: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's kind comments about my opening speech. I am aware of the Liberal Democrat and Conservative policy of moving away from individual taxation. However, I think that the Liberal Democrat manifesto also suggested a potential increase in duty, which I welcome. Is that part of the coalition policy?

Lorely Burt: I am afraid that it is above my pay grade to comment further on that. The coalition Government will be working on this issue, and the Minister may wish to refer to it in her remarks.

Increasing people's ability to travel is a bit like Boyle's law—demand expands in relation to the existing capacity. We have seen that with the motorway network. Every time new roads are built or a motorway is enlarged, traffic increases more than would be expected under normal predictions. We must be careful about that. During the three weeks the Minister has spent in her job, I do not know whether she has given any thought to how we can make it easier for people to travel less. That must obviously be an aspiration.

I will conclude by considering some of the economic benefits that HS2 would bring to the west midlands. In terms of employment, we have probably been the hardest hit of any region. We have a strong manufacturing base, but that has also been hit hard by the recession. On behalf of people in the west midlands, I am looking forward hugely to the airport link. The extension of the single runway at Birmingham International airport will mean huge inward investment, and along with the high-speed rail link to London and the north, that will make the west midlands a central economic hub, which I welcome.

The national exhibition centre will benefit hugely from the fact that High Speed 2 will stop there before moving on to Curzon Street in Birmingham. It is important to get on with this scheme. I am sure that we can use our imagination and ability so as not to damage the existing rail network, which we must work on and improve. High Speed 2 is a wonderful thing, but it is not everything. We must look at the whole picture and ensure that the experience of the rail traveller—whether on High Speed 2 or on local railways—is a good one.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) is the last speaker who wishes to be called in the debate. Let me advise him that I intend to start with the contributions of the Front-Bench speakers at 10.30 am.

10.18 am

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Mark Lazarowicz) on securing this debate on the important subject of high speed rail. It is an issue that affects both his constituents and mine due to likelihood that under the current proposals, it will have no impact on them whatever. Historically, UK Governments have failed Wales on rail, and the refusal to provide a timetable for the development of a high speed rail link has put us on the backburner once again.

The last UK Government agreed to electrify the Great Western line to Swansea because of the hard work of the Transport Minister in the Welsh Government. When the previous UK Government announced the scheme, it was supposed to go only as far as Bristol, and only after the intervention of the Welsh Government did they agree to electrify the line as far as Swansea. I understand that the Conservatives have always been coy about sticking to that agreement. Will the new UK Government confirm that that electrification will take place?

Will the Government also confirm that the electrification will go further in Wales, as part of their commitment to support further electrification of the rail network? That would include, for example, the north Wales coast line, the valleys lines and the Severn tunnel diversionary line, as recommended by Railfuture Wales. In Europe, Wales is alongside Albania and Moldova in not having more than a mile of electrified rail track. What more proof do we need that the UK Government are leaving us behind?

More than just electrification of the railway lines, we need a concrete timetable for high speed rail in Wales. The proposal for a Wales high speed rail connection was first put forward by First Great Western in 2005, as part of the package of suggestions that it was making for improved rail services, linked to its bid for the new Great Western franchise. However, we are no closer to having such a connection now than we were then.

The former shadow Secretary of State for Transport, who is now the Minister of State, said only in March:

"Our plans to take high speed rail to the North will boost jobs and investment right across the country and bring particularly strong benefits to the regions. We believe it is essential that the North is not short changed and left out of high speed rail and the major regeneration opportunities it will generate."

Naturally, I agree with every word about the benefits that high speed rail will bring to those regions, but it cannot be right that Wales does not share in those benefits. At the moment, high speed rail is an England-only project that will be funded from UK money. That cannot be right.

A genuine High Speed 2 network needs to include Scotland and Wales and connect with the south-east of England and the continent, bringing us closer to major international markets and them closer to us, giving us major business opportunities and helping to tackle climate change by reducing short-haul air travel. Otherwise, the UK Government should just admit that high speed rail is really for England only and give us a Barnett consequential, so that we can get on with the job of developing our own network in Wales.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): The hon. Gentleman is painting a strong picture of how we need a countrywide network, including Wales and Scotland. Is he aware of the High Speed North proposal by the Harrogate-based engineer, Colin Elliff? That is a real vision for a nationwide network—something that the previous Government did not properly consider. I hope that the new Government will properly consider it.

Jonathan Edwards: I was not aware of those proposals, but I imagine that the UK Government should be examining them closely, because the key point is that if we are to go for a high speed rail network based on a UK Treasury spend, the benefits should apply to all the nations and regions of the state.

We would like a timetable and costings to be developed for a high speed rail link between south Wales and London, preferably as part of the current scheme but even as part of High Speed 3. Perhaps as a matter of good faith, the work on that could begin at the south Wales end. That would certainly be the far cheaper part of the development. Diolch yn fawr iawn.

10.22 am

Mr William Bain (Glasgow North East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Mark Lazarowicz) on securing this crucial debate on high speed rail. He spoke with real authority on behalf of many businesses and rail passengers in his constituency, and throughout the UK, who recognise the transformative effects that investment in high speed rail will bring: a stronger economy with the creation of new jobs in the construction and maintenance of the new high speed lines; a modern transport infrastructure to match those in the rest of Europe; improved business links between London and the other major cities in the UK; and increased tourism and environmental benefits, with many more journeys being made by rail than by short-haul aviation.

Let me also praise the contributions of the other hon. Members who participated in the debate, including my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Sir Peter Soulsby) and the hon. Members for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and for Solihull (Lorely Burt), who spoke eloquently about the need for consultation. There was a passionate contribution from the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) on the need for a UK perspective on high speed rail and its extension to Wales.

This is a project of genuine national importance, and our task in the coming years will be to work across this Chamber to ensure that High Speed 2 is completed on schedule. The aim of Opposition Members is to fulfil the vision in the Command Paper published this spring—to start with construction of the high speed line between Euston and Birmingham and then to extend it to Sheffield, Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith said, we see great advantages in expanding the high speed rail network to Edinburgh and Glasgow in due course, subject to consultations with the Scottish Government, as it would involve significant capital expenditure from that source.

In my first appearance as Opposition transport spokesman, I welcome the Minister of State to her position in the Department for Transport. I look forward to our discussions here and in the main Chamber over the coming months. They may be robust at times, but

[Mr William Bain]

they will never be intemperate. In opposition, she demonstrated a keen commitment to the principle of high speed rail and if that continues in government, she will have our support in the negotiations that she undertakes with the Treasury to secure the financing to make High Speed 2 a reality, on time and on target.

I have had an opportunity to consider "The Spending Review framework" published yesterday by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and I note that all Departments will be asked to assess and justify their spending priorities against nine criteria, which include the promotion of economic value. In the Opposition's view, even when those criteria are applied, HS2 is a project of national economic necessity, which must escape the Chancellor's programme for fiscal consolidation.

I place on the record our appreciation for the work done by former Ministers Paul Clark and Chris Mole, who, sadly from our perspective, were not returned to the House to represent the constituencies of Gillingham and Rainham and of Ipswich respectively. We wish them well for the future. The shadow Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), will hold the Government to account on their transport pledges in the coalition agreement and continue to advocate the causes that he advanced while in government.

I also pay tribute to my noble Friend Lord Adonis, who was one of the most visionary Secretaries of State for Transport that Britain has had in the past 60 years, with a powerful commitment to the role of a revived railway network in boosting economic growth, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and, through his strategic support for HS2, building the modern transport infrastructure that a decent, just society requires.

In the Command Paper published in March by the previous Government, we sought to avoid some of the problems in the consultation process for the first domestic high speed link, from central London to Ashford, by consulting on a single preferred route between Euston and Birmingham, rather than the choice of five routes in the first high speed rail consultation process. No route in a project of this significance will be without controversy, which is why there must be adequate consultation of the affected communities, together with consultation on the exceptional hardship scheme for those whose properties may be affected by proximity to the preferred route. We note that the Government have slightly extended the period for consultation on the hardship scheme until 17 June and have introduced a shadow scheme for immediate introduction. We would support both those measures.

There has been strong support from rail passengers, business and local government in the cities covered by the proposed new high speed rail network, because they recognise the real benefits that high speed rail will bring to their cities. For example, journey times from London to Birmingham will come down to 49 minutes, and those from Leeds to Canary Wharf will come down to 90 minutes. Even with regard to the first part of the network, my constituents in Glasgow would immediately benefit, with a reduction in the journey time from Glasgow to Euston to about 3 hours 30 minutes. That makes high speed rail genuinely competitive for business, passengers and tourists compared with short-haul flights from Scotland to London airports.

Some 10,000 jobs will be created in the construction of the high speed line, with a further 2,000 permanent jobs created in line maintenance and operation. There are great environmental benefits, given that high speed rail emits between eight and 11 times less carbon dioxide than air travel. There will be an increase in the freight capacity available by rail. There will be a boost to the west midlands economy to the tune of £5.3 billion a year, and to the north-west economy of £10.6 billion a year. If extension of the network to Scotland proceeds, there will be a benefit of nearly £20 billion to the economy there. As the work of HS2 Ltd made clear, every £1 spent on high speed rail yields £2 in economic benefit to the nation.

I would appreciate it if the Minister of State clarified several points. Will she confirm the Government's priorities and intentions on the route set out in the previous Government's Command Paper? Will Ministers commence the consultation on that route, which the previous Government planned to start in October? Are the Government committed to the Y-shaped network that HS2 Ltd proposed in the Command Paper or is that being abandoned for an alternative structure?

Will the Minister outline the time scale that the Government envisage for the commencement of the construction of the first part of the network? My party's plans were predicated on connectivity with Crossrail and Heathrow Express, with an interchange station at Old Oak Common and fast links to Heathrow airport, Canary Wharf and beyond. The proposed connectivity between Crossrail and HS2 meant that we wanted to complete the construction of Crossrail by 2015 and to commence the construction of the London to Birmingham high speed line in 2017. Do the Government agree about the need to link Crossrail with High Speed 2? Are their plans based on the completion of Crossrail in 2015?

In opposition, the Minister was committed to plans for a high speed rail hub at Heathrow airport. Are those the Government's plans now? Does the Minister propose to alter the terms of reference or the time scale of Lord Mawhinney's review into the practicality of a high speed rail station at Heathrow airport?

Can the Minister give a pledge that none of the cities that the previous Government proposed to link through the new high speed network will be left behind or left out? Specifically, does she agree in principle that we need a network that serves the major northern English cities? Does she plan to begin talks with the Scottish Government over possible network extension to Scotland in due course?

Has the Minister's Department begun work on preparing the hybrid Bill that would need to be presented to Parliament to make the new network a reality in this Parliament? Will she give a pledge today that the Government will commit to the long-term investment required to make the project a success?

The high speed rail project is of genuine national significance, and the Opposition will not play petty or partisan politics with it. I hope that we will be able to work across the House to secure a rail link worthy of a great country entering the 21st century.

10.32 am

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mrs Theresa Villiers): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Betts. I join others in congratulating the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Mark Lazarowicz) on securing a debate on this important topic. For many of the reasons that he so articulately set out in opening the debate, the issue is significant for the future of our transport system, our economy and our environment,

I can assure hon. Members that high speed rail plays a core role in the new Government's vision for the future of travel in the United Kingdom. I am therefore grateful for the strong support that has been displayed across the parties in the debate, and particularly by the new shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Bain). That support has been reflected in many speeches this morning, and I welcome the contributions from not only the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith, but from the hon. Member for Leicester South (Sir Peter Soulsby), my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and the hon. Members for Solihull (Lorely Burt) and for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards). I shall address a number of the issues that they raised. As well as supporting high speed rail, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury reflected on some of the issues for local communities that might be affected once a route is chosen. I will come to that later.

The Conservatives championed high speed rail in opposition. We transformed debate on the issue in October 2008, when we pledged to start the long process of building a national network. At the time, the Labour Government had dismissed high speed rail as an option, and their 30-year strategy for the railways contained no place for it. Nevertheless, I very much welcome the change of heart that occurred after our announcement and with the appointment of Lord Adonis. I echo the comments of the hon. Member for Glasgow North East in welcoming and paying tribute to the work that Lord Adonis did on the issue.

The change of heart from the previous Government signalled the emergence of a broader cross-party consensus on the principle that high speed rail is essential for Britain's transport system. The new Government's support for high speed rail was clearly and explicitly included in the coalition agreement. Our programme for government includes the creation of a high speed rail network. Our ambition is the creation of a genuinely national high speed network, although we recognise that that will have to be achieved in phases over a number of years. However, in answer to the questions about that national network, let me say that a genuinely national network of course embraces destinations in the east midlands, Scotland and Wales—the areas that have been specifically highlighted this morning.

Let me take this opportunity to emphasise that the Government's ambitions for high speed rail do not stop at Birmingham. Although the previous Administration had a change of heart on high speed rail, their focus was still just on detailed plans for a route to Birmingham. It is manifestly clear that we will not reap the full benefits of high speed rail unless we go much further than the west midlands, important though a link to the west midlands obviously is. We want to make progress as rapidly as possible towards the creation of a national network that connects to the rest of Europe via the channel tunnel.

In opposition, both coalition partners emphasised the importance of taking high speed rail to Scotland. It is clear in the devolution settlement that the Scottish Government are responsible for rail infrastructure north of the border. Delivering cross-border high speed rail services and a cross-border high speed rail line would therefore obviously require close co-operation and careful joint working between Holyrood and Westminster on a range of issues, including, of course, funding. That is why, in my role in opposition, I visited Scotland for constructive talks with John Swinney on how that co-operation might go forward. There are extensive and close contacts between the Department for Transport and its counterparts in Scotland. The Secretary of State also looks forward to working with his Scottish counterpart in developing a high speed rail strategy that incorporates Scotland.

Issues relating to the timetable were at the heart of the questions from the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith. The Secretary of State is considering the timetable set out by HS2 Ltd. He is also considering questions relating to the integration of Heathrow into the high speed rail network, which I will come to in due course. He will report to Parliament in due course on the timetable and on how things will be taken forward. However, the intention is to go forward with the consultation as promptly as possible, after that statement to Parliament.

The Government intend to present a hybrid Bill during this Parliament. We also intend to start enabling work by 2015. That is a somewhat more aggressive timetable than that set by the previous Government, but we are determined—the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith questioned me on this—to take the process forward promptly. Further work is already under way on lines beyond Birmingham. We will also continue to assess the appropriate delivery vehicles.

Mark Lazarowicz: I thank the Minister for her answers so far, but may I be clear about one point? She said that she envisaged work starting in 2015, but what kind of work does she mean? Such work would be welcome, but 2015 is quite soon, so perhaps she will elucidate.

Mrs Villiers: As I said, the intention is for enabling work to start in 2015. Given that there will be a detailed and expansive consultation process before decisions are made on a route, it would not be appropriate or realistic for me to say exactly what type of work we would intend to start by 2015 and in what locations.

Sir Peter Soulsby: The Minister has talked about a route going beyond Birmingham, and about Scotland. Do the Government remain committed to the Y-shaped link that was part of the previous Government's proposals?

Mrs Villiers: The previous Government talked about a line north of Birmingham, but had no clear commitment. It was the Conservatives who championed a national network that would bring the benefits of high speed rail to a wider range of areas than was envisaged in the core part of the previous Government's proposals.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned fares, and it is important that the high speed rail line should be affordable for ordinary families. The analysis done by the Conservative party in opposition and by HS2 Ltd under the previous

[Mrs Villiers]

Government makes it clear that the line will be affordable and deliverable with a contribution from future fares revenue, even with fares that are reasonable and broadly in line with existing levels on existing services. We can deliver the line without necessarily assuming that the fares will be unreasonable and out of the reach of ordinary families.

Sir Peter Soulsby: I thank the Minister for her response on fares, but she did not respond to my question about the Y-shaped link. I am interested in the link not north but east of Birmingham, serving the east midlands, south Yorkshire and, of course, the north-east.

Mrs Villiers: As I have made clear, our ambition is a national network, and we believe that it is vital to make progress promptly and to ensure that we achieve the benefits of high speed rail as widely as possible. We have also made it clear that merely going to Birmingham is not enough. We need to ensure that other parts of the country share in the benefits of high speed rail. We shall publish details of the timetable in due course.

Greg Mulholland: I welcome the Minister to her new job. She is aware that I have been heavily involved in the lobbying campaign for a direct high speed link to Yorkshire, working with you, Mr Betts, and with the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), in a cross-party campaign with the *Yorkshire Post*—its "Fast Track to Yorkshire" campaign. The Y shape is not the only way to create a direct link to Yorkshire and the important cities of Sheffield and Leeds, which are the economic hubs of their areas. The High Speed North proposal merits further consideration. May we be clear, and have a commitment that the Government will, when the relevant phase happens, create a direct link to Yorkshire—not a link via Manchester, which does not make sense?

Mrs Villiers: I have made it clear that the ambition is to create a national network, and it is of course vital that the north of England, Manchester and Yorkshire should be included in that network. In due course, decisions will be taken about the exact route to be selected. However, as I have emphasised, there is a long process to be undertaken before final decisions are made on the route for new high speed rail lines.

The case for high speed rail is undeniable. It has the potential to make a huge contribution to the long-term prosperity of the country and the efficiency of its transport system, and it can play a crucial role in achieving the goal of a lower-carbon economy. In the next 20 to 30 years, key inter-urban routes are likely to become increasingly congested, with negative consequences for our economy and quality of life. High speed rail could provide a massive uplift in capacity, as well as dramatically reduced journey times.

We have been discussing the areas to be served directly by high speed rail, but we must not lose sight of the fact that a high speed network also relieves pressure and overcrowding on existing railways. It allows more space for commuting and freight services, so it produces significant benefits for passengers and the economy even in areas that are not directly served by a line or station. It will create huge benefits in growth, regeneration and jobs, which will be felt far more widely than in the destinations directly served by new lines and services. I believe that it will provide valuable help in addressing long-standing prosperity differences between the south-east and the rest of the country, and thus create a more stable and balanced economy.

To return to some of the issues raised by the hon. Member for Leicester South, of course it is vital, in parallel with taking high speed rail forward, to continue a programme of work on upgrading and improving the existing rail network.

Sir Peter Soulsby: On that point, I would be very grateful if the Minister gave way again.

Mrs Villiers: I would rather make a little progress. I have been very generous in giving way, so I will proceed with my remarks for a moment.

We all acknowledge that there is a downside to the proposals—the impact on the environment of the localities through which new lines could go. As my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury explained, hon. Members have understandable concerns about the potential impact of high speed rail on their constituents. The Government of course recognise the gravity of those concerns. There will be a detailed and inclusive process before final decisions are made about our approach to high speed rail overall, and the route it should follow. I am happy to engage with colleagues and hon. Members during the process. It goes without saying that reducing and mitigating the local environmental impact of high speed rail will always be a high priority for the Government in advancing the project. It will inform our decisions on the selection of the route.

I am happy to take on board my hon. Friend's ideas on benefiting the communities that may be subject to the environmental impact of high speed rail lines. Ideas are already under discussion about the possibility of burying power lines, and the new Government's commitment to high speed rail has already brought about a benefit, because it has enabled us to say with confidence that we strongly oppose a third runway at Heathrow. The fact that it will not go ahead provides significant benefits for some communities that may be affected by high speed rail, because there will not be the massive uplift in aircraft noise to which many of them might have been subjected had the election gone a different way and if a Labour Government had been elected and proceeded with their plans. As to existing transport corridors, in assessing the route, the potential benefits of their use will be fully considered. However, that approach is not a panacea. It cannot provide the answer in all cases, but it is worth considering.

We made it plain before the election that we reserved our position on the route that HS2 has recommended. The process of formal consultation on the hybrid Bill will provide extensive opportunities for people to make their voice heard and have their point of view properly and fairly considered before a route is finalised. We also recognise that concerns in that respect are not confined to fears about the future. In some places, the impact is being felt today in the instability of local property markets.

A key goal for the new Government is to press ahead expeditiously, taking on board the continuing consultation, with the finalising of arrangements for an exceptional

hardship scheme, so that we can swiftly and equitably give assistance to those who most need it. The consultation is due to end in a week, and we shall look with great care at the respondents' suggestions in deciding how to proceed.

As part of the work that we are doing to reconsider and review the HS2 proposals on the route, we need to find the right option for connecting Heathrow to the new network. As we made clear in opposition, we believe that it is vital to integrate the country's only major long-haul hub airport to the high-speed rail network that we propose to build. Lord Mawhinney was asked by the previous Government to assess the alternatives. His review was established against the background of Labour's policy of supporting a third runway at Heathrow.

In answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for Glasgow North East, one of the first acts of the new Secretary of State was to agree with Lord Mawhinney an amendment to his remit, to reflect the approach of the coalition. The new Government strongly oppose a new runway at Heathrow, as the Prime Minister confirmed and reiterated in one of his first actions on taking office. Heathrow needs to be better, not bigger. A key part of our programme for improving it is to integrate the airport into the proposed new high speed rail network. That would improve public transport links to the airport, and help to relieve the problems with air quality and congestion in the area by encouraging people to switch from road to rail when travelling to Heathrow.

In response to questions on the subject, we are obviously carefully considering whether high speed rail could be integrated with Crossrail. As a number of colleagues said, integrating Heathrow should also facilitate a major shift from air to rail. Experience in Europe shows that high speed rail provides an attractive alternative to short-haul flights. For example, Air France has completely stopped flights between Paris and Brussels, choosing instead to charter carriages on the TGV rail link.

Maximising the scope for switching from air to rail is an important goal in environmental terms, as high speed trains emit significantly less carbon than aviation. Indeed, the gap between the train and the plane is likely to widen as we proceed with the vital task of cleaning up our electricity generation sources. A further benefit of the air-to-rail switch would be to free up space at Heathrow by providing an alternative to the thousands of short-haul flights going in and out of the airport. That is how we plan to relieve capacity pressure.

We believe also that it is essential to have a direct link between the new domestic line and existing international services on HS1, and we have asked HS2 Ltd urgently to assess the best way to deliver that. It would be a mistake to consider rail only in relation to domestic aviation when it is clearly a viable alternative for travelling to a number of important near European destinations such as Brussels, Paris, Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

In conclusion—

Sir Peter Soulsby: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Villiers: I am sorry, but I am going to conclude. There is a huge task ahead of us as we contemplate delivering an infrastructure project as big as any since the 19th century, when the Victorians revolutionised our economy and our society with the nation's first railway network. It is worth remembering that Britain's first, and so far only, 68 miles of high-speed track owed much to the unlikely combination of John Prescott and Michael Heseltine. As we press forward with realising this great ambition, I hope that we can continue to count on cross-party support.

Sir Peter Soulsby: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Villiers: I have given way on a number of occasions. I am now going to conclude.

Sir Peter Soulsby *rose—*

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): Order. The Minister is indicating that she will not give way.

Mrs Villiers: I have no doubt that there will be difficult times ahead, not least in relation to decisions about the route and how we mitigate and reduce its impact on surrounding communities and the landscape. However, I firmly believe that future generations will thank us for displaying determination and persistence in delivering this crucial upgrade to our transport system. We need to inject some of the long-term thinking that transport policy has so often lacked in the past. The new Government are determined to rise to that challenge and deliver the high speed vision for Britain's rail network—one that could have a transformative impact on our transport system, our economy and our quality of life.

10.53 am

Sitting suspended.

Transport (South Devon)

11 am

Mr Adrian Sanders (Torbay) (LD): There are many reasons why the people of south Devon, and of Torbay in particular, need better transport links. Coach, rail, sea, cycle and road vehicle transport all suffer from under-investment. Our main transport link with the motorway network is the A380, which is dualled between Telegraph Hill and the Penn Inn roundabout, and is then single lane between Newton Abbot and Torbay.

Torbay is the 40th largest urban conurbation in the country, and the only settlement of such a size with a single carriageway link road to the trunk road system. The resident population increases by 50% during the summer peak with the influx of holidaymakers. Many arrive in the area frustrated and angry as their inward journey is marred by congestion and delay between Newton Abbot and Torbay, and many leave early as a result. Torbay relies heavily on tourism for its livelihood and future prosperity. Its economy is one of the most difficult in the country, with the widest gulf between average earnings and house prices and some of the worst wards in the country in relation to indices of social deprivation. A recent shocking statistic is that 40% of Torbay's children are now brought up in households living below the official poverty line. Reviving Torbay's economy, therefore, needs to be at the centre of everything that the Government and the local authority do.

Research has shown that our biggest single drawback is our lack of connectivity, which is a serious disincentive to inward investment and a blight on regeneration. The south Devon link road, or Kingskerswell bypass, is vital to overcoming that problem. It will overcome many local problems of congestion, pollution and rat-running, thus creating a more sustainable quality of environment.

Torbay council and Devon county council have worked together to promote the scheme, and have so far committed some £6 million to achieve the necessary consents and funding. Both councils see the road as one of their highest priorities. The scheme is ready to proceed as soon as the funding is made available by the Department for Transport: there is a valid planning consent, the land acquisition and side-road orders have been served, and a public inquiry was held in October 2009 to hear objections. The inspectors' report should have been, or will shortly be, presented to the Minister for confirmation.

The two councils have put the project out to tender and agreed on one bidder who has met all the quality criteria and, importantly, is within budget. Subject to funding and confirmation of orders, we are ready to start in the autumn. The cost of the scheme is £130 million, and the first spend of £8 million is anticipated in 2010-11 in accordance with the regional funding allocation. The road remains a top priority in the region. The application for full funding approval has been submitted to the DFT, and discussions with officials indicate there are no technical shortcomings in the submission. Perhaps the Minister can confirm that.

The history of the project has been fraught with delays and can be traced back to the early 1950s—to well before I was born. I cannot imagine any area the size of Torbay that has had to wait as long for a proper link to the country's main road network. In 1951-52, a dualled carriageway was first included in the Devon country development plan. By 1959, a public inquiry had determined the actual line of the proposed road, but then Devon county council sought to change the proposed line and suggested an alternative route. In 1974, a revised three-lane dualled carriageway plan was suggested by the outgoing Devon county council. By 1976, having completed stage 1 of the Torbay ring road, the highways authority made a submission to the Department for Transport for the trunking of the A380 road in its entirety.

In 1976, at the end of another public consultation, Devon county council announced its preferred route. In 1981-82, the county council submitted its preferred route to the Department for Transport, with an application for 100% grant aid funding. In 1987, a public exhibition was held, following which an updated submission for grant aid was made together with a revised submission for the trunking of the A380 from Exeter through to Torquay.

In 1989, a Government White Paper entitled "Roads for Prosperity" included the trunking of the A380 between Exeter and Torquay together with the proposed £26 million scheme to dual a new two-lane carriageway. In 1990, a traffic survey on best value and an audit had to be carried out before the proposed scheme could go forward to draft order stage. In 1994, another national report, entitled "Trunk Roads in England Review", was issued by the Department for Transport. It still included a proposed Kingskerswell bypass as a priority scheme in the national list.

In 1995, the Government announced that they would not be able to keep their commitment to the trunk road programme, and in a report entitled "Managing the Trunk Road Programme" the A380 was dropped from the priority list and transferred to the longer-term programme for the trunking of roads. In 1996, the Government de-trunked the A380 and transferred responsibility to Devon county council. In 1997, Labour won the general election, all road building was put on hold and it was decreed that existing infrastructure had to be exhausted before a new road could be considered. Two years later, the no-roads policy statement was reversed with an announcement by the then Deputy Prime Minister.

There have been at least three significant historical changes determining the decision-making process and the financing of roads since then. There have also been a couple of self-inflicted delays resulting from local government reorganisation: in 2003, Torbay left Devon to become a unitary authority, and in 2005 Torbay voted to have an elected mayor. None the less, most of the delay has been well beyond our local control. The road should have been built by now and should be playing its part as our route out of recession. At worst, it should be under construction, with the prospect locally of better times ahead; but it is not and now we hear there may be yet another review. Will my hon. Friend the Minister tell me how many projects are being reviewed and what their total value is? How much will the Department want to cut from this total, and will priority be given to schemes that are more advanced?

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I should like to add my support to this scheme, because the road in question, the A380, passes through my constituency of Newton Abbot. Indeed, Kingskerswell bypass is in

my constituency. Having this road would significantly improve the lives of my constituents in economic terms. Moreover, it is a key road and a key artery between Torbay hospital and my constituency, and many of the plans the primary care trust has made are predicated on the existence of that bypass.

Mr Sanders: The hon. Lady makes a very powerful point on behalf of her constituents and those across south Devon.

Let me turn to other forms of transport that impact on south Devon's economy and quality of life. Three years ago, the last Labour Government promised an additional 1,300 carriages across the country, of which 647 have already been brought in or are on order. The remainder have now been put on ice, after the Department for Transport was told to slash £683 million from its budget as part of a raft of in-year savings totalling £6.2 billion. Of the 1,300 carriages, First Great Western was due to receive 52, but only 12 of those were destined for services in the south-west. Their future was threatened when the Transport Secretary said that each project must be rigorously re-assessed to ensure that it offers value for money for taxpayers. Under the previous Government, the plans for new carriages had been delayed and mired in review following the announcement of the electrification of the main line between London and Swansea. There is uncertainty over the allocation of new rolling stock. What is the status of the carriages promised to First Great Western in the south-west, and where should representations be made to argue the case in favour of providing extra rolling stock? What is the Government's overall strategy for railways in the south-west, and do they still consider Torquay and Paignton to be mainline train stations?

Finally on rail, the introduction of fast train services from Paddington to Paignton via Westbury rather than Bristol is good, but will more services be forthcoming?

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and I am grateful to him for giving way, because in fact there are three constituencies that would benefit very greatly from this proposal. My own constituency, which covers Brixham and much of Paignton, lies downstream from his, at the other end of the A380, and as he has mentioned we have very high levels of deprivation in our constituencies.

I would also like my hon. Friend the Minister to consider the great problem that we have with housing. Time and again, the objection made to further housing development in our area is that there is insufficient infrastructure to support it. The roads have reached complete gridlock. Given that lack of adequate transport is one of the greatest obstacles to reconstruction and investment, what mechanism is being used to assess which projects should receive funding, and are these very important factors of reconstruction and investment being taken into account?

Mr Sanders: I thank the hon. Lady for her contribution, and I am sure the Minister will respond to that very important question. She is absolutely right. I often think of my constituency as being the "end-of-the-line" town, but the Brixham area of her constituency, which I think is the largest urban area in Totnes, is very much the end of the line and does not even have a railway line. Road transport is therefore particularly important in getting from Brixham, Paignton and Torquay to the rest of the country.

I should also mention the poor coach services from Torbay to the main centres of population. The journey times are off-putting and often, the slowest part of any coach journey is the first or last seven miles between Torbay and the dual carriageway at Newton Abbot. In the past, we have enjoyed ferry services between south Devon and the Channel Islands, and beyond. Even our cyclists in Torbay are poorly served, its having fewer miles of cycle lanes than most urban areas of a similar size.

We have been waiting for six decades to enjoy the transport links that the rest of the country takes for granted. My constituency records the lowest household incomes and highest household debt in the United Kingdom. We have been, and remain, the unemployment blackspot of the south-west region.

Better transport links are our road to recovery. Two Select Committee reports—the Communities and Local Government Committee report on seaside resorts, and the Culture, Media and Sport Committee report on tourism—support that view. Both concluded that better transport links are essential if such seaside areas are to improve their economic well-being. As for those who oppose such road improvements, I simply ask them why there are no campaign groups asking for the removal of existing bypasses.

There is a huge opportunity here for the new Government to demonstrate their commitment to the south-west region with immediate delivery of a fantastic scheme that would be a huge credit to all involved, and would fundamentally regenerate Torbay and the surrounding area for years to come. There is political unity on this issue among all parties in south Devon: Torbay council, Devon county council, Teignbridge council, and South Hams district council. All the key players, including small and larger businesses, know that this project is critical to our future success, be it the tourism industry, manufacturing or services.

In my 13 years as a Member of Parliament, I have observed business after business trying to grow locally, but in order to expand they have had to leave the area, citing the lack of transport links as the reason. Inward investors who are prepared to invest in jobs and in improving the area are being put off by the very real barrier that is the final seven miles into my constituency.

It was in 1951-52 that people started to talk about this project, for which there were plans by the end of that decade. Surely we will not have to wait another decade for another decision that will allow the project to go ahead.

11.13 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Norman Baker): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr Sanders) on securing a debate on the important topic of transport in the south Devon area. I am aware that he has campaigned tirelessly for transport improvements in Torbay and the surrounding area since his election to Parliament in 1997. If I may make a partisan point, it is good to see him back in the House.

[Norman Baker]

I also very much welcome the hon. Members for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) and for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) to their places in this House. I note that all three Members spoke with one voice today, which I suppose is a demonstration of coalition politics in action.

As the coalition agreement makes clear, we believe that a modern transport infrastructure is important for a dynamic and entrepreneurial economy. We are determined to make the transport sector greener and more sustainable, with tougher emissions standards and support for new transport technologies. The coalition agreement also makes clear that tackling climate change is one of the biggest challenges that we face and that a wide range of levers will need to be used to cut carbon emissions. Transport policy will clearly have a major role to play, given that carbon emissions from transport are still rising.

With that in mind, the Department for Transport is committed to reforming how decisions are made on which transport schemes to prioritise around the country, not least so that the benefits of low-carbon proposals are fully recognised. Of course, particularly given the current fiscal constraints, we need to ensure that any new transport infrastructure is affordable and offers value for money. Those two issues—the reform of how decisions are made and the review of all planned Government expenditure—mean that today I will not be able to be as helpful to my hon. Friend as I would like to be.

I turn specifically to the issues affecting south Devon. As my hon. Friend will know, the area is currently served by two main roads running south-west from Exeter: the A38, for which the Highways Agency is mainly responsible, and the A380, which is the responsibility of Devon county council. The area is also served by the railway line that he referred to, which runs between Exeter, Newton Abbot and Paignton, and between Newton Abbot and Plymouth. Both the lines to Paignton and Plymouth have daily services running to London, Bristol, the midlands and the north, as well as local services to Exeter and beyond, which also stop at a number of other smaller stations.

My hon. Friend asked me about the status of Torquay and Paignton rail stations. The Department for Transport does not classify stations as "mainline" or otherwise. However, Network Rail classes both Torquay and Paignton as category C stations—that is, they are important feeder stations—and further definition is included in the station champions' "Better Rail Stations" report.

I know that my hon. Friend has been very active in campaigning for more through trains between Torbay and London Paddington, and I am delighted to confirm that, from December 2010, one additional through service each way will be provided on that route. The current service provides for a 7.30 am train to arrive at Exeter at 10.12 am. The new service will provide an earlier fast train service to Exeter and Torbay, with arrival at Exeter at 9.30 am and at Paignton at 10.6 am. The aim of this new early train service is to strengthen business links between the west country and London. It will also help to boost tourism, which I know is an issue that my hon. Friend takes very seriously indeed.

Anne Marie Morris: Although speed is clearly crucial for my constituents, through whose area this railway passes as it runs down the coast, we absolutely need this railway for tourism. There has been a lot of concern in the constituency that the money to support the line, which I know is one of the most expensive lines in the country to maintain, will not be forthcoming. I would be grateful if the Minister considered the issue of tourism, and therefore the impact on the local economy, when he makes decisions about money being invested in that particular railway line.

Norman Baker: I should say that decisions on rail investment are not for me to make in my particular portfolio. However, I can say that the Government are entirely seized of the importance of tourism to the south-west and that that factor will be taken into account in making any decisions about transport infrastructure and any other issues relating to Government investment.

The new train service that I referred to will allow business passengers to travel from London and do a full day's business in Torbay, as well as cater for people on holiday who prefer not to change trains, which was the point that the hon. Member for Newton Abbot made.

Rolling stock was also raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay. As far as that is concerned, the Department for Transport has recently signed a deed of amendment with First Great Western. That ensures that there will be ongoing funding for 30 vehicles that would otherwise cease to be funded by First Great Western itself. I hope that he will accept that that is good news for the rolling stock for the area.

The Government want to see rail prosper and we certainly value the rail links to the south-west. We do not have individual strategies for each part of the country, but the strategy for the network as a whole is set out in the Department for Transport's high level output specification document. It is focused on improvements in safety and performance, and, crucially, on providing more capacity.

We made it clear in the coalition agreement that we will grant longer rail franchises, giving train operators more incentive to invest in better services, rolling stock, stations and perhaps even enhancements to the network. We want a better deal for passengers, with fair pricing for rail travel and the rail regulator as a powerful passenger champion. We also want to see Network Rail being made more accountable to its customers, both the train companies and—frankly—ultimately the public at large.

Given the upcoming spending review, we are unable to commit today to any further immediate improvements to rail services elsewhere in the south Devon area. However, we will monitor the current usage of rail services and re-evaluate them in the light of the emerging financial situation.

My hon. Friend is also concerned about the road network. I acknowledge the importance that he and others attach to the A380 Kingskerswell bypass scheme, also known as the south Devon link road, and his strong view that it is key to supporting the regeneration of Torbay and the surrounding area. I also note the scheme's long history; it goes back to 1951, which is, I think, before either of us was born.

The scheme's promoters—Devon and Torbay county councils, with the support of the other councils to which hon. Members have referred—have made the case for the bypass to the Department. As my hon. Friend acknowledged, progress is well advanced. The view expressed is that the A380 is an important link to south Devon and that the congestion between Penn Inn and Kerswell Gardens affects the business and commercial needs of Torbay throughout the year, as well as the tourist trade in summer.

I understand that the promoters have developed the scheme in recent years on the strength of the priority given to it by the previous Government within their regional funding allocation process. However, any new Government will naturally have their own views on which major schemes should be supported by Government funding, and I am afraid that we will need to consider the scheme in the light of the tough spending review to come. After the public inquiry in July 2009, as my hon. Friend knows, an inspector's report on the scheme orders was submitted to the Secretary of State for a decision. Given the current uncertainty about funding, we must consider such decisions carefully and will be making a statement on the subject shortly.

It should also be acknowledged that considerable opposition exists alongside the local and regional support for the scheme, as my hon. Friend acknowledged. I am sure that he is aware that several well-organised campaign groups have expressed opposition, including the Campaign for Better Transport, the Campaign to Protect Rural England and the Kingskerswell Alliance, which is made up of residents of Newton Abbot and Kingskerswell. Those groups believe that Devon and Torbay should be considering more sustainable alternatives that have less impact on the environment.

Mr Sanders: Can my hon. Friend mention one road-building scheme that has had no objections at all?

Norman Baker: I am not aware of any, but it is only fair in a debate of this nature to reflect the comments both for and against the scheme received by the Department, as I hope I am doing. There are strong views on the scheme, and it is important to listen to both sides of the argument, as I am sure my hon. Friend, as a fair man, would acknowledge.

In addition to those issues, we must also consider the wider funding position and what it means for the affordability of a £130 million road scheme. As we are all aware, the current fiscal situation means that we must consider carefully future funding decisions on all transport schemes across England and Wales.

My hon. Friend asked what mechanism is being used to assess which projects should receive funding. As I mentioned, the Government have committed in the coalition agreement to review how decisions are made on which transport projects will be prioritised. We are at the start of that process. Until that is complete and the spending review is concluded, we will not be making any funding approval decisions. I made that point clear in a recent letter to Nick Bye, mayor of Torbay, who wrote to me about the Kingskerswell bypass.

The hon. Member for Totnes asked how many projects are being reviewed and what their total value is. The Government are reviewing all funding approvals made by the previous Government from 1 January 2010, and we hope to conclude that review soon. Additionally, all schemes granted conditional approval or programme entry by the previous Government will be reviewed as part of the spending review. There are 42 such schemes, and the total requested Department for Transport contribution is about £1.5 billion. However, those schemes will not necessarily be given priority over schemes that have not received any previous funding approval. Pending further discussions with our Treasury colleagues, we are not in a position to say how much the Department will want to cut from the total. That is what the spending review is for. However, no one should assume that schemes prioritised under the previous Government's regional funding allocation process will be funded to the previous published levels.

Finally, in response to my hon. Friend's question about prioritising schemes that are more advanced, as is this particular road scheme, I am afraid that, for the reasons that I have given, the Department can offer no guarantees. However, I can confirm that priority will be given to projects that align with the Government's priorities and are affordable.

I understand fully my hon. Friend's desire for a positive decision on the funding for the Kingskerswell bypass, not least because of how much time has passed since 1951. However, the sad fact is that many other local authorities around the country are in a similar position, wondering what the future holds for their planned transport schemes. I hope that he will acknowledge that the Government need to consider all funding commitments carefully.

As with all other major local transport schemes, the Department can offer no particular assurances at this point regarding future funding, but I give my hon. Friend my personal assurance that, as part of our wider spending review, I will consider carefully the case for the funding of the Kingskerswell bypass and take into account the comments made today by him and hon. Members from nearby constituencies.

11.24 am

Sitting suspended.

Child Poverty

4 pm

Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): Despite the current economic uncertainty, Britain remains one of the wealthiest nations on earth. It is therefore to the lasting shame of successive Governments that our country has one of the worst levels of child poverty in the developed world and one of the worst in Europe, with poverty rates worse even than those of the former communist countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—a point I have already made in an intervention on the Prime Minister.

According to the charity Barnardo's, in the UK there are 2.8 million children living in poverty before housing costs are taken into account, which I gather is the previous Government's preferred measure. However, Barnardo's tells me that that figure soars to 3.9 million after housing costs are taken into account, according to the 2007-08 "Households Below Average Income" report, published last year by the Department for Work and Pensions. I was shocked by the following disturbing extract from the "Hard Times" report published by Save the Children in 2006:

"One third of British children are forced to go without at least one of the things they need, such as three meals a day or adequate clothing."

What should the new Government do now? Well, here is one thought that Barnardo's has put to me:

"The poorest families in the UK are struggling during the recent economic crisis and are very likely to bear the brunt of forthcoming spending cuts. Barnardo's proposes pragmatic, cost-effective solutions to redistribute money to the poorest families without the Government spending a single penny extra."

Save the Children told me:

"It makes financial sense to end child poverty—the Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates it costs the taxpayer £25 billion a year."

Putting to one side the obvious reasons why a civilised society should not tolerate child poverty, Save the Children then makes the financial case for ending it:

"In the long-term, huge amounts would be saved from not having to pick up the pieces of child poverty and associated social ills."

I therefore invite the Minister to have a meeting with Save the Children, Barnardo's and the other charities that do so much work to help children, to discuss what needs to be done. Working together, as a big coalition of people with shared interests, makes sense. It would make further sense if there were a permanent standing committee, for example, involving Government and those organisations, to help with formulating policies and strategies, in the spirit of joined-up government across all Departments. I also seek a pledge from the Minister this afternoon that there will be no delay and no dilution of the provisions set out in the Child Poverty Act 2010, including measures on the poverty reduction target and setting up the child poverty commission, which are a matter of urgency.

Child poverty issues are usually even worse for households with one or more children with a disability, and for single-parent families. Today, I shall combine strong criticism primarily of the last Labour Government with a reminder to the Conservative party that the situation has not arisen in the past 13 years but was inherited from when it was last in office. Successive Governments should hang their heads in shame. Generations of young people have been let down.

My message to the new coalition Government is this: quite simply, we must do better. Abolition of child poverty in the lifetime of the present Government must be the target. Whatever the economic issues facing the country, it simply cannot be right in a civilised society to have children living in conditions that are deemed to be below the official poverty line.

I recognise that this is all relative. What is described as poverty in the UK is not the poverty that can be found in third-world countries or in the slums of some overseas cities, where obscene wealth and grinding poverty are physically close to each other but worlds apart in terms of quality of life and life expectancy.

That said, I was deeply shocked by a poster I saw in a church in Colchester last month. It prompted me to table early-day motion 39, which states:

"That this House is deeply concerned at the content of posters issued by The Children's Society and displayed on church premises which state 'A vital project that is helping feed, clothe and assist in finding destitute children somewhere safe to live will close on 30th September due to a lack of funds; when it does, hundreds of poverty-stricken families will be left to fend for themselves'; and calls on the Government to hold urgent talks with The Children's Society to avoid the closure."

And this is Britain in the second decade of the third millennium.

Much was expected of new Labour in tackling child poverty. I do not doubt for a minute that it had sincere intentions, but the stark reality is that it failed, and failed big-time. I cannot speak of child poverty at first hand. I grew up in a family environment in which I did not want for food, clothing or housing. My wife and I were able to provide for our four children. I am now a grandfather and grateful that my two grandsons and my infant granddaughter do not experience the child poverty that so many children experience. However, I have been involved in political life in my home town for 40 years or so, and have experience of working on a local newspaper, and as every MP can vouch through work in his or her advice bureau, we know child poverty when we see it.

As word spread that I had secured the debate, I received considerable background briefing from different organisations concerned with tackling child poverty. That so many exist is proof of the seriousness of the situation. I cannot possibly in 15 minutes do justice to what they told me, but I hope I will be able to convey the importance of their concerns. I place on the record my thanks to those that have contacted me: Barnardo's, Save the Children, the Children's Society, the National Childminding Association and the Child Poverty Action Group.

The Children's Society told me about the good childhood inquiry, the report of which was published last year. I shall quote one telling comment from its briefing to me:

"One of the most striking things about the evidence received from children was how frequently they mentioned their basic needs. Over 5,000 children filled in postcards about their lives and the three topics they talked most about were 'friends', 'family' and what was termed their 'material needs'.

Their comments on this subject were mostly about the importance of having a home, a bed, clothes, warmth, food and water. Interestingly, far more children talked about material 'needs' such as these than mentioned material 'wants' such as money and possessions."

I look at life as though it is a jigsaw—lots of pieces need to come together to complete the picture. It is not enough to talk in isolation about education, health, employment and so on. We must look at the whole picture, and if any of the pieces are missing, which tragically is the case for children living in poverty, that young individual will struggle throughout their life, with the guarantee that their life chances will be considerably less than those for a child from a household that is not lacking in the necessities of life; and they will have a shorter life expectancy as well. Why should nearly 4 million children be so grossly disadvantaged? It is not their fault.

As we know with a jigsaw, the first pieces that need to be put in place are the corners and the edges. For our children, the corners and the edges of their jigsaw of life are a decent home. Successive Governments have also failed to deliver that over the past 25 years, with the ending of the building of council houses for families. Oh for the return of the days when local councils built family houses—houses fit for purpose, built to Parker Morris standards—not today's cramped dwellings with paper-thin dividing walls, which in any event are inadequate in number to deal with the worsening housing crisis. If we addressed the shortage of truly affordable family houses to rent by the resumption of the building of public housing, as was the ambition of successive Labour and Tory Governments for broadly the middle 50 years of the 20th century, excluding the war years of 1939 to 1945, that would help us dramatically on the road to the abolition of child poverty.

It is interesting that post-war Conservative Governments built more council houses than Labour Governments. Indeed, the Thatcher Government built more council houses than the Blair and Brown Governments combined. I contrast the last 13 years with the inspirational Labour Government of Clement Attlee, who in 1945 set about tackling the housing crisis after six years of war. If it can be done in those circumstances, why can it not be done today? After all, if new Labour could fund an illegal war in Iraq, then housing British families should have been affordable.

As a nation, we would do well to revisit the Education Act 1944. It was not about education only; it put forward an holistic approach to the health, welfare and general well-being of the child, of which the universal provision of school meals was an important part; its authors were determined that the child poverty of the 1930s should be a thing of the past. It is perhaps an indication of Britain's divided society—the gap between rich and poor has widened since 1997—that even in a relatively prosperous town such as Colchester at least two primary schools have breakfast clubs, so that children who would otherwise start the day without a meal have one.

I hope that my debate will encourage the new coalition Government not to let their planned cuts in public spending further damage the life chances of another generation of children. Even in a recession and an era of cuts, expecting children from less well-off backgrounds to experience a further lowering in their living conditions is simply not acceptable.

I observe in passing what I consider to be the silence of the Church on child poverty. I sense that churches collectively, with notable exceptions, are too comfortable, and that the missionary zeal for tackling inequalities in society—and not only child poverty—is something they do not want to get involved in.

As a penultimate point, I pay tribute to the late Professor Peter Townsend, the joint founder of the Child Poverty Action Group, whose work over more than 40 years did so much to highlight the plight of children in this country. I knew him when he was at the university of Essex; from its inception in 1964, he was one of its first professors. Indeed, for a time he lived in the same part of Colchester as me. A tribute to him was published in June last year by the university of Bristol, where his name lives on in the Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research. That tribute included this observation:

"He had brief hopes when New Labour arrived, and especially after Tony Blair pledged to eliminate child poverty in 1999. In the end, however, he was left bitterly disillusioned".

In conclusion, I trust that all Members will accept an open invitation from the Child Poverty Action Group to attend the launch of the group's handbook on Tuesday 6 July at 10.30 am in the Jubilee Room. MPs will have an opportunity to discuss with folk from CPAG how to help end child poverty in every constituency in the land. Surely, ending child poverty is not asking too much of the new Government.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate and on making so many valid points about the poverty of children. Does he agree that the Government's commitment to providing an additional 4,000 health visitors through the Sure Start scheme would be a significant step in the right direction?

Bob Russell: I welcome anything that will help eliminate child poverty and promote the welfare of children. I also welcome the inclusion in the coalition Government agreement of the pupil premium, which will help children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

4.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Miller): May I say what a pleasure it is, Mr Betts, to serve under your chairmanship? This is the first of two debates this week on child poverty and poverty in general. In securing this debate, the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) continues with a subject that has been of interest to him for a number of years, and I thank him for giving us the opportunity to discuss this important matter today.

The hon. Gentleman is right that we must do better. Poverty is the most important factor in predicting a child's life chances. Effectively tackling the causes of poverty and inequality in Britain is at the heart of our coalition Government's agenda, and I welcome the opportunity to reiterate to him and the other Members here today our clear commitment to helping the millions of children who still live in poverty. I give the clear and I hope unambiguous assurance that there will be no delay and no dilution in our commitment, and I refer him to section 14 of the document issued by the coalition that pledged to end child poverty by 2020.

I know that this is an emotive subject. The hon. Gentleman raised a number of questions and I shall attempt to cover them in my response; however, if there

[Maria Miller]

is anything that he feels has not been dealt with properly, perhaps we can discuss it separately.

Over the past 13 years, we have seen ever more being spent on the benefits system, even outstripping inflation, in an attempt to move people above the poverty threshold. The Labour Government were nothing other than well intentioned; there is no question about what they were trying to achieve, but their policies simply did not work and did not deliver what was needed to deal with child poverty. As the hon. Gentleman said, many people felt disillusioned as a result.

The figures speak for themselves. The previous Government's approach did not work because they did not do what the hon. Gentleman has suggested, which is tackling the root causes of poverty. The gap between the richest and the poorest is at its highest since records began. At best, the previous Government's attempts to tackle poverty stalled, despite their spending some £85 billion a year on benefits and tax credits.

The simple truth is that there are 800,000 more adults in poverty now than there were in 1998-99. Instead of the number of children in poverty having been reduced, it has increased by 100,000 over the past five years, and 2.8 million children are now living in poverty. The hon. Gentleman also spoke about the definition of poverty and asked whether it should include housing costs. The Prime Minister has asked the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) to consider that matter in his independent review, which will report before the end of the year.

It is clear that the old way is failing. We need a new vision, a new approach to tackling poverty and giving children a better start in life. I am sure that that was one of the hon. Gentleman's main passions when he first came to this place, as it was one of mine. That new approach is what I intend to set out today.

It is not enough to tackle the symptoms of poverty; we must tackle the underlying factors that make it a seemingly intractable problem. They include entrenched worklessness and economic dependency, family breakdown, educational failure, addiction and debt. Those are the drivers of poverty—finance is only one aspect. If we are to deal with the persistent poverty and multiple disadvantages of some of the UK's most vulnerable families, we need to fight poverty in its broadest sense, and I suspect, judging by the feeling that I got from the hon. Gentleman's contribution, that such a view lies behind his call for this debate.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the importance of joined-up government, and I could not agree with him more. If we are to take on this complex and multi-faceted problem, we need to ensure that we tackle all the different facets of poverty so that we break the cycle of disadvantage and deprivation and give all children the same opportunity to flourish and excel.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) mentioned Sure Start. We have clear coalition policies on taking Sure Start back to its roots to increase the effectiveness of its outreach services, and to uphold our commitment to early intervention. We know that Sure Start has a critical role to play, and we want to make it work harder.

We want to ensure that more children have the advantages of a good education, which is critical to improving stalled social mobility, and that is where the pupil premium comes into play. By making some £3,000 available to each pupil who falls into that sector, we will be making a significant financial contribution to schools. We will also give schools the autonomy to use that money in the way they think is best. We will end the couple penalty in the tax system that jeopardises the future of too many children, because we know that stable family life is an important way of addressing child poverty.

We will also introduce wide-ranging welfare reform, as was set out in the Gracious Speech, through the work programme, which will be more effective in helping people into work and so out of poverty. At all points, we will ensure that work pays. All parts of the House now accept that helping people back into work is a basic principle of tackling poverty.

The hon. Member for Colchester talked about the importance of a holistic approach, and I could not agree with him more. We are on the samé page of the book in that respect. Clearly, such a programme to address child poverty needs to work across the board, which is why the Prime Minister, working in conjunction with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, has announced the establishment of the Social Justice Cabinet Committee. Such a group gives us the opportunity to bring together people from across government to tackle these seemingly intractable problems. Its one mission will be to consider social justice in this country.

Bob Russell: The Minister may not know the answer to this question immediately, but if so, perhaps she can find it out for me. Will the organisations directly involved in tackling child poverty be part of the arrangement she has just described?

Maria Miller: The organisations the hon. Gentleman mentioned will have a critical role to play in pulling together the strategy on child poverty that we need to develop by March 2011. With regard to the constitution of the Social Justice Cabinet Committee, it is early days yet. Certainly, I will take the hon. Gentleman's thoughts back to our team and put forward his suggestion, because it has great merit.

The Social Justice Cabinet Committee will consider the causes of poverty and how we can make a difference to the lives of thousands of children. The hon. Gentleman mentioned housing—an issue in which he has a passionate interest—and particularly the role of councils in ensuring that good-quality housing is available for families, thus giving children the stability and good accommodation that can make such a difference to their lives. A Cabinet Committee such as the one that will be constituted can tackle an issue such as that, as part of a holistic strategy for dealing with child poverty. I hope the hon. Gentleman is reassured that we share his view that that is the only way to make a real difference.

Let me turn to how we plan to go forward in practical terms. Like the hon. Gentleman, I have sat in this Chamber many times, hearing Ministers talk in abstract terms about what they may or may not do, so I should like to tell him about some concrete things that we will be doing. We will set up the Social Justice Cabinet Committee, which will provide a holistic, cross-government approach on this issue. Under the Child Poverty Act

2010, the Government will publish a strategy to show how we will meet the goal of ending child poverty by 2020. The first such strategy will be published in March 2011. I know that the organisations the hon. Gentleman mentioned—Barnardo's, Joseph Rowntree and Save the Children—will be making important contributions to the development of that strategy. I look forward to meeting those organisations in the coming months to ensure that we have the full value of their experience and expertise in this area, because only by doing that will we come to the right answer.

The simple truth is that the previous Government fell short on the progress that was needed on child poverty. That is why our new approach needs to be implemented quickly, if we are to reach the ambitious targets set out in the 2010 Act. Over the next nine months, I shall work with colleagues across government to ensure that we have a robust child poverty strategy in place. We want to tackle not just the symptoms of poverty but the root causes, so that we can say that we have the strategy on child poverty that both the hon. Gentleman and I know this country needs.

Royal Liverpool University Hospital

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): Let me explain the protocol to new Members in the Chamber. If a Member wants to intervene, it is up to the Member who is speaking to give way. If a Member wants to speak, they have to get prior permission from the Member whose debate it is and the Minister; I hope that they would let me know as well.

4.27 pm

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Betts, and let me say that I am glad to serve under your chairmanship. I am pleased to have this opportunity to raise a key concern facing the people of Liverpool—namely, the urgent need to build a new Royal Liverpool University hospital. The Royal is an excellent university teaching hospital and a leading regional centre for diagnosis and treatment, deploying cutting-edge technologies such as digital histopathology, interventionist radiology and PET-CT—positron emission tomography-computed tomography—advanced scanning.

The problem is that the existing hospital, which was built in 1972, has major structural defects. Its mechanical and electrical infrastructure has major faults, it has design flaws and its internal and external fabric is failing. The trust is rated excellent for clinical services and for financial management. It has a gifted and committed staff, but that cannot overcome the problems of a deteriorating building.

In March, following years of intensive scrutiny, the then Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) visited the Royal to announce a new £45 million replacement hospital, a private finance initiative, to be built on the same site. The possibilities of refurbishment had been costed and rejected on the grounds that they offered poor value for money. The approval was confirmed in writing by the Treasury and by the Department of Health, which issued an approval letter. The trust is to fund £130 million of the £451 million capital cost, so it is planned that most of the funding should come from the private sector.

The proposal has been assessed for many years. The outlined strategic case was approved in 2006. It has been subjected to intensive scrutiny again and again locally, regionally and nationally, including by the Department of Health and the Treasury. It has met stringent tests for affordability and for value for money. That process has indeed cut costs, by about 32%, and the current proposal for 637 beds constitutes a 34% reduction in the number of beds outlined in earlier plans. Construction at the hospital, which will lessen both the hospital's energy use and its carbon footprint, is due to start in 2012 and be completed by 2016. A competitive process to identify a suitable private sector partner is now under way. All that planning has now been thrown into doubt by this Government's current spending review and their threatened draconian cuts.

I want to make it very clear that replacing the Royal is about providing front-line health care for the people of Liverpool and the region.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Does she agree with me that many people from south Liverpool also rely on the Royal Liverpool University

[Maria Eagle]

hospital for acute health services and that a failure, at this late stage, to agree to rebuild the Royal and to let that project go forward will leave the entire city—not just the north of the city—having to obtain its health services in a deteriorating building that is no longer fit for purpose in the 21st century?

Mrs Ellman: I agree with my hon. Friend and her intervention shows why this issue is so very important.

The city has taken major steps forward in recent years, yet Liverpool remains the poorest local authority; in total, 67% of its population live in the top 10% most deprived localities in the country. Ill health is related to poverty. Industrial diseases such as asbestosis and mesothelioma, which are connected with the shipping industry of the past, cause deaths and incapacity today.

Although health standards have improved significantly during recent years, there is still an unacceptable gap in life expectancy between Liverpool people and those in the rest of the country. Women in Liverpool, Warrington and Hull have the lowest life expectancy for women in the country, at 78.8 years. Women in England as a whole can expect to live until they are 81.9 years old. The longest-living women in England are to be found in Kensington and Chelsea, reaching 88.9 years—a disparity of 10 years with women in Liverpool. Liverpool men have the fourth lowest life expectancy in the country, at 74.3 years, compared with a life expectancy of 84 years for men in Kensington and Chelsea and of 77 years for men in England as a whole.

Mortality rates are too high. The number of deaths from heart disease in Liverpool is 31% higher than the national average; the number of deaths from cancer-related diseases in Liverpool is 36% higher than the national average; deaths from causes that are amenable to health care in Liverpool are 42% higher than the national average, and deaths from conditions attributable to smoking in Liverpool are 57% higher than the national average. It is a chilling fact that for every 100 new cancers diagnosed in the rest of England, 130 new cancers are diagnosed in Liverpool.

Although that situation is related to long-term poverty, deprivation, the city's industrial legacy and individual lifestyles, the new hospital, with its proposed high-tech facilities and single rooms, which would help to reduce the spread of infection, is essential to improving people's health.

Despite its high incidence of cancer, Liverpool is the only major UK city without a comprehensive cancer centre. Following the Cannon and Baker report, a cancer centre linked to Liverpool university's department of cancer studies should be built at the Royal and that project should be progressed with urgency.

The new hospital will contribute to the alleviation of disease by building on Liverpool's strengths in the biochemical sector, already a major contributor to the local economy, by adding £1 billion gross value added and employing 6,000 people. In doing so, the new hospital will help regenerate the city. It will enhance important diagnostic research and life sciences, with increased collaboration between the university's leading medical school, the internationally renowned Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and the biomedical industry. Companies such as Eli Lilly, Novartis, MedImmune and Bristol-Myers Squibb already work with the Royal. A new biomedical campus is planned on site and it will be integrated with similar facilities, expanding research, improving diagnosis and developing new health-related products. That campus will create additional jobs in Liverpool, as Liverpool increasingly becomes a global leader in this sector. The new hospital will also make a major economic impact. Building the hospital itself will create 1,600 jobs, with the local economic benefits reaching £240 million.

It is very sad that, with the Government's draconian spending axe hanging over us, we still await a decision on the Royal's future. What is at stake? Primarily, the new hospital is about the well-being of the people of Liverpool and the region, too many of whom experience unacceptably poor health. Everyone, irrespective of wealth, is entitled to good health care. There has been a great deal of investment in health services in Liverpool in recent years, which is why we have seen improvements in people's health. But the key issue of the need to replace this major hospital remains outstanding and it is acutely important. The developmental hospital is important for Liverpool's ongoing regeneration. Liverpool is a city transformed, but too many of its citizens have not yet reaped the benefits. And now, in this fraught economic climate, new challenges have emerged.

A rebuilt Royal will bring all the people of Liverpool essential state-of-the-art health care, fit for the 21st century. Linked with primary care, it will make a real difference. The current proposal is mainly private finance initiative-funded. It does not lean heavily on the public purse. It has been subject to stringent scrutiny, ensuring value for money, and that process is continuing.

The city council has already made strong representations and I want to praise Councillor Joe Anderson, the leader of the council, and Councillor Paul Brant, an executive member of the council, who have taken the lead in speaking up for the health needs of the city. Any delays, cutbacks or cancellation would deal a major blow to the people of Liverpool, with consequences for the whole region.

On 31 March 2010, the *Liverpool Daily Post* reported statements made by the then shadow Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr Lansley). Following some general comments that he made about the proposed scheme at the Royal, the *Liverpool Daily Post* said:

"And he turned the tables on Labour, by insisting the Tories were committed to protecting NHS budgets, while the Government"—

that is, the Government at that time—

"was plotting to slash capital spending by half."

Asked about the Royal development, the right hon. Gentleman, now the Secretary of State, replied:

"The Conservatives have been clear about the need to protect NHS budgets, including capital spending, so we can support this project."

I ask the Minister to confirm that that pledge remains real. I also ask him to implement it without delay, give this front-line service the green light and enable the people of Liverpool to benefit from the first-class health facilities that are so important for their future.

4.38 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Simon Burns): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) on securing this debate on the future of the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust. I know of her long-standing support for the rebuilding of the Royal Liverpool hospital and it is apparent, just from looking at the number of Labour Members from Liverpool who are here today, that they are showing their interest in and concern about the provision of health care services in their constituencies and in the broader area of Liverpool and the Wirral.

I also pay tribute to the NHS staff across the whole of Liverpool, who do such an incredible job of caring for hon. Members' constituents throughout the city and the surrounding area. Those members of staff do a fantastic job, day in and day out, with little recognition or thanks from people. I want to place on record my gratitude for their tremendous work and that of NHS staff in the rest of the country.

Before I come to the specifics about the Royal Liverpool hospital, I would like to set out the Government's approach to the reconfiguration of local NHS services mentioned by the hon. Lady as part of her argument. I believe passionately that local decision making is essential to improving outcomes for patients and driving up quality. This Government will do more than just talk about pushing power to the local level; we will actually do it.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has identified four crucial tests that all reconfigurations must pass. First, they must have the support of GP commissioners. Secondly, arrangements for engaging patients and the public, including local authorities, must be further strengthened. Thirdly, there must be greater clarity about the clinical evidence base underpinning any proposals. Fourthly, any proposals must take into account the need to develop and support patient choice. To be clear, that means that forced hospital closures that do not have the support of GPs, local clinicians, patients and the local community should not occur.

Mrs Ellman: I am interested to hear the Minister's enunciation of Government policy, but does he agree that in this instance we are discussing the much-needed replacement of an existing hospital that is required by practitioners and the local authority?

Mr Burns: The hon. Lady can rest assured that I will come to that in due course, during the latter part of my speech. In light of some of her comments, particularly about cancer services, I wanted to show the setting for reconfiguration in so far as it might affect that site and other parts of Liverpool's health care provision.

Where local NHS organisations have already started to consider changing services, they will need to consider again whether their plans meet the criteria before continuing. It will be an opportunity for patients, local GPs and clinicians, and local councils to play a far greater role in how services are shaped and to ensure that the changes will lead to the best outcomes for patients.

The hon. Lady mentioned in an intervention the rebuilding of the Royal Liverpool. That will be reviewed in the light of the Secretary of State's four tests. As she said in her speech, it is widely recognised that the hospital has a number of issues. Most significantly, the fabric of the building is deteriorating due to a serious case of concrete rot. The building's condition contributes to high maintenance costs and a significantly poorer patient experience. The building is also inflexible, making it increasingly difficult for the trust to deliver modern, high-quality services.

Maria Eagle: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his role. He is a reasonable man, and I am happy to see him in this job. Can he give all the Liverpool MPs here today some time scale within which the Government will take the decision on the review? We would be grateful for an approximate date.

Mr Burns: I thank the hon. Lady for her kind comments, which are greatly appreciated. I return the compliment by saying that when our roles were reversed, I found her an extremely helpful and sympathetic Minister when I brought problems to her concerning Chelmsford prison. She has anticipated me in her direct question. I assure her—I am choosing my words carefully, as she will discover—that I will answer her question later in my speech.

The programme to address the issues within the trust has been ongoing for some time, as all hon. Members present will know and appreciate. For the benefit of those hon. Members not present who will read the report of the debate, I shall set out the timeline of events.

Due to the sorry state of the buildings and the high cost of refurbishment, the trust decided fully to rebuild the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust while refurbishing the site at Broadgreen. In July 2004, the Department of Health agreed the project's strategic business case, enabling work to start on the outline business case and the process of obtaining planning permission from Liverpool city council. In March 2008, planning permission was granted. In September 2009, the strategic health authority, NHS North West, approved the outline business case. Then, in March this year, the project was approved by the Department of Health and the Treasury. On 14 April, an advertisement to tender for the project was placed in the *Official Journal of the European Union*. That is the scheme's current position.

However, it is important to understand the changed context within which we now find ourselves. The most urgent task facing the Government is to tackle our record debt. As part of that, the Treasury is reviewing every significant spending decision made between 1 January 2010 and the general election on 6 May. As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside herself said, the final approvals were given on 29 March—two weeks to the day before the general election was announced. As a result, the project has been included in the Treasury review of public spending commitments made by the previous Government.

I hasten to add, as delicately as I can, that we, as a nation, face tremendous difficulties due to the staggering debt left to this Government. My right hon. Friends have rightly decided that we must get to grips with the economic situation that we inherited, and the primary problem that we face in the immediate future is the debt.

Mrs Ellman: We all understand the problems of debt, but, as the Minister himself said, the replacement of this particular hospital has a long history. It has been scrutinised many times at many different levels—locally, regionally and nationally. It is a majority private finance initiative scheme funded mainly by the private sector. Is he suggesting either that the scrutiny has not been proper or that the hospital is not needed to meet the health needs of the people of Liverpool?

Mr Burns: I am not quite sure how the hon. Lady could reach either of those conclusions, and I can tell her with all clarity that my answer to both questions is no. I do not think either of those things—that is, that proper scrutiny has not been carried out or that changes to the existing system are not needed. I can reassure her on those points, but the problem is that the final decision was taken after 1 January—very close to the calling of the general election. Because the review commences from 1 January, the project falls within its scope and must be reviewed, in these changed circumstances, to help to meet our pressing economic problems and deal with the debt that we have inherited. The project received Treasury approval only in March. As a result, it is caught up in the review, as are many other projects.

The issue comes down to the simple fact that this country faces crippling debts. A huge amount of work is involved in the Treasury review. As I hope hon. Members will appreciate, I cannot give an exact timetable for the decision, but to be as helpful as I can and, I hope, live up to the kind words of the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood, I anticipate a decision being taken by the spending review in the autumn. I appreciate that that might be frustrating for hon. Members and their constituents, but it is the best I can do. I hope that that answer moves towards their concept of helpfulness. I am afraid that, until then, I cannot comment further on the future of the development. If hon. Members were in the position in which my Government and I find ourselves, I am sure that they would do the same.

Like the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside, I and everyone in the country share a vision of and want a high-quality NHS—accountable to patients, led by GPs and controlled locally. As a party, we were elected on a platform of real-terms increases in the NHS budget for every year of this five-year Parliament. It is a protected budget, so there will be no cuts, but there will be real-terms increases year after year, as long as this Parliament remains, which I anticipate will be five years. In that respect, there is stability and commitment, and an understanding of the financial commitments to the NHS. That, I hope, will give some stability to the overall decision-making process and the decisions that the NHS will have to take beyond simple capital projects.

Steve Rotheram (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that our city and its citizens deserve not only a new hospital built on the Royal Liverpool site, but the state-of-the-art facilities outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman)? Does he also agree that the jobs created during the construction phase, similar to those that the Prime Minister spoke of in the Chamber this afternoon, would boost the local economy at a time of economic uncertainty? From what the Minister has said, the project appears to meet the Chancellor's tests under the Treasury review because it is primarily financed under the private finance initiative.

Mr Burns: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point, but everything has to be taken in the context of the changed circumstances—a change of Government and our overriding need to get the debt and the deficit under control. The context for that and the engine driving it is the review of all public spending commitments across the board. We are talking about not simply the health service, but commitments made across Government since 1 January. I cannot anticipate the outcome of any review, and I am sure that hon. Members would not expect me to. I can tell them that decisions will be taken by the spending review in the autumn, and I hope that hon. Members consider that helpful.

Maria Eagle: The Minister is being extremely generous in giving way and I am grateful. I understand the position that he is in—believe me. He gave an endpoint to the deliberative process, but the time scale he suggested might put the development at risk. Uncertainty can create difficulties with the funding arrangements for a PFI project, such that it is no longer workable or cannot be put together properly if the delay is too extensive because the private sector needs to raise money through the markets and in other ways.

Will the Minister undertake to do the usual thing that Ministers do, which is talk behind the scenes to his Treasury colleagues, as he will have to do anyway? Will he ensure, as far as he can, that the project is at the front rather than the back of the queue? The delay he indicated—through to the spending review in the autumn—could put the viability of the scheme at risk, whether or not the Government reaffirm the commitment made by the previous Government. For that reason, I urge him to do us a favour and discuss with the Treasury behind the scenes, as Ministers do, the urgent need to deal with this scheme as soon as possible.

Mr Burns: I respect the hon. Lady's ingenuity and I can see where she is hoping I will go. I do not want to disappoint, but I understand the situation and all I can do is reiterate that the project will be reviewed, as a lot of other projects across Government will be reviewed, in line with the Treasury guidelines for the review of projects from 1 January.

A decision will be taken by or at the time of the spending review in the autumn. I cannot go further than that. However frustrating it is for the hon. Lady, I know that in her heart of hearts she understands what I am saying. If the roles were reversed, she would probably say the same thing. It would be wrong and irresponsible, and potentially misleading, to go any further.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

Mr Burns: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, who has not had a chance to intervene.

Stephen Twigg: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way and I join in the congratulations to him on his well deserved appointment to the Department of Health. I understand that he cannot go further on timing, but can he tell us more about the nature of the review? Is it likely that his Department will say that

certain projects will go ahead as planned and others will not, or will it ask projects to look again at the cost, to achieve more projects at the lowest cost to the taxpayer?

Mr Burns: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind and gracious comments, which I greatly appreciate. I also pay tribute to his experience in coming at the question from a different angle. I do not want to, but I am afraid that I must disappoint him. I will not go down the route he suggests because it could be open to misinterpretation. I can only repeat what will happen: all spending projects from 1 January are being reviewed. Decisions will be taken by the time of the spending review.

I return to the reconfiguration of cancer treatments in the area, which the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside raised, to give her a brief explanation of the current position, because that will put it in context and, I hope, be of help to her. Local health organisations in Cheshire and Merseyside are working together to ensure better cancer facilities for the local population. However, I am advised that the primary care trusts plan to review the first facility at the University Hospitals Aintree site before committing to further facilities at the Royal Liverpool. As the hon. Lady will appreciate, that is a local decision and it would not be appropriate for Ministers, at this stage, to compromise the processes, intervene or comment. There are local procedures to be gone through before final decisions are taken.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the future of Liverpool Royal University hospital and fully appreciate how important it is to all hon. Members present and their constituents. We will have to wait until the spending review is concluded in the autumn for a decision. In the nicest possible way, I urge hon. Members, however difficult it is, to be patient and wait. If I were a constituency MP in Liverpool, I would be in the same position as them.

Question put and agreed to.

4.59 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 10 June 2010

[MR JOE BENTON *in the Chair*]

Volcanic Ash (Impact on Aviation)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*(Mr Vara.)*

2.30 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mrs Theresa Villiers): I am grateful, Mr Benton, that you should be presiding over this debate; it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

The debate is being held in Government time to allow us to consider the severe problems caused by volcanic ash in April. We are all too aware of the significant inconvenience and unhappiness caused to those who were stranded by the crisis or whose travel plans were disrupted. That alone merits the House's giving careful consideration to how the crisis was handled and how we should deal with the continuing threats caused by volcanic ash.

Hon. Members will be aware that the source of the problems is the Eyjafjallajokull volcano. I hope that the House will forgive my rudimentary attempts at Icelandic pronunciation; I plan to say the volcano's name a few more times today, so it might improve. For brevity's sake, however, hon. Members may prefer to call it E15, not least because mispronouncing it has caused a number of problems for media outlets across the world.

A key point is that the distinctive individual characteristics of different volcanoes can have a significant impact on the level of disruption generated by their ash clouds. Eyjafjallajokull has a number of features that are relevant to the matters that we are considering this afternoon.

First, previously recorded active periods show eruptions of varying intensity taking place over many months. That is in significant contrast to volcanic eruptions such as those at Mount St Helen's or Pinatubo; those were very intense, but they lasted only a matter of hours. Secondly, E15's caldera is capped with ice. Initially, the magma erupted through the ice cap, which caused rapid cooling of the magma, leading to its explosive disintegration into fine particles of ash. I am advised that fine particles of ash are more easily conveyed over long distances by the prevailing wind, and they remain in the atmosphere for longer than the larger particles produced by eruptions like Mount St Helen's.

Thankfully, E15 stopped emitting ash on 22 May. However, that does not mean that the crisis has gone away or that we should ease off with important activities meant to deal with the threat to flying posed by volcanic ash. The volcano could erupt again at any time over the next few months. Moreover, it is located 15.5 miles west of a larger volcano called Katla. Historical evidence indicates a worrying correlation between activity at E15 and subsequent eruptions at Katla. The risk of activity at Katla remains present. For a number of reasons, there remains an urgent need to address the issue and to ensure that we get the right safety and regulatory framework in the event of a recurrence of volcanic ash problems.

I am sure that everyone here will agree that safety must be our paramount concern. Volcanic ash presents a problem for modern jet-powered engines for two principal reasons. First, the ash is silica-rich and therefore abrasive, especially when it hits aircraft at high speed. That affects forward-facing surfaces such as the windshield and the leading edges of the wings, and it can also lead to accumulation of ash in surface openings—including, most importantly, the engines. Secondly, the composition of most volcanic ash is such that its melting temperature lies within the operating temperature range of modern large jet engines.

The risks have been illustrated in a number of previous incidents, and I draw the House's attention to two of them. On 24 June 1982, a BA 747 jet, on its way from London to Auckland, flew into a cloud of volcanic ash 100 miles south-east of Jakarta. In rapid succession, all four engines flamed out and shut down. The aircraft entered a glide, dropping from 37,000 to 13,500 feet before the pilot was able to restart the engines; one of the engines failed again soon afterwards. Similarly, on 15 December 1989, a KLM 747 flying from Amsterdam to Tokyo flew into volcanic ash on the approach to Anchorage airport. Again, all four engines shut down. The plane dropped 14,000 feet before the pilot was able to restart the engines. Damage to the plane was reported to have cost more than $80 million.

I return to the crisis that we face in this country. The initial reaction of air traffic controllers and regulators in Europe was to follow the internationally established procedures set down in the International Civil Aviation Organisation's volcanic ash contingency plan for the European region. That plan is based on experience, and it provides that aircraft should avoid flying in volcanic ash. The scope of the zone affected by volcanic ash was determined by a computer model run by the Met Office, in its role as the volcanic ash advisory centre for the north Atlantic. Using data about the ash emitted from the volcano, the model is used to predict where the north Atlantic winds will carry the ash, and the potential peak concentrations of that ash. As a result, the Civil Aviation Authority and NATS imposed movement restrictions in UK airspace that had the effect of grounding commercial aircraft between 15 and 20 April.

That decision undoubtedly triggered controversy. However, it mirrored similar measures taken throughout Europe. It also reflected the advice of aircraft manufacturers at the time that aircraft should not fly in areas if there was a risk of ash being present. Whatever the merits of the choices made during the tenure of the previous Administration, it soon became clear that a rule that required complete avoidance of volcanic ash in affected areas would not be a long-term solution in Europe's congested airspace. That is why the CAA brought together airlines, regulators, and aircraft and engine manufacturers, to develop a new approach to reducing the disruption caused by Eyjafjallajokull.

After a review of test flight data, and in consultation with the airline operators, manufacturers and international partners, the CAA issued new guidance on the use of airspace on 20 April. That guidance reflected revised ash tolerance levels, as determined by the engine manufacturers. Put simply, it was established that there was after all a level of ash concentration that was consistent with safe flying. The area in which it was safe

[Mrs Theresa Villiers]

to fly was thus expanded, and aircraft were permitted to start flying again in UK airspace. That, of course, was immensely welcome.

The new regulatory framework designates three airspace categories. The first consists of airspace predicted to be free of ash, when no special restrictions apply. The second is a red enhanced procedures zone, when low ash density is predicted and aircraft are permitted to fly so long as increased safety and maintenance checks are carried out. The third category is a black no-fly zone, when predicted ash levels exceed safety limits and no commercial flights are permitted.

That was the situation in place when the new ministerial team took over the Department for Transport in mid-May. Given the hassle caused to passengers and the economic impact on airlines, the volcanic ash problem was clearly one of the most important issues for the new team to address. In the days immediately following the new Government's taking over, officials had to work around the clock to deal with the matter. We need to pay tribute to their hard work, under both this Administration and the previous one. The new Secretary of State's first official decision was to declassify the five-day ash concentration forecasts of the Met Office and authorise their publication, to assist the aviation community to tackle the crisis. He has focused time and effort on this matter every day since his appointment.

We have been working hard with officials, the Civil Aviation Authority and industry to ensure that such disruption to UK aviation is not repeated, even if there is renewed volcanic activity. Finding a safe way to achieve that goal is a high priority for us, which is why we put this debate on the agenda this afternoon. I look forward to hearing hon. Members' contributions and comments on this important matter.

Central to our efforts is an attempt to engage with manufacturers, to distinguish between concerns about safety and concerns about the commercial impact of ash damage to engines. Given that the issues cross both the aircraft's body and its engine, a key task for the CAA and the airlines has been to press the aircraft and engine manufacturers to establish, with clarity, what level of ash their engines can safely tolerate. That is a key question, and the Department continues to be actively engaged in that important process.

The general approach that I have outlined was endorsed at an international conference hosted by the CAA on 13 May. The conference brought together more than 100 representatives from organisations such as the European Commission, the European Aviation Safety Agency and Eurocontrol, as well as from the airlines, airports and manufacturers. I am pleased to say that on 17 May further progress was made. The CAA established an additional area for safe flying—a new time-limited zone—which is between the black no-fly area and the red enhanced procedures zone. Aircraft and engine manufacturers agreed that it was safe to allow operations in the new grey zone for a limited time at higher ash densities than were previously permitted.

To operate in the new zone, airlines need to present their national supervisory authority with a safety case that includes the agreement of their aircraft and engine manufacturers. Essentially, there was a doubling of the ash threshold for safe flying from 2,000 to 4,000 micrograms per cubic metre, which was a significant and a welcome step forward. However, I want to emphasise that the new Government are not letting up the pressure. We are also pushing for progress on the matter at an international level, both within the European Union and more widely in the International Civil Aviation Organisation. We want to see ICAO take forward the development of a new global standard on volcanic ash.

Turning now to the impact of this incident on passengers, I have immense sympathy with those who had their travel plans disrupted or who had difficulty getting home for work, school and other commitments. The situation must have been a nightmare for thousands of families stranded around the world during the Easter holidays. Certainly, the efforts made by the previous Government in aiding the repatriation of those passengers were subject to some controversy and criticism, and I imagine that during the course of the debate, hon. Members will want to recount the problems experienced by their constituents.

We need to acknowledge that many passengers felt angry and frustrated about how the situation was handled. Particular controversy surrounded the Madrid hub that was established by the previous Government to help bring home long-haul passengers. Nevertheless, to be fair, we should acknowledge that the Foreign Office did provide consular assistance to thousands of British nationals around the world. Additional capacity was also provided on Eurostar, the channel tunnel, cross-channel ferries and domestic rail to help passengers return home. Moreover, we should recognise the efforts made by the airlines and travel companies—initially to get people home by road, rail and sea and then by laying on extra flights once air space reopened.

Most passengers have statutory entitlements under one or both of the denied boarding, cancellation and delay regulations or the package travel directive, depending on the type of holiday that they bought. I do not propose to go into the detail of the rights accorded by such regulations, but further advice on them can be found on various internet sites, including that of the Air Transport Users Council. In practice, a proportion of passengers were provided with food and accommodation by their airline or tour operator until they could travel. Others covered by the regulation who opted for re-routing but who were not provided with up-front assistance are entitled to claim reasonable costs from their airline.

Most people acknowledge that the regulations did not work perfectly, but they were being applied in an unprecedented situation. There can be little doubt that the eruption of an Icelandic volcano was not a scenario uppermost in the minds of the legislators who drafted the rules. Their operation, therefore, clearly needs to be reviewed.

The response to the ash crisis is an important matter on the agenda for the next meeting of EU Transport Ministers, which will take place on 24 June and which the Secretary of State is planning to attend. Whatever the debate about the future of these rules, it is important to make one thing very clear and put it on the record. Despite the controversy surrounding the denied boarding rules and the undeniable burdens that they have placed on the airline industry in what was an unprecedented situation, we expect pending claims under those rules to be processed fairly, expeditiously and in accordance with the current law.

I should like briefly to address some issues around the impact of this episode on the aviation and travel industry. A number of organisations and trade associations from air transport and related industries have asked for financial assistance from the Government to help meet the costs of looking after passengers, and to cover lost business during April. In the last couple of weeks, the Secretary of State has met the chief executives of the major UK airlines to discuss a number of topics, including this one. We appreciate and understand the concerns expressed by the companies that were hit with an unexpected bill so soon after the end of the recession and so soon after what everyone has acknowledged has been a very difficult period for the aviation industry generally.

The Government have not ruled out providing support for airlines, but I do not want to raise expectations. The starting presumption must be that it is for businesses to meet their own operating risks and legal liabilities. Moreover, EU state aid clearance would be needed if assistance were to be given. Even more importantly, the state of the public finances means that such assistance may not be affordable. My understanding is that although Governments across Europe may sympathise with the plight of the airlines, they are also constrained by similar concerns about affordability. Such a view can come as no surprise to anyone given the current financial situation, which has been all too apparent in news bulletins recently.

In conclusion, this was and remains an unprecedented situation. It required the rapid development of a new approach to air safety regulation and lessons need to be learned to deal with similar emergencies in the future. Indeed, they are already being learned, as is shown by the urgent work that the new Government have undertaken to seek improvements to the robustness of the regulatory framework and its ability to adapt and to respond to the challenge posed by volcanic ash.

In that regard, it is worth noting that with the adoption of the 17 May set of changes, which I outlined earlier, the maximum concentration of ash designated as being consistent with safe flying has risen by a factor of 20 since the decisions that were made at the start of the crisis in April. But let me emphasise that both the CAA and the Department for Transport are continuing to work hard with engine and aircraft manufacturers with the goal of establishing a further increase in safe ash tolerance levels.

Eyjafjallajokull may have stopped erupting for the moment, but no one can rule our further volcanic activity and further disruption during the coming months. So I want to close my opening remarks by assuring the House that the new Government will work hard to see that every effort is made to minimise any disruption, with the goal of avoiding a rerun of the events in April that caused so much mayhem and unhappiness for so many passengers.

2.50 pm

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): My constituency is home to Newcastle International airport. It is an award-winning airport that is crucial to the business success of the north-east region. The airport suffered during the recession of 2009, with passenger numbers down by about 10.6%. There was also a significant fall in profits and staffing numbers.

The airport's authority has expressed to me its view that the analysis of the effect of the volcanic ash on aircraft has improved, as the data have become more widely available. However, it was unfortunate that, from the beginning of this incident, there were severe restrictions and that there was no alternative to the action that was taken.

None the less, without apportioning blame for this natural event, Newcastle International airport would like the House to be aware of the losses that it has suffered, no doubt like other airports across the country, as a result of it. The direct financial losses at Newcastle International airport have been established at roughly £1 million. However, that sum can be multiplied significantly when the effect of the situation on other businesses at the airport—for example concessions, catering, hotels, car rentals and so on—is taken into account, and that will have a significant effect on the economy of the north-east region.

The airport's authority has estimated that more than 75,000 passengers were affected by more than 780 flight cancellations. I am here today to urge the Government, on behalf of Newcastle International airport—and, I am sure, other airports in the UK—to work hard for compensation for airports as well as for airlines at the EU Transport Council on 24 June. I also urge the Government to work hard with the aviation industry to restore travellers' confidence in air travel.

2.53 pm

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): I also represent an airport, Aberdeen, which is one of the BAA group of airports. Like Newcastle International airport, which is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), it was affected by the volcanic ash. I will come back to that issue.

First, I want to thank the Minister for her opening remarks, which were really helpful in bringing us up to date on where we are and where we are going. I also want to say to her that, although the industry has suffered severe losses, I agree with her that this is not the moment for it to look to the public purse to resolve its problems. I do not think that that would be a realistic outcome. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that this incident was a shock that had severe economic repercussions, especially for the aviation industry, which we all know does not operate on the widest of profit margins, even at the best of times—and these are not the best of times.

It has been estimated that the industry lost something in the region of £50 million to £100 million a day, or at least most of those losses were suffered by the aviation industry. Perhaps 25% of those losses were suffered by other industries. To quote the proverb, "It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good", and this was an ill wind—exactly so.

Having said that, there were other travel operators that benefited from this situation. I speak on a personal basis in saying that, and I would also like to make a comment about the unpredictability of the movement of the ash. When I was due to travel down to London at that time, I was told that either Aberdeen airport or the London airports were likely to be closed on my day of travel, so I elected to take the train. Earlier this week, we had a debate in the House that reinforced the case

[Malcolm Bruce]

for high-speed rail going to Aberdeen. I say that because that journey took me seven and a half hours—on the fast train from Aberdeen. In the event, as I was on the train, I was able to check in on my phone and find that neither of the airports that I was due to fly to or from was affected by the ash.

However, people have to make plans, so one issue that needs to be addressed—the Minister has addressed it—is the fact that, if such events occur again, there must be the greatest possible accuracy and predictability to enable people to plan their options. Clearly, that would be important and helpful. No doubt the Civil Aviation Authority, the Met Office, NATS and everybody else will be getting together to ensure that we have a much better operating system, which would give people advance warning and the opportunity to make alternative plans. That would be instructive.

It was also interesting to see a situation in which nobody had ever considered the possibility of a total lack of planes in the skies for a week, and to see the mindset of modern life suddenly confronted with a quite unexpected challenge. For some people, that was shocking, inasmuch as all kinds of presumptions went out of the window, but for others it was perhaps refreshing, in that it made people understand that not all these flight journeys were necessary and that teleconferencing could be used quite effectively. For some people, there were more pleasurable means of surface transport than air travel, at least for the shorter journeys. Indeed, I heard one woman say that she had never seen the Alps, other than from the air, until she had to drive through them to find an airport from which she could get home.

It is right to acknowledge that that situation made people think differently. I do not know whether the Minister or her Department feel that they need to express any view about that, but it is being suggested that people might reconsider the kind of holidays or business trips that they make. People may consider that the risk of possible disruption justifies thinking about not travelling so far or finding places to travel to where there is surface transport. People might plan their lives slightly differently, especially given the fact that, as the Minister has warned us, a much bigger eruption could occur at any time, which could lead to more serious disruption.

I want to return briefly to the particular circumstances of the airport that is located in my constituency. Much the same as the airport in the constituency of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North, Aberdeen airport has suffered a direct loss—in landing charges and all the usual operating charges—which I estimate to be £1,056,000. That is a slightly more precise figure than the one that the hon. Lady gave for Newcastle International airport, but it is in pretty much the same ballpark.

BAA estimated that it lost £6 million per day for every day that the planes were not flying. Aberdeen airport recorded a 26% fall in passenger numbers in April 2010 compared with April 2009, yet in the first part of May 2010, the corresponding fall compared with the first part of May 2009 was 9.9%. In other words, the economic effect of the recession looks like accounting for 10% of the losses. The effect of the disruption from ash accounted for the other 15%.

Obviously, airports, which are suffering from the recession, find such losses quite a significant hit to take. Because it is part of BAA, I guess, Aberdeen airport did not even suggest to me or to my office that it was looking for compensation, but it was nevertheless anxious that people should be made aware that the incident had cost it money and that that was of concern to it.

The Minister touched on this point, but I want to ask whether she can determine the extent to which the UK authorities and the European authorities are operating in total unity, or do we feel that we have a distinctive concern of our own? The fact is that we are further north than many other European countries and consequently closer to the source of eruption, so the likelihood of disruption for the UK is probably higher. That would justify us having our own standards, if necessary.

As the Minister correctly stated, safety is the prime concern for us all. Interestingly, the public reaction was remarkably sanguine. I think that the vast majority of people, not being technically aware and hearing that there was a problem, would not have wished to take a flight into the unpredictabilities of an ash cloud. As the closure extended to a significant number of days, some remarks from the airline industry raised a slight concern, in spite of the qualifications made, that commercial considerations may have been prejudicing the industry's judgment. That is understandable, but it reinforces the reason why such decisions must ultimately be taken by public agencies, not left to the commercial judgment of the operating airlines.

The public interest and the public good seem to justify the ability of Government and public agencies to take such decisions without the threat of financial liability for the consequences. It would be distasteful if, as some press reports have suggested, the airlines or the industry started to take European institutions, Governments, the CAA, the Met Office and so on to court over the issue. That would raise in the public mind a concern that public agencies whose job is to defend the public good and the public interest could suffer a commercial cost as a result of a decision that must be taken at short notice with the best of intentions. If necessary, the law should be brought into play to ensure that that does not happen.

That does not detract in any way from the fact that I have sympathy for the airlines. I recognise that they have a profit incentive and that none of them makes huge profits—indeed, hardly any are making any profit at the moment. However, we must ultimately operate on the basis of mutual good will and understanding. Conversely, the airlines are entitled to expect public agencies to seek the best possible advice so that unnecessary closures are not enforced and a full evaluation is made of the available options and diversions.

Interestingly, I read that there is some suggestion of an early-warning technology that could enable planes to identify dangerous concentrations of ash in flight and fly around, over or under them. It seems that we will accrue useful gains if we can make use of such technologies. I hope the Minister accepts that the right approach is a partnership between the public agencies and the industry. The public agencies should recognise that people want and need to fly, that flying is an economic necessity and that airlines must make revenues to keep their operations going. At the same time, public safety must be the overriding consideration.

On a parochial conclusion, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North is right to speak up on behalf of the airport in Newcastle, and I hope she will forgive me if I make some additional special pleading. I mentioned the length of the fastest train journey from Aberdeen to London. For us, the airport is not just an alternative means of communication; it is our essential connection with the economic drivers of our area. Aberdeen is the international centre of the offshore oil and gas industry, so it is vital to us that people are able to fly in and out of the city. The disruption has had serious significance for us, as has the ongoing British Airways strike, although in that case we can at least use other operators.

I am sure that the House will understand, therefore, that I will be as concerned as anybody if long periods of closure or no flying are likely, but I am not prepared to defend the importance of flying to the economy or the airport to my constituency when passenger safety is the overriding priority. People need to be satisfied that the Government have the right balance of regulations in place and confident that those regulations are realistic, that they take account of the technical information available and airlines' capability to adapt to different circumstances, and, ultimately, that they balance commercial interests and the public interest. If we achieve that, even if another major disruption of this kind occurs, I hope that we will be able to manage it in a way that does not lead to long-term complete closure of flying. If that is what safety requires, that is what we must do, but I would think that we had learned enough this time probably to be able to prevent it from happening again. I certainly hope so.

3.4 pm

Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con): The Minister has set out clearly what problems the country faced and what tasks the Government had to go through. I am grateful for that summation of the situation, which I think was helpful for everybody.

In South Derbyshire live thousands of people who work at East Midlands airport, as well as thousands of people who make the magnificent air engines at Rolls-Royce, so I come at the issue with a two-pronged attack. Even though we had a week of peace while the airport was shut down, this situation has cost the airport's owners, Manchester Airport Group, about £10 million. I am sorry that the situation has cost other hon. Members' airports £1 million, but I think that I have trumped them. It has been a huge shock to our area. Passenger safety is the most important consideration, but the situation has hit us financially at a difficult economic time.

I applaud the Minister's statement and look forward to any compensation package that might be offered. It must be Europe-wide. It must not be just our Government going out on a limb. That would not be fair to everybody in the country. We should also work hard on new technology, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) said, and ensure that we minimise any future risks from the volcano—I am not going to try Icelandic, so I will call it E15. It is interesting that there is an ongoing risk that it might erupt again, and that its neighbouring big brother might blow as well.

We have learned a lot from those two eruptions. It was not a happy time. I sincerely hope that the Department for Transport, and perhaps the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, will consider working with Rolls-Royce, other aviation companies and universities in greater detail on new types of radar and so on.

On the compensation packages, I have received some interesting letters from residents caught up in the disruption. They have given me detailed descriptions of how they felt let down by consular activities, particularly out on the west coast of America. If I may, I will copy the Minister in on those documents—I will probably send them to the Foreign Office as well—because the Government need to hear at first hand what happened. South Derbyshire is a great place, and people rushing back to it were particularly annoyed that it took about another week to achieve that.

I am grateful to the Minister for what she has said. I know that the thousands of people who work at East Midlands airport and Rolls-Royce will be looking for leadership on the matter.

3.7 pm

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con): I am pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Heather Wheeler) in discussing the impact of the recent crisis. I represent Stourbridge in the west midlands, which—like every other town in the country, I dare say—is home to countless people who were inconvenienced or stuck abroad. The eruptions happened during the election campaign. I was due to attend the opening of a new building, including a ceremony and a whole day of events, at Old Swinford Hospital school, but it had to be cancelled because various teaching staff and governors were scattered around the globe.

Also—I will not say that this is worse—a couple of people from my election delivery team were detained in Dubai, along with about 10,000 or 15,000 other people, and were unable to return to the UK to help me to get elected. It was illuminating to see how many people are away at any one time. I was surprised to hear how many teaching staff were away on all sorts of educational trips, not necessarily with their students, in Australia and other parts of the world.

I will not repeat what my hon. Friend said about compensation and the need for transparency. I am sure that dealing with that is in the forefront of the Minister's mind.

On the national impact, our airline industry is looking at £1 billion of losses, which is a serious matter. My local airport was not as badly affected as the one in South Derbyshire, but Birmingham airport suffered losses of £2 million. There is also the ongoing effect to consider. This week, I spoke to the chief executive of Birmingham airport, who informed me that things seemed to be back to normal with long-haul flights—people visiting relatives in far-flung parts of the world—business flights and short-haul, two-week summer holidays. However, short, weekend-break holidays, when people spontaneously think that they might go somewhere for the weekend because there is an offer on easyJet, still seem to be struggling. People are still nervous about whether they will get back in time for work or other commitments at the end of their weekend break. Therefore, we should not forget the impact on future airline business.

Obviously, we need to learn from the way the crisis was handled in April. There certainly seems to have been a lack of application of research on identifying

[Margot James]

safe thresholds for volcanic ash in the atmosphere. My right hon. Friend the Minister gave examples of near disasters that have occurred over the past 20 or 30 years, but they seem not to have created a sense of urgency about improving regulations. As a result, the only option left in April was to close all our airspace. Now that the Government are going to get a grip on the issue, I hope that that will not be our only option when an eruption occurs again, as I am sure one will.

Initially, the main criticisms were that the UK allowed its airspace to remain closed for at least 24 hours longer than the rest of Europe. There were also questions over the extent to which help was given to passengers stranded around the globe. My hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire mentioned people on the west coast of America whom this country and the former Government could have done more to help, and I am sure that that is true of people who were stranded in other parts of the world.

I have also heard criticism from people in the airline industry that there was a real lack of political leadership at the outset of the crisis. It took a full three days before leading members of the Government were on the airwaves giving a lead as to what actions should be taken. The first time they came on the airwaves, it was to talk about sending the fleet to Spain to collect people who were stranded there, which was not the sort of initial leadership that passengers and airlines were looking for. I am sure that our new Government will learn from the leadership issues that arose during the crisis.

Obviously, there has been no major volcanic explosion in Europe for several hundred years, so we cannot blame anybody too much for the fact that all the airspace had to be closed. If I have mentioned certain matters, however, it is because there were things that could have been done, despite the fact that nobody expected the crisis to hit.

In finishing the first part of my speech, I pay tribute to Willie Walsh, chief executive of British Airways. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) said that most of us would not step into an aeroplane knowing the risks involved in flying into volcanic ash. Someone had to take the plunge and test a flight to see what the effects of ash in the atmosphere would be, and I greatly admire the chief executive of British Airways for leading from the front in that respect.

On the future, I hope that the research being done by easyJet will result in improvements to radar technology. I gather that the company is already testing its radar technology and believes that it will be good enough to predict ash clouds from about 60 miles away so that pilots will be able to fly around them. However, there is cause for a degree of caution about how far that will enable us to overcome the problem in the short term.

Malcolm Bruce: I want to reinforce that point. EasyJet should be commended for what it is doing, but does my hon. Friend agree that, if the technology is to make a viable contribution to a solution, it needs to be part of a regulatory arrangement, rather than the individual choice of one airline?

Margot James: I strongly agree with my right hon. Friend. It should be part of not only a UK, but an international regulatory solution. None the less, it is good to know that these technological developments are under way, although there is a fair way to go, even with the good work that easyJet has started. It is important that we understand the impact of not only denser ash clouds, but fragments and shards in the atmosphere. The key is to reach an understanding of what constitutes a safe level. I think that 2 mg per cubic metre is the accepted standard, but we need a greater evidence base to support that.

My right hon. Friend the Minister talked about the danger of the Katla volcano erupting. I gather from reading expert reports that it could have 100 times the impact of the previous volcanic eruption. Other experts—I am delighted that I now know that they are called vulcanologists, which sounds like something out of "Star Trek", although I am sure that we will be hearing more from them in the future—predict that the Icelandic volcanic system will enter an active phase in the 2030s, so it is timely that the Government are starting to add weight to the priority of the issue.

The events that we are discussing have been a salutary experience for everyone who has been caught up in them. We in the west somehow think that we have conquered nature in many respects in our daily lives, but recent events are a timely reminder that nature is still very much in charge.

I would also emphasise the fact that nobody—no Government, no regulatory body, no industry—can predict and plan for everything. The Government are absolutely on the right path in looking for a regulatory solution and working with the industry, and I am sure that we will get there, but there is no perfect solution. I have spent most of my working life in the pharmaceutical industry, and there is no such thing as a medicine without a risk, just as there will never be such a thing as a flight without a risk. We have to accept that there will always be a risk, but we have to reduce it to manageable levels. We should opt not for the no-fly solution that we were all panicked into, but for a more manageable level of risk reduction.

New politics means different things to different people. To me, it is important that we understand that there are limits to what Governments can do, so we should not be too quick to blame the previous Government for the problems that I have tried to do justice to this afternoon. We should not expect too much or a perfect solution from this Government or any future Government.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister and her team will do their very best to move the situation on so that the airline industry and passengers are not once again brought to a halt and dramatically inconvenienced in the way that they were, and so that we manage the risk of taking to the air. However, nothing can ever be perfect.

3.19 pm

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Thank you, Mr. Benton, for giving me the opportunity to make my first speech in Westminster Hall. The issue of the volcanic cloud emanating from Iceland caused huge problems for people travelling abroad and for those trying to get home in April. British airspace was closed for six days, but it was also significant that the disruption lasted much longer than that. The problem also compounded the difficulties that the airline industry has been suffering.

The recession hit the industry hard, and the grounding of all flights for days on end simply added to those difficulties.

Estimates vary—the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) quoted some relating to the airport in her constituency—but the EU estimates that the ash crisis cost the airline industry £2 billion. We can all agree that there was significant loss to the industry. We shall probably never know the true figure. About 100,000 flights were cancelled in the relevant period. The industry must accept that running any kind of business will never be risk-free, but we must also recognise that April 2010 was an exceptionally tough month. Not since 11 September 2001 has aviation faced such a challenging time. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) mentioned the surreal experience of looking up at the sky and seeing not a single aeroplane or jet engine trail, for a protracted period; I think that was only the second time that has happened in my lifetime.

I want to mention the difficulties that travellers faced. The uncertainty of the situation meant that not only could people not return home, but they did not know when they would be able to do so. There were Dartford residents who were affected by the travel disruption and could not get home or travel abroad. The ash cloud problems also coincided with the school holidays, and many people who had gone on family holidays could not return home, which had a consequential impact on them. Even my Liberal Democrat opponent in the general election, Mr. James Willis, could not get home until just before the nominations closed. Obviously, I was deeply concerned. He is a decent chap. It was sad that even in the middle of that difficult time for travellers, one airline tried to avoid liability for refunding passenger tickets, which added to the misery, uncertainty and difficulty for those travellers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Margot James) mentioned leadership, which the country looked for during that period. Clearly, safety had to be the priority for the Government. They needed to ensure that it was safe for people to fly, but we need to consider whether more information on the ash cloud could have been gathered more quickly than it was, and whether flight restrictions could have been removed earlier, reducing the impact on travellers and airlines. The then Government's initial approach was to claim that any ash in the sky meant that flights could not take place. We now have a new approach. I welcome last month's rule change to allow flights when there is ash in the atmosphere at the safe level of 2 mg per cubic metre. We need to ensure that that is reviewed, and to consider whether the non-aviation options were properly thought through.

We also need to see whether the contingency plans shaped up. Has the Minister been able to get to the bottom of what happened to the 100 coaches we heard so much about—which were meant to bring stranded British subjects home at the same time that coaches were being used by travel companies, and were at a high premium? As far as I can tell they never materialised, so perhaps lessons can be learned from that. We need to learn such lessons, because we must ascertain whether the decisions that were made were too cautious. I believe it is inevitable that a similar situation will happen again—probably with the same volcano, whose name I shall not even attempt to pronounce. However, we can ensure that if planes can fly safely, they are allowed to do so.

We need also to learn the lessons about the repatriation of passengers, and what practical measures might have been possible to help passengers who were stuck abroad. Will the Minister consider the possibility of temporarily—I emphasise the word "temporarily"—waiving night-time restrictions on flights, to allow people to get home should a similar situation occur in the future?

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): On deregulation, I appreciate that the Conservative party is committed to the deregulation Bill, but a fundamental point of passenger safety arises and we cannot allow compromise; it must be paramount. To allow commercial interests to influence our judgment would be a terrible mistake, with potentially dangerous consequences.

It was refreshing to hear the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Margot James) suggest that perhaps the Government at the time were not to blame. Sometimes it is easy to throw rocks, even volcanic ones, at one's opponents—in this case, the previous Government. A new phrase to use might be "tough on volcanic ash and tough on the causes of volcanic ash".

On working with the authorities and technical people, the right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) talked about the technologies—I am not sure whether they are radar or infrared technologies.

Mr Joe Benton (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is getting rather lengthy and becoming a speech. I invite him to complete it, but he should bear it in mind that interventions should be as brief as possible.

Grahame M. Morris: Thank you, Mr Benton; I apologise.

My point is essentially about deregulation and not allowing it to compromise passenger safety. I would hate the drive to deregulation in the broader political environment to impinge on that, because it is vital.

Gareth Johnson: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we must of course ensure that safety is treated as paramount in such situations, but it is also essential to adopt a common-sense approach. We should not enter a blame game, but should learn the lessons that are there to be learned, so that if the same situation arises again, as I believe it will, we shall be better prepared to deal with it, and so that people stranded abroad can be brought home and can fly as soon as it is safe. To learn the lessons, we need to work with the airlines, the Civil Aviation Authority and all the agencies involved, so that there can be proper contingency plans.

I agree that it is easy to look back at the volcanic ash problem with 20:20 hindsight and claim that we have all the answers, and that the previous Government should have done this or that better. That would not be fair in many instances, because at the time we faced a unique situation. However, a Government's capability can be tested in unique situations. We witness the contingency plans—where they exist—the quality of leadership, and a Government's adaptability in unpredictable situations and how they interact with different agencies. In the light of that, I hope my right hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that the aviation industry will be able to

[Gareth Johnson]

contribute to the scientific and technological assessments of flying into areas where ash is present in the atmosphere. I hope the technology that some airlines are already using—an issue touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge—will be considered for use in detecting the location of ash clouds and their density. I also hope that we continue to work in partnership with the engine manufacturers, because they understand better than anyone the capabilities of their engine and the circumstances in which it would be unsafe to fly using their engine type.

Yes, ash clouds can be extremely dangerous to aircraft, and the crew and passengers of the 1982 British Airways flight over Indonesia, which was mentioned earlier, can testify to that, but we need common sense to prevail. The zero-tolerance approach was clearly wrong—we know that now—and the repatriation of passengers lacked co-ordination. We need to learn from that and ensure that when this situation happens again, we are better placed to tackle it.

3.30 pm

Mr William Bain (Glasgow North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you back in the Chair, Mr Benton, and to serve under your chairmanship once again. The debate has been useful and constructive and—dare I say it, as a Member of seven months' standing?—very consensual. I say to newer Members that perhaps not every debate will be quite as consensual as this, but it has been exceptionally productive.

I praise the generosity of the Minister's remarks about the actions taken by my noble Friend Lord Adonis, and other Ministers in the Department for Transport prior to the election, in tackling the first emission of ash from the volcano. I welcome the steps the Minster and her colleagues have taken since the election, in particular on freeing up corridors and zones for air travel, which has contributed greatly to improving the situation for air passengers across the country. I would like to put on the record our appreciation for the work of the Department since the election.

The eruption of the E15 volcano—I am afraid that my standards of Icelandic pronunciation have not reached the Minister's level of mastery yet—was an act of nature. However, the consequences of the resulting ash cloud emitting from the volcano—it spread across Europe, causing the largest air traffic shut-down since 1945 and leaving 5 million passengers stranded across the globe—have been huge. There can be few Members who have not had constituents contact them with harrowing stories about the financial and other disruptive effects of being stranded in an unfamiliar place. The problem might persist for months, if not years, to come; on some estimates, the volcano might emit ash for several years. Previously, it has emitted ash for up to 20 years.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on her advocacy of Newcastle airport, and on putting the strong case for its receiving a financial package to deal with the losses suffered. I thank the right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) for his similar advocacy of transport needs in north-east Scotland and, in particular, of Aberdeen airport. He spoke eloquently about public safety and the need to continue to review the regulatory framework. The hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Heather Wheeler) spoke passionately about the effects of the ash cloud on her constituency and, in particular, on Rolls-Royce.

The hon. Member for Stourbridge (Margot James) spoke eloquently about how the disruption affected and inconvenienced her constituents, and about the need to learn lessons about safe thresholds of ash in the atmosphere. The hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) spoke with great authority about the effects on the aviation industry throughout the country and in areas surrounding his constituency, as well as the disruptive effect on passengers. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) for his extended but illuminating intervention. He put his point on deregulation with great force, and I look forward to hearing similar interventions, questions and speeches from him in this Chamber and the main Chamber in the coming months.

The airspace over much of northern Europe was closed from 15 to 23 April, and the ash cloud led to significant disruption of air travel in Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland on 4 and 5 May, and in Spain, Portugal, northern Italy, Austria and southern Germany on 9 May, with Irish and UK airspace closed again on 16 May and reopening on 17 May. We heard stories in the debate of the distress and financial hardship, particularly from the hon. Members for Stourbridge and for Dartford, which occurred because of the disruption. The crisis has shown how significant and important aviation is to our way of life, for business, culture and tourism.

The International Air Transport Association estimated this week that, across the globe, airlines will make combined profits of $2.5 billion in 2010, albeit in Europe there are higher than projected losses of $2.8 billion, with $1.8 billion in lost revenues attributed solely to the ash cloud. The cloud has already led to a sharp reduction in UK air passenger numbers, with the British Aviation Authority reporting a fall in passenger numbers at its airports of 22.7% in April compared with April 2009. The closure of Heathrow and Stansted airports alone cost BAA £28 million. The figures for May, published today, show a fall of 4.5% in passenger numbers compared with May 2009—admittedly, the industrial dispute affecting British Airways was also a factor—against an expected increase of 0.4% in passenger numbers this May.

EasyJet has reported that the disruption has cost it £75 million, with 215,000 passengers' travel plans disrupted and 1,600 flights cancelled. Virgin Atlantic reported 310 cancelled flights and more than 43,000 stranded passengers, with potential losses approaching £50 million. As the hon. Member for Stourbridge alluded to, last week easyJet revealed that it intends to work with Airbus to fit infrared cameras to its aircraft by the end of the year, in order to detect quantities of ash in the atmosphere using AVOID—the airborne volcanic object identifier and detector system. Will the Minister discuss with the Civil Aviation Authority whether the potential certification of the system being developed by easyJet will proceed without too many difficulties, if the initial tests prove successful? If similar technology is shown to work, will she direct the CAA to encourage other carriers to fit it to their aircraft? Does she agree that such technology is likely to diminish the prospects of large-scale disruption to carriers and passengers, should the ash cloud return to UK airspace over the coming years?

I have other points for the Minister to reflect upon in the debate or on another occasion. Will she liaise with her colleagues in other EU member states to ensure that there are no other supervening regulatory difficulties in achieving cross-European recognition for similar onboard volcanic ash particle detection systems in future? Can she confirm whether the Government have made a submission to the UN International Civil Aviation Organisation international volcanic ash taskforce, which is due to consider the provision of new guidance and standards to the aviation industry and, indeed, to national aviation authorities? Today is the conclusion of a meeting in Paris under the auspices of the ICAO to finalise proposals to amend the current volcanic ash contingency plans. Will the Minister inform hon. Members of any changes that the ICAO proposes to make to those plans?

An important issue is that of compensation for affected passengers. We know that EU regulation 261/2004 makes it clear that airlines are responsible for the welfare of passengers affected by the disruption, including providing subsistence and accommodation costs for the period in which they are stranded and are awaiting their flights. The European Transport Commissioner, Siim Kallas, was surely correct when he said in late April:

"EU law must be respected...There are no discount passenger rights for discount airlines."

Some of the airlines have pledged to process the majority of affected passengers' compensation claims by the end of July, but will the Minister impress on the airlines the anger that many affected passengers feel about the delays to the compensation payments to which they are entitled under EU law? Will she promote stronger action to ensure that passengers who, through no fault of their own, were left stranded for up to a fortnight are properly recompensed? Will the Minister and, indeed, the Secretary of State, resist any calls to weaken or dilute regulation 261/2004, which is surely an essential part of proper consumer protection law and of securing fairness for inconvenienced passengers?

We know that 2010 is the benchmarking year for aviation in the EU emissions trading scheme. Will the Minister make representations to the European Commission, perhaps in conjunction with the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, about the inability of airlines to generate revenue tonne kilometres during the period of the closure of UK airspace and the effects that that may have on the allocation of emissions permits commencing in 2012?

There are two priorities for us in this debate. First, the interests of passengers, who demand the highest standards of safety and consumer protection and, secondly, the need for the aviation industry to work collaboratively with the Civil Aviation Authority to ensure that we minimise any future disruption through the use of new technology and smarter regulation of UK airspace.

3.43 pm

Mrs Villiers: With the leave of the House, we have had a very constructive discussion. As the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Bain), correctly pointed out, the debate has been remarkably consensual and good natured across all parties. I fear he is correct that that will not necessarily be repeated on every occasion when we discuss transport matters in the main Chamber or this place.

Before dealing with hon. Members' individual points, I want to mention a subject that cuts across a number of the speeches made this afternoon: the impact of data. The lack of data about the impact of ash on engines was clearly a big part of the initial problems, and there was also a need for more data on identifying where the ash concentrations actually were. As I outlined in my speech, significant progress was made on that problem relatively rapidly, and progress has accelerated. However, all hon. Members who mentioned that matter were correct to say that efforts to ascertain the facts about those two issues are pivotal to ensuring that we have a robust regulatory framework under which safety is paramount and the disruption caused by volcanic ash episodes is minimised and reduced.

Work on that matter is continuing with airlines and, crucially, with aircraft and engine manufacturers. The CAA is also actively engaged with that work, as is the Department for Transport through the active and energetic involvement of the Secretary of State and Ministers, who are engaging with the process and encouraging progress to be made. Such work is obviously hugely important if we are to be successful in preventing a recurrence of disruption on the scale that we saw earlier this year. In that regard, work is also being done on test flights. That kind of data will be important in improving the regulatory framework and making progress on the matter.

A number of hon. Members asked whether there should have been more advance preparations and why the scale of disruption was so much more significant in this case than it has been in relation to other volcanic incidents around the world. That point leads me back to some of the remarks that I made at the start of my speech. It was the type of volcano and its location that played a significant part in the degree of disruption caused. The fact that the ash was particularly fine meant that it was dispersed over a wide area and, geographically, the volcano was close to a very congested area of airspace. That unfortunate combination played a significant part in the extent of the disruption caused and is one of the reasons why we must make progress in improving the robustness of the regulatory framework to deal with such an unprecedented situation.

Turning to some of the comments made about the efforts to repatriate passengers, I emphasise that work on that is under way. We all hope that there will not be significant disruption in the future, but we must prepare for the eventuality that it might occur. The Government as a whole, under the auspices of the civil contingencies secretariat in the Cabinet Office, are looking at contingency planning should there be another significant eruption. That work is considering all modes of transport, not just aviation. The Department for Transport is also working closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which would lead on the issue of repatriating stranded British nationals. We will be placing a priority on preparations for that kind of effort to deal with disruption, if such a situation occurs again.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) made some interesting remarks about Newcastle International airport, which has an important place in the economy—not just for her constituency, but for the north-east as a whole. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire

[Mrs Villiers]

(Heather Wheeler) also made it plain that regional airports play a significant part in regional economies. Many regional airports have experienced significant difficulties as a result of the ash crisis, which is certainly something that we will take on board.

On compensation, I am afraid that I cannot add to my previous remarks. We understand the concerns of the airlines, the airports and travel-related industries, but, in an era of constrained public finances, the issue of compensation is very difficult. The kind of compensation that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North would like to be paid simply might not be affordable, but we will be devoting care and attention to the matter before a final decision is made. She also emphasised the issues surrounding data, some of which I have already responded to.

I turn to the remarks of the right hon. Member for Gordon. He outlined some of his own travel problems, with which I have great sympathy. He was right to point out that it was, literally, an ill wind that blew nobody any good—although some of the train operators did quite well as a result of the crisis. He was also right to say that one of the things that we must work on, just in case these events recur in some form or other, is trying to get as much information to people as early as possible, so that they can plan their travel.

One of the Secretary of State's first acts was to release some of the hitherto classified Met Office data for five-day forecasts, to help the airlines plan in the eventuality of further disruption and, in turn, help their customers.

The right hon. Gentleman also rightly referred to the importance of improving work on forecasting the location of ash concentrations, and I have outlined that. He mentioned that the crisis had caused some people to reconsider their travel plans and to look at alternatives to flying. Some people did go through that process but, as the hon. Member for Glasgow North East also pointed out, the incident has shown us the important part that flying plays in our daily lives and our economy. Although it is useful to look at the environmental benefits associated with finding alternatives to flying, that is obviously not a solution when there is disruption on the scale that we experienced a few weeks ago.

The right hon. Member for Gordon went on to talk about losses at Aberdeen airport, and I think that I have covered that point. He also emphasised the importance of UK authorities working closely with European ones, and I can assure him that that is under way at the moment. He asked whether the UK needed special considerations and perhaps special rules, and whether we would always be in line with what the rest of Europe was doing. That is a point to note, because our being closer to the volcano than other countries has an impact on the decisions that we can make on airspace, and it perhaps played a part in the slight differences between the timings of the relaxation of restrictions. In response to what has been said by other hon. Members about the timing of that relaxation, it is worth bearing in mind that the work done by the CAA led the debate and formed one of the reasons why airspace across the rest of Europe was reopened. Some of the work done by the CAA was, I understand, adopted and used by other European countries in making their decisions to reopen their airspace.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire spoke very eloquently about East Midlands airport and its importance to her constituents, and also about Rolls-Royce's superb manufacturing facilities in her constituency. She told us about some of the difficulties that local residents had in getting home. She asked for leadership on the issue, and we are determined to provide that; I appreciate how important it is for all her constituents who work at East Midlands airport and at Rolls-Royce. We put this debate on the agenda this afternoon precisely to enable Members such as my hon. Friend to make those kinds of points, to listen to Parliament's concerns and to ensure that we provide the leadership needed to take forward the improvement to the regulatory system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Margot James) talked with eloquence about the inconvenience suffered by her constituents. I am sorry to hear that her election campaign was disrupted somewhat by the volcanic ash; that happened to a number of people. I had conversations with Conservative party HQ about the fact that Icelandic volcanoes were not included in its list of contingency plans for election tours. Nevertheless, the election efforts carried on undiminished. It was interesting to hear my hon. Friend's comments about the impact on Birmingham airport. She, too, emphasised the importance of further research on the impact of volcanic ash on engines—a point I think I have covered. She paid tribute to Willie Walsh for his work in a test flight, and she welcomed the work done by easyJet, with its AVOID system.

Turning to some of the questions asked by the hon. Member for Glasgow North East, I, colleagues and the CAA very much welcome easyJet's efforts to contribute to the debate. EasyJet's efforts and the technology that it is trialling are being carefully considered. The hon. Member for Glasgow North East urged us proceed swiftly to deliver safety certification, but I am sure that he would not suggest that we cut corners. Interesting work is being done, and no doubt the CAA will monitor it carefully and go through the appropriate steps to ascertain whether and when it might receive the safety certification that the hon. Gentleman has suggested. That is, however, a matter for the CAA to determine, taking into account all the relevant facts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) spoke with great authority about the impact of the crisis on both passengers and the aviation industry. One of his questions was about the famous Madrid coaches. I have a long, full list of coaches, which I do not propose to read out, but I can send it to him. The total number of passengers transferred from Spain to Calais was more than 1,000, with a significant number of coaches leaving from Madrid, Barcelona, Malaga and Alicante.

My hon. Friend also referred to the difficult issue of waiving night flight restrictions. For his information, night flight restrictions were waived briefly when airspace first reopened after the prolonged restrictions on flying. Making an exception to the night flight rules is always a very difficult decision. I am a strong supporter of the protection that people are given as a result of the restrictions on night flights but, given the scale of the emergency, it was felt that a brief relaxation was justified.

In the event of a similar emergency in the future, I am sure that airspace authorities would give careful and due consideration to the difficult competing concerns. One wants to make every possible effort to normalise travel as soon as possible, but night flights have a corrosive impact on people's quality of life and one therefore needs to act with extreme care, even when referring to only a very brief lifting of such important protections. My hon. Friend also urged me and my colleagues to work with the airlines, the agency and the industry on technology. We are definitely doing that—it is the only way forward. He also called for common sense to prevail, and I shall certainly try to ensure that that is the case.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North East asked a number of questions, some of which I have addressed already. He asked, in particular, whether the UK is working with ICAO on its work to revise the volcanic ash rules and the programme for Europe. Yes, work is going on with ICAO on precisely that. He also asked whether the Government would impress on the airlines the importance of paying out in line with their obligations under the denied boarding and cancellation rules. As I sought to set out in my opening remarks, we believe that, whatever debate there may be in the future about those rules, it is important that the airlines pay out under their legal obligations in the rules as currently drafted, and that claims are settled as expeditiously as possible. He was right to raise the concerns of those who are awaiting settlement of reasonable claims under the provisions.

The hon. Gentleman urged me to prevent any dilution of EC regulation 261/2004. We need to look at it in the round to see whether there are ways to make the whole system work in a better and fairer way. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, the matter will be discussed by EU Transport Ministers in the near future, at their next meeting.

Lastly, the hon. Gentleman spoke about adapting the allocation of emissions permits under the emissions trading scheme so that the interruption in flying does not have a distortive effect on the allocation of permits when that is decided. That is a fairly technical matter, but I hear the point he is making and shall pass his comments on to those in the Department who are dealing with the mechanics of getting the ETS into operation. We need to see whether we can ensure that the interruption of flying as a result of volcanic ash does not have a perverse or distortive effect on the decisions that will be made in the future on the allocation of emissions permits.

With that, I shall close. I am grateful to all right hon. and hon. Members for participating in this constructive debate on an issue that is extremely important to our economy, as well as to holidaymakers, as we make progress on improving the robustness of the regulatory framework and its response to volcanic ash.

Question put and agreed to.

4.1 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 15 June 2010

[MR. GARY STREETER *in the Chair*]

UK Parliamentary Sovereignty and the EU

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*(James Duddridge.)*

9.30 am

Mr William Cash (Stone) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak before you in this Chamber, Mr. Streeter. I would like to dedicate this debate to my mother, who died this past weekend, and to my father, who was killed in action in Normandy in the last war.

I heard today that Philip Ziegler's biography of Mr Edward Heath has just been published. I recall vividly a discussion that I had with Mr Heath in the Smoking Room on an anniversary of the D-day landings. It transpired that we had an enormous amount in common, which may seem very strange. I heard Philip Ziegler this morning describing Edward Heath as a person who stuck to his course, who did what he thought was necessary, and who was bloody-minded. That is not an uncommon characteristic of those of us who get entrenched in European battles.

I recall that Mr Heath was not much disposed to talk at the beginning. He had on an Artillery tie, and I asked him, "Why have you got that tie on?" He said, "It is because of today's commemoration." I mentioned the fact that my father had been killed in Normandy, where Mr Heath had fought at the same time. Interestingly—to me, at any rate—he then began to engage in earnest conversation and explained to me the real reason he took the line that he did on Europe, which I do not think has come out in some of the reviews of the book. He felt that if we did not take that line, the problems that he had witnessed in the war might well recur.

I also remember, while I am in historical mode, a Cabinet lunch in July 1990 to which I was unexpectedly invited. Margaret Thatcher, now Baroness Thatcher, invited me to No. 10. She said, "Today we will talk about Europe." There I was, surrounded by an impressive galaxy of Cabinet Members. She turned to me and asked, "Bill, what do you feel about Europe?" Rather taken aback, I said that I thought that her task was more difficult than Churchill's. She said, "Did everyone hear that? Bill says that my task is more difficult than Churchill's. Can you explain?" I said, "Yes, Prime Minister. He was faced with bombs and aircraft. You are faced with pieces of paper." That is the starting point of my concern about what has developed during the 26 years that I have had the honour of being a Member of this House.

The time has come for action. I quote a passage from "Julius Caesar":

> "There is a tide in the affairs of men
> Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
> Omitted, all the voyage of their life
> Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
> On such a full sea are we now afloat,
> And we must take the current when it serves,
> Or lose our ventures."

I believe that we are at such a moment.

It is ironic, perhaps, that this week there will be an incredibly important summit that will deal with the essence of our sovereignty in relation to the proposals for budgetary arrangements and the question of whether they would be presented to the European Commission before they are presented to this sovereign Parliament. Therefore, without overdoing it, I hope, I suggest that, as in the case of the passage I just read out, this is the moment when there will be those who will be seen at Philippi.

There are similar problems today in respect of the sovereignty of our country, our people and our Parliament, and we have a responsibility to deal with them analytically and politically. Sovereignty means supreme power or authority. It means a self-governing state. I hasten to add—this is for my hon. Friend the Minister, with whom I have had the pleasure of debating these matters over many years—that this debate is not specifically about getting out but about the practicalities of how we should now deal with the European issue. It is not about an abstraction but about the daily lives, economic and political, of those who vote us into this Parliament. It is about Euro-realism in the United Kingdom and in Europe as a whole.

This debate is about rules that do not work, economically or politically, and the need for radical reform of a system that has become uniform and inflexible, with the acquis communautaire, which has become sacrosanct and irreversible, and with majority voting and the pernicious system of co-decision. Barring only a total negotiated change by all 27 members in an association of nation states will problems be resolved. If and when that fails, we must assert the sovereignty of the UK Parliament to override this failing system. It is in our vital national interest to do so.

To give but one example of the problems, the system of co-decision is described by someone from the European Commission's Legal Service as creating a situation in which the European Parliament

> "is allowed to propose uniform, irrational, impractical amendments, safe in the knowledge that they have no responsibility for implementation."

Of course, that is compounded by the role of the European Court of Justice. If the Legal Service takes that view, and it is so seminal to the undermining of the sovereignty of this Parliament, a serious review is called for.

On the "Today" programme yesterday, I heard a pre-eminent German banker state that he believes that there will be "revolts in the street" in "ever higher frequency" and a kicking out of the Government. He described the situation as highly dangerous, and said that there were indications of revolution. Michael Sturmer, who was Chancellor Kohl's adviser, is also deeply disturbed, and Angela Merkel herself, who, by all accounts in today's paper, is in serious crisis with her coalition, acknowledged recently that Europe is in danger, as is the euro. So it is, and so are we.

We have already seen hundreds of thousands of people all over Europe coming out on to the streets, and the catastrophic failure in Greece. It is not as if this has not

[Mr William Cash]

been coming for decades. In a series of essays published in "Visions of Europe" in 1993, I warned of how the then new rules of economic and monetary union, which we opposed at Maastricht, would increase the likelihood of strikes and civil disorder but that there would be less and less practical accountability as the leaders of Europe withdrew from their responsibilities and handed over more decisions to unelected bankers and officials.

I then went on to warn of the neutering of national parliaments and the paralysis of Europe, which would

"give way to the...collapse of the Rule of Law, compounded by waves of immigration from the east, recession and lawlessness."

I say this not with any sense of self-congratulation—at the time of the Maastricht rebellion, we were under the most intense pressure to disavow what we were saying. I simply ask that, in all honesty—an eminent columnist wrote to me the other day and said that it was lacking—people admit that a problem exists and that it must be addressed.

The real question is what the UK and our coalition Government will do about the situation as it is now—as it has come about—and how they will lead the UK and Europe out of the predicted and present chaos which is damaging to the UK economy and democracy, and to individual European countries and Europe as a whole. That is a practical necessity requiring vision, statesmanship and political will. The argument, I would say, is over, and it is now down to action.

The European Communities Act 1972, as Lord Bridge said in the Factortame case, is a voluntary Act. European treaties are subordinate to Parliament—as I established in exchanges with the right hon. Members for Blackburn (Mr Straw) and for Rotherham (Mr MacShane) when they were Foreign Secretary and the Minister for Europe respectively—and that includes the Lisbon treaty. I have made that point consistently and repeatedly, and I have already made three speeches in the new Parliament on the issue. In January 2010, I set out the legal and constitutional case, and in this contribution I wish to concentrate more on the practical questions, as compared with the remedies that I proposed in my United Kingdom Parliamentary Sovereignty Bill.

Over many years, I have set out the case in correspondence with the current Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary for the immediate implementation of the sovereignty Bill. In my view, there is an unchallengeable, legal, political and constitutional case for that Bill, and a necessity to enact it immediately to underpin negotiations that are needed and which include, for example, talks that the Prime Minister will conduct this week in Brussels. The sovereignty Bill was in our manifesto. On 4 November 2009, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron), now Prime Minister, made a speech entitled, "A European policy that people can believe in", to which I replied in *The European Journal*. That was on my website during the general election.

Immediately before the general election, I intimated to the current Foreign Secretary that we needed the sovereignty Bill now, so as to underpin negotiations and deal with what appeared to be the inevitable and now present course of events. On 10 May, I wrote to the Prime Minister regarding those fundamental matters in the context of his pending negotiations for the coalition agreement. He replied on 21 June.

The situation has become significantly worse, including proposals in the context of majority voting for the sovereign right of the United Kingdom Parliament to receive and determine its own budget, which the Prime Minister will have to address this week. I regret to say that under the coalition agreement we are now reduced to a mere proposal for a commission to discuss sovereignty, not the manifesto commitment to pass the sovereignty Act on which we fought the election, and to which I referred in my commitments in my election material.

In my judgment, the sovereignty of the United Kingdom Parliament and the imminent practical necessity supersedes the compromises of a coalition. This is no time for dither or prevarication, or for too-clever-by-half manoeuvres by the Foreign Office or diplomats in the Committee of Permanent Representatives, or by others. This is a time for action. We are where we are, and we must address the present crisis that lies at the heart of our constitution and at the axis of our economic and political future.

On "The Andrew Marr Show" last Sunday, the Foreign Secretary replied to questions about the European proposals to submit the UK budget to European institutions before submission to the UK Parliament. He replied that those were only proposals and would be dealt with in due course, and that we will argue for that position and maintain it. So far, so good, but we heard nothing about the use of the veto, no doubt in the knowledge that the proposals will be dealt with by majority voting. There are times when issues cannot simply go on being deferred or avoided, as happened, for example, in very different times during the 1930s. We cannot expect that something will turn up, or that negotiations with recalcitrant parties will somehow succeed.

In 1986, I tabled an amendment to the Single European Act, which is where majority voting comes from. It was refused for debate but stated:

"Nothing in this Act shall derogate from the sovereignty of the United Kingdom Parliament."

It was supported by only one other Member of Parliament at the time, the right hon. Enoch Powell, who clearly understood why it was important.

There is also the question of the still outstanding Irish guarantees, which take us back to the Lisbon treaty and which we are told will be attached to the next accession treaty, possibly with Croatia. We will be denied a referendum on that, despite the accretion of powers to the European Union that it will involve. We have already been refused a referendum on that treaty, despite the fact that it fundamentally alters the constitutional relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union—a point that was outrageously denied by the outgoing Government but well understood by the Conservative Opposition during the last Parliament, and about which I made a minority report in the European Scrutiny Committee.

Why can France, Holland, Denmark, Ireland, Spain and other European countries have referendums, yet we deny one to our own people? There is also the question of what are, in my view, the unlawful guarantees given by the former Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the Greek bail-out. I tabled questions on that, but I have received no satisfactory answers. They appear to have been thrust under the carpet, despite exposing the fact that the UK taxpayer has been saddled with about £12 billion of commitments. That is against the background

of the current Government debt and deficit, which is second only to Greece. It is compounded by our being the second greatest contributor to the European Union, with costs rising to £6.6 billion for 2010-11. According to the TaxPayers Alliance, the European Union costs individual British taxpayers £2,000 each per annum, which they certainly cannot afford. In the context of that broad landscape, I have to ask what it is in return for.

Furthermore, there is the proposed European tax on our financial services sector, which infringes the sovereign right of taxation of the UK Parliament, not to mention the European regulation of the City of London, about which I have written in the *Financial Times* on many occasions over the past few years, and spoken in the House. That tax is again by majority vote, and the jurisdiction—as with all European legislation—is with the European Court of Justice over and above the Bank of England and/or the Financial Services Authority.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman talks about the costs of the European Union. Does he accept that other additional costs go beyond those that he has mentioned? Because of the European Union, economic growth has been slower than it would otherwise have been. If one adds up the cumulative loss of growth over 30 years or more, it represents a considerable cost to Britain. Additionally, there is the higher cost of food which is a result of being a member of the common agricultural policy.

Mr Cash: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his consistent, persistent predictions, all of which have proved to be right, even if he and I may differ as to what use we would make of the sovereignty if it were reclaimed. The right hon. Peter Shore became a good friend of mine, and during the Maastricht debates, he and I debated issues of the kind raised by the hon. Gentleman. We can honestly say that we did our best and that what we demonstrated has occurred.

The hon. Gentleman's point about costs raises the question of over-regulation and competition. Professor Roland Vaubel of Mannheim university has written on that matter, calling it a form of "regulatory collusion" between the Governments of the member states, with member states using majority voting to create competitive advantage. Vaubel shows that regulation is explicitly used as a means of raising rivals' costs. People must take that seriously. That is what is going on; it is a form of warfare—as Clausewitz would have said, "War by any other means". Indeed, Germany followed that model, led by Prussia in a majority coalition after 1871. As with so much of what goes on today, much has already happened in the creation of modern Germany.

There is also the problem of over-regulation calculated by the British Chambers of Commerce in its "Burdens Barometer", written by Tim Ambler and Francis Chittenden. It shows that in both the United Kingdom and Europe, 70% of over-regulation comes from the European Union, which since 1998 has cost the British economy £76.8 billion.

One of the most invasive legal obligations is the working time directive, which came through the Single European Act. Despite my warnings to the then Government, that directive was misleadingly included in a declaration in that Act, which the Court of Justice subsequently ruled, as I had expected, as a legal obligation—a costly mistake, which has to be reversed. Even the noble Lord Mandelson stated—as did his fellow EU Commissioner Mr Verheugen—that the over-regulation that so undermines EU and UK competitiveness, with China and India for example, amounts to as much as 4% of GDP. Indeed, we heard yesterday that the noble Lord Young of Graffham will lead a review of health and safety legislation. I trust that that review will recognise that so much of this damaging legislation—some of which is necessary—comes from the European Union, and particularly from the powers made under the so-called precautionary principle, which bypasses judicial review and is used by the Court of Justice. That principle will need to be overridden—as will so many other laws—under the sovereignty Act that I propose. That same principle applies in the fields of environmental and consumer protection law, and it is therefore pervasive.

Kelvin Hopkins: I apologise for interrupting the hon. Gentleman's flow yet again, but he made a point about competitiveness. There might be many differences between the two of us on economics, but had Britain been a member of the eurozone we would not have been able to depreciate and our competiveness, compared with India and China, would have been even worse.

Mr Cash: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman is, as ever, slightly ahead of my curve, but I now move on to the next point.

We hear from the Prime Minister that we want the eurozone to be stable. I have argued for many years that an imploding European Union is not in our national interest. I have been saying that for 20 years; I thought that it would occur, and it has. What has been needed is a realignment of European institutions and Europe itself into an association of nation states, precisely to avoid the implosion that is taking place. Only a few months ago, the Prime Minister himself referred to the desirability of our forming ourselves into an association of member states, which I take to be much the same idea.

The Lisbon agenda has failed. I railed against the stability and growth pact in 1996, when the now Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), was Chancellor of the Exchequer. I wrote to Members of Parliament in reply to his letter, indicating that I did not think that the pact could work. It has failed, and with it, the rule of law. Yet, here they are: I heard Madame Lagarde only yesterday talking about bringing it back again, as if experience cannot be seen for what it is. Experience, in my judgment, crushes hope.

The common agricultural policy, the common fisheries policy and the EUROSTAT statistical system have all failed. I believe that the latter is at the heart of the problem in relation to—let us put it bluntly—the lies that were told about the Greek economy. EU origin marking causes enormous damage to the third world, as the committee of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) demonstrated the other day. We had an interesting analysis from the global governance commission in Washington, which emphasised over and over that the EU origin marking system was one of the major problems for the third world.

[Mr Cash]

There is endemic fraud. The Maastricht deficit criteria of 3% is nothing short of a joke, with massively seriously consequences for the voters in this country and throughout Europe, who are subjected to bungled economic management, and massively increasing debt, with the hidden costs of up to £3.1 trillion——in our own case in real terms—which cannot be swept away. The budget deficit proposals of £6 billion are a mere sop in relation to the mismanagement that is coming through Europe and affecting our economy as well, and we will not convince the bond markets or the rating agencies, which determine our ratings in the global marketplace.

As I have said, we were told by the Prime Minister that we need a strong eurozone, because 50% of our trade is with that zone. However, the eurozone is imploding, and Angela Merkel and 68% of the German people are opposed to the Greek bail-out, precisely because the whole economic and political structure of the European Union does not work.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again, in this very timely debate. I am listening with great interest to him analysing the situation, both within and without the eurozone. Does he agree with me that if we do not move now and grasp the nettle—as he has accurately said we should—one of the political problems will be the rise of the far right across Europe, which preys on the very fears and concerns that we all know are out there, and which we have seen emerge from time to time in various nation states?

Mr Cash: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman, and in my essay in "Visions of Europe" in 1993 I said exactly that—that that would be the consequence of the lawlessness that would follow. The problem is that it is not good enough to wring our hands and say, "Oh well, we'd like this to be better," or "We're going to go along with it." We have to have a radical policy based on proper analysis. I wait to hear what my hon. Friend the Minister says, but I cannot believe that he could seriously disagree with anything I have said. These are factual questions. If it is just a matter of culture or attitude: "Oh well, we want to be good Europeans," or "We don't want to face up to these things," or "People such as Bill Cash are just Europhobes who go around ranting about Europe and banging on"—

Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con): No.

Mr Cash: I am glad that my hon. Friend has made the inevitable harrumph, but the matter needs to be taken extremely seriously. Europe does not work as it is now devised; it is pre-eminently a practical matter. It is no good our being committed to a eurozone that is so undermined by its own institutional inadequacies and contradictions, by the diversity of its different economies, and by the real requirements of the voters and the business community in each country. Is it all so difficult, complicated and entrenched that nothing can be done, or do we roll up our sleeves and get down to resolving it? I suggest that at the summit this week we at least start to get serious about the nature of the problem. Europe does not work, not only because of over-regulation and the irreversibility of the acquis communautaire, but because it is essentially undemocratic and authoritarian, which is dangerous, as both German and Greek commentators agreed only yesterday. And it is not only one or two commentators; that view is becoming endemic and demonstrable.

The whole of Europe is trembling and action is needed now. There are those, such as Ambrose Evans-Pritchard of *The Daily Telegraph*, Martin Wolf and Ralph Atkins of the *Financial Times*, Walter Munchau, Stephen Glover, Andrew Alexander and a growing band of Euro-realist Members of Parliament who are beginning to speak out, and many who have done so over many years. In Holland, the general election left its message on the table—in France and Germany, the same. Across the entire breadth of the continent, in Italy, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria, in the referendums that have taken place and in the ditching of the constitutional treaty, which was then supplanted by the Lisbon treaty—virtually the same thing—people are disillusioned with the European Union and demand change and action, yet we are still presented with a policy of further enlargement, against which I have argued for many years. In the leader in today's *Financial Times* we hear more about Europe's debt crisis. It states:

"Europe's sovereign debt worries have prompted parallels to...2008",

and

"crisis management is not the same as crisis resolution."

On enlargement, only last week *The Spectator* devoted its leader to the proposal for Turkish accession. It is clear that Turkey is moving towards accession, and on both economic and political grounds it should not be regarded as a prospective member of the club, given its current dealings with Syria, Iran and the middle east. As is so often the case in the political and economic sphere, the problem with enlargement is that European Union policies, once espoused, are deemed irreversible. Just when decentralisation and democracy—listening to the people and involving them and the big society in our Government—have become so essential, the institutions and governmental establishments of the European Union and each of the member states career ever more wildly into crisis.

Recently, we have had the experience of the European arrest warrant. The absorption of our criminal justice system is yet another area of deep concern. Under a European arrest warrant, Mr Arapi, a British resident from Leek, in Staffordshire, was convicted in his absence and sentenced to 15 years. We have the inconceivable and unacceptable vision of a British judge ordering Mr Arapi's extradition, when there is apparently overwhelming evidence that he was not where he was said to have been when he was supposed to have committed a murder in Italy. The whole project is flawed from beginning to end and must be radically reformed, or else.

I turn now to the European Scrutiny Committee. Parliament has a system for dealing with many of the problems that I have outlined or, at any rate, for alerting Members of Parliament to what is going on. I regret to say that the Committee is still not sitting, despite the fact that Parliament has now been back for a couple of weeks. I have been on the Committee for 26 years, sometimes in adverse circumstances; it has been difficult to be heard, let alone listened to and certainly agreed with, despite much evidence. While in opposition in the last two years of the previous Parliament, the Conservative

party achieved remarkable unity on the European issue and the Lisbon treaty, barring just one vote on the sovereignty of the United Kingdom.

Although the manner in which Parliament deals with European legislation has been subjected to a number of improvements, we have not gone far enough. Indeed, the present Home Secretary made some significant proposals for reforming European scrutiny. She agreed to adopt my proposal that if the European Scrutiny Committee recommends a European matter for debate, and 150 Members of Parliament propose that it is a matter of national interest, it should be subjected to a free vote on the Floor of the House—I say "vote", not "take-note motion", because that is one of the problems. She also proposed that the Committee meet in public, as many of us have advocated for some time. After the issue was finally voted on by the Committee, it was abandoned, and it must be revived.

In my 26 years on the Committee, the establishment and the Government of the United Kingdom have always ensured that there is a majority in favour of European proposals that emanate from Brussels. Matters may be recommended for debate in a European Standing Committee—sometimes by a majority vote—but no vote in such a Committee ever goes against the Government. If one ever does, it is immediately reversed on the Floor of the House as being inconsistent with the European Communities Act 1972. That is no way to proceed. Not one vote has ever gone against Brussels legislation in my 26 years on the Committee. Only last week, a Cabinet Office Minister indicated that there were no proposals for a sovereignty Act to alter that disgraceful state of affairs.

That is how the European Scrutiny Committee functions. I have been on it long enough to know that not one single vote on any European legislation that has been through a European Standing Committee on the recommendation of my Committee has ever been passed on the Floor of the House, and I challenge anyone to come forward with an example. We have take-note motions, Adjournment debates and general European affairs debates, but we do not have votes on seminal matters of the kind I have described.

Whatever the merits of the national interest, which I have already described, it is vital to create a requirement, set out by our Prime Minister in 2005 when he referred to an imperative requirement to achieve competitiveness in the British economy. The European Scrutiny Committee is called in for debates, but issues are not voted on, which makes the process intrinsically futile. The Committee is important, but it must be reformed and improved, although improvements are taking place.

The Committee has the power to impose a scrutiny reserve while debates take place, but it is sometimes overridden out of what is described as urgent necessity. In any case, such measures merely hold down the European juggernaut for the time being, and there is no resistance whatever to majority votes in the Council of Ministers being imposed on the UK Parliament. A work by Sanoussi Bilal and Madeleine Hosli states what some of us know already, although it is worth recording. They say that in the EU,

"a major difficulty arises from the lack of transparency of the decision-making process. In particular, decisions by the Council seldom result in a formal vote, but are rather taken by consensus (or without a vote when no obvious blocking minority has formed)...why would a minority member state cast a vote against the majority knowing it is doom to lose anyway, unless it wants to make public its disagreement. Therefore, most of the time, formal votes at the Council level merely represent the tip of the iceberg of the coalition-building and decision-making process."

Given that the enormous matters we are discussing affect the entire British economy in one form or other, and given what is at stake, only some of which I have indicated, it is inconceivable that there should be such incredible problems in the fault-lines of the system that has been devised. Once again, the issue needs to be taken extremely seriously, but I wonder whether it will be. If it is not, there will be difficulties of a kind that I do not need to specify.

The Back-Bench business committee proposals, which will come before the House this afternoon, do not include European documents, although the proposals would not seem to preclude votes on European affairs, unless such matters were taken only in Westminster Hall, and that highly contentious question will no doubt be debated this afternoon. We therefore have debates on European matters without votes, on a take-note basis. Much business is conducted behind the scenes in Brussels by the United Kingdom Permanent Representation to the European Union and COREPER, using their own arcane procedures. It is conducted within and parallel to the European establishment and it is intertwined with it. Why and how can that be allowed to continue?

Not only is most business conducted behind closed doors, but the majority voting system itself is not transparent. More often than not, we do not even know which way the UK will have voted or whether it will have deliberately abstained—we know a bit more about the German situation—to acquiesce in or even appease the European institutional consensus. At the same time, the UK Parliament, and therefore the British people, are bypassed and stitched up.

Recent events relating to the 1922 committee concern the independence of Conservative Back Benchers, but the same applies to the parliamentary Labour party. It is essential that those of us on the Back Benches have systems, mechanisms and procedures that can act as a safety valve. We do not necessarily want those things because we want to act in a hostile manner or to be difficult or awkward, but because there is an alternative view, and expressing it is part of our freedom of speech and vitally affects the interests of those who vote us into this place.

The BBC has consistently declined to give proper coverage to the European issue and has adopted that policy with tenacity and editorial contrivance since the 1950s, as has been well documented. Anyone who raises serious and seminal questions about the European issue—most of their predictions have turned out to be true—tends to be regarded as Europhobic or worse.

What can now be said with certainty is that, as we speak, our economy, our democracy and our constitution are on the line. This week, the summit will discuss proposals for our Budget to be presented to the European institutions before our Parliament sees it. There may be attempts to create some obscurantist device, perception or spin to make it look as if these things are not really happening or that they are all happening under the aegis of the majority vote. At last, however, the penny has begun to drop. The mask is being stripped away. Our national interest is at stake, and the need for

[Mr Cash]

political will to reaffirm the sovereignty of the British people through their representative Parliament has become paramount in the national interest, as is there for all to see.

This critical summit is the time for us and the European Union to face up to action and reality. Let us put our commitment to a sovereignty Act on the table this week. Let negotiations commence between all 27 member states for a voluntary association of nation states to get *out of the mess that exists*, which will get worse. Even the Prime Minister has recently put forward the idea of an association of member states. If that falls on deaf ears at the European Council, let those member states who want to, including Germany and France, use the enhanced co-operation procedure for a fiscal and political union—a new Zollverein with a new treaty—with a referendum here in Britain on the proposals; for they will affect us in a fundamental change in our relationship with the European Union. We can remain with other like-minded states in an associated status within the amended European arrangements, as I proposed in my pamphlet of 2000 called, in deference to Churchill's time-honoured phrase, "Associated, Not Absorbed".

10.10 am

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): May I say first what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship this morning, Mr. Streeter, and secondly may I convey my sympathy to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr Cash) on his bereavement? I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising this important debate. I thought it important to come along and put a democratic socialist perspective, arriving at the same conclusions from a different perspective on the European Union.

This is a critical time in the development of the European Union and in Britain's history. The European Union and, indeed, Britain, are suffering severe economic difficulties. The eurozone is in crisis and the plans of the extreme federalists are unravelling before our eyes. That is a welcome movement, and is happening not before time. It is possible that Germany is in the process of re-establishing the Deutschmark, or a Deutschmark area. It has great difficulty in doing that, because it is so exposed to other member states of the European Union, which have great economic difficulties, but that shows the folly of imposing a single currency on different economies, with different levels of economic success. It does not work and on many occasions elsewhere it has been proved not to work.

The peoples of Europe are deeply sceptical about the European Union and the direction that it has taken. The danger, as the hon. Gentleman said, is that there could be a rise in nationalism as a reaction. Such a reaction results from the fact that the peoples are not listened to. The opposition to much of what the European Union has been doing recently comes from the left. The referendum in France was won—that is the sense in which I see it—by people of the left. The left was also in the lead in the Dutch referendum. Even to go back to the Swedish referendum on joining the euro, which was another substantial no vote, it was the left—trade unionists, socialists and social democrats—who pressed that case.

Over and again I have to point out that, although we keep talking about Europe, we are discussing not Europe but the European Union. Europe is a geographical entity with many historical and cultural links. The European Union is an invention of humankind, imposing a political structure on many of the nations of Europe, but it is not Europe itself. Although I may be accused of being a Europhobe I genuinely love Europe. I am culturally European. Clearly, Britain is European. I love European music, languages and literature. I love and enjoy everything about Europe, but I do not approve of the European Union.

Mr Cash: In relation to art, music and culture, and in every other way, I endorse what the hon. Gentleman says 100 per cent.

Kelvin Hopkins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that positive intervention. In a few weeks I shall be sojourning in Provence, sampling wonderful European wine, listening to music and so on. Europe is a wonderful place, but the European Union is deeply flawed.

The hon. Gentleman has said that even this week the European Union is trying to interfere and to impose its will on Britain's decisions about its budgetary situation and economic policies. That was reported yesterday in the *Evening Standard*, so it is not going away. I hope and trust that the new Government will tell the European Union in no uncertain terms that decisions about our budgetary and economic policies will be decided by the British Government, who will be accountable to the British Parliament, and will not be determined by the European Union. Perhaps the EU is under the illusion that it can manage Britain as well as it has managed the eurozone. That would lead us pretty much into disaster.

While I am on the question of the European Union's recent policies, I shall mention enlargement. It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman mentioned Edward Heath. I listened to one of his last speeches to Parliament before he retired 10 years ago, and he made a strong point to the effect that enlargement would not work. He was against it. I do not speak for or against it today, but Edward Heath was strongly opposed to it because he thought that a European Union covering more than the developed nations of western Europe would not work. He wanted a deeper and stronger European Union, possibly with a single currency, but he believed that it could not work if it were to be widely enlarged. One of the reasons I have supported enlargement is that I believed it could weaken the European Union. That may be a cynical view, but I thought that over time people would realise that ramming countries or nation states together in that way would not ultimately work. Therefore I have gone along with enlargement. I think it is a way of ensuring that in the end people come to their senses.

I am not against international alliances or co-operative relationships with all our neighbours. Indeed, those are vital. I am sure that everyone would be in favour of those things if they were based on democratic Governments agreeing to work together for mutual benefit on behalf of their peoples. That is what the European Union should become, in my view. We must stop the drive towards a federal Europe now, retain what sovereignty we have, and begin to roll things back: the EU and what it has taken over from Britain and other member states.

I have often mentioned my concern about the common fisheries policy, which is completely barmy. I think that Edward Heath decided at the last minute that we should

go into that, but it has been disastrous. Some of the biggest fisheries in Europe are Britain's, and the EU itself has reported, in the past week or two, that 30 per cent. of fish stocks are at the point of collapse, and all fisheries are being overfished. The only way to overcome that is for fisheries to be restored to member states, which will then have the sense of ownership and responsibility for managing the areas in question. Then fish stocks can start to recover. Reforms have taken place and there are non-fishing areas, but it will not work until member states take over responsibility for their historic fisheries and husband them as they did in the past.

The costs of agriculture are enormous and every member state in the European Union has its own approach. Some are more agricultural than others. We are one of the most efficient agricultural nations, but that is only a small part of our economy. Other countries are overwhelmed by agricultural costs and inefficient, small-scale agriculture, but it is up to those member states to manage their own agriculture. If we need to transfer revenues between member states, that can be done on a voluntary basis, and if poorer states need to be sustained by richer states perhaps fiscal transfers can take care of that. The common agricultural policy distorts the whole of agriculture and operates in an inequitable way. Some member states pay more than they should and some receive more than they should, in a way that bears little relationship to their relative wealth. We should start to roll back agricultural policy.

I hope that the Government will give notice that we want to return to a world in which member states manage their own fisheries—an abandonment of the common fisheries policy. If other member states or the European Union refuse, Britain should give notice that, after a period, we would re-establish control of our historic fishing grounds. I hope that that would put sufficient pressure on the EU to make some sense of it.

The real question is one of democracy—of whether the populations of the various member states have control of their own destinies and can choose to be free market capitalist or democratic socialist countries. I have campaigned all my life for a democratic socialist Britain, and I do not want that possibility to be taken away by EU bureaucrats. Equally, some want to see a more free market capitalist world in Britain. We will not want bureaucrats in Brussels telling us that we cannot do things if the people of Britain have chosen to go in those directions. It is about democracy. One of the great advantages of our system of government is that when the population gets fed up with the Government or do not like what they are doing, it can kick them out and put in another Government with a different view. The essence of democracy is a real choice of policy in how people are governed.

British economic policy should be decided by British Governments that are elected by the British electorate. As and when we need to co-operate with other member states and other nations, we should do so on a democratically agreed basis. I am sure that that would be most agreeable to everyone, as well as being beneficial. It would also help us resist the tendency to nationalism. If people become frustrated about the EU and the lack of democracy, they may turn to other forms of politics, some of which would be much more unpleasant—one such is nationalism—and there is talk, even in Germany, of serious disorder if things are not made democratic. If the Germans and the Greeks can decide their future, so can we. Although we have friendly relations with other member states, if we rather than the European Commission and the European Union were able to decide our future, everyone would be a lot happier. The danger of extreme politics would go.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): I am listening carefully to my hon. Friend, and I share most of his views. Does he agree that one of the mistakes made by our trade union and labour movement—it was a historic and democratic mistake—was to be persuaded by Delors that we could more easily get a shift to the left and more trade union rights via the back door of the European Union, then the Common Market, than by winning the argument in this country?

Kelvin Hopkins: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. The fear was that the only way to roll back what was then described as Thatcherism was by going along with the European Union. The TUC flip-flopped right over from being critical and sceptical about Europe to being enthusiastic. Subsequently, however, judgments have been made by the European Court against trade unions and in favour of employers, because it thinks that they interfere with how the market should operate. The trade unions, and even John Monks, a great enthusiast for the European Union, are becoming more sceptical.

Mr Cash: May I mention again the extremely important paper written by Professor Roland Vaubel of Manheim university on the raising of rivals' costs? Much of that is to do with labour regulation. I shall give the hon. Gentleman a copy, as it demonstrates how regulatory collusion can create disadvantages for certain countries.

Kelvin Hopkins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. I take a slightly different view on some of these things because I think that trade union rights should be decided though the democratic governance of member states.

International involvement comes through the International Labour Organisation, with its minimum standards for labour regulation. That is where we should stand, but we fall below those standards. I want us to move forward and restore trade union and worker rights at least to the ILO standards, in many ways going back to the sort of regime we had in the past. That would not be agreeable to the Government, no doubt; and other countries, too, might choose another approach. However, that is the approach that I would like to see, and I would like to see it voted on by the working people of Britain, who I hope would support the election of a Labour Government committed to re-establishing trade union and worker rights. It is another example of democracy. I do not want to see the European Union telling me or other trade unionists or socialists that we cannot legislate in a particular way. We should decide our trade union rights, not the EU.

The EU and its ultra-federalists have over-reached themselves. It is time to roll back the EU, and restore sovereignty and democracy to member states. Member states may choose to go down a socialist road or a non-socialist road, but the direction should be down to them and to their electorates and peoples. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising this important subject, and I hope that my brief comments are helpful.

10.25 am

Mr Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I apologise, Mr Streeter, for having missed the opening of the debate and the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr Cash).

I see this debate as being divided into two sections. Sovereignty of Parliament is questioned—indeed, threatened—by the development of the European Union. That may be so if custom and usage has a part in it; sovereignty of Parliament is the profound constitutional doctrine that has determined the course of our development over nearly three centuries. I do not see that concept being threatened for as long as the judges apply it.

The conflict that arises with the European Union is entirely of Parliament's making. If there is a conflict, it is because Parliament assents to each and every dreadful transfer of powers—powers of initiation, and powers of legislation—to the EU. The conflict lies with Parliament asserting—contrary, I would argue, to the will of the people—that all these transfers and mechanisms used by the EU are appropriate. That will doubtless be the Government's position today; they will fudge along, arguing that we are, of course, taking strong measures to protect our sovereignty. However, there is no need to protect our sovereignty if we in Parliament are clear about its relationship with the people.

I have argued during my time as a Member of the House of Commons that it is not the sovereignty of Parliament in the current age but the sovereignty of the British people that matters, and that for as long as Governments are not prepared to refer the issues involved in that concept to the people themselves, then the question of legitimacy arises. Those are the issues that I think thread through the problem.

Anyone who has experienced modern British government knows the tyranny of the majority; the sovereignty of Parliament can indeed assert itself and, as a raw concept, be a great tyranny. Instead of the old traditions, with Governments attempting to win arguments to pursue their policies, they now resort to sheer, simple, straightforward majoritarianism. It is evidenced, of course, in the proceedings of the House, where guillotines are the order of the day. No one can say, in a proper and reliable sense, that the sovereignty of Parliament rests upon consent, in the sense that due and proper process, the seeking of an argument and the ability to develop an argument, is scrupulously observed by Parliament.

In respect of the European Union, one speech on what was happening was perhaps the best that I ever heard. Leaving aside all the manoeuvrings, it was an observation made on 28 February 1992, when I was moving my Referendum Bill on Maastricht, that it was incredible that what will now be two generations of those who had run our country's affairs were prepared to surrender that thing which this island, this nation, had believed was among its crown jewels—self-government. That is what this conflict is about.

In my lifetime, Governments of both parties have, since the referendum, pursued the giving away of whole areas of self-government. The hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) referred to the right of others to determine our employment laws and the relationship with the trade union movement. Such matters were brought up by Peter Shore, whom we remember as the author of Gaitskell's "a thousand years of history" speech. That was not a rabid anti-European Community measure, or the Common Market as it was then called, but a speech made in the absence of knowing what this would lead to—cautious, intelligent and well worth reading today.

Why have the two generations who have run our public policy pursued a policy that undermines the very sense of sovereignty of the British people, and done so often contrary to the wishes of the parties—it destroyed Major—and the people, as regularly diagnosed by public opinion polls? Those who make the laws are accountable. That is what self-government is about in a democratic age. They are accountable to the people, in our instance; hence, I call it the sovereignty of the people. What in those relationships makes the European Union, to which we have outsourced the making of our laws, accountable to the British people? Of course it is not accountable, nor was it ever intended to be. The biography of Edward Heath was mentioned; his regard for the wholehearted consent of the British people was contemptuously disregarded. It took Mr Wilson and a split Labour Cabinet to give a "sort of" referendum to the British people on something of which Mr Gaitskell would have said, "We do not know where this leads". And we did not know where it led.

I praise my hon. Friend the Member for Stone for initiating this wide-reaching debate about where we are and the significance of what we should be. I stand, as does my hon. Friend, for the British people in this argument. In the end, those who give cast-iron guarantees on referendums, or otherwise, destroy faith and trust in themselves and in our system. This debate gives us a way forward to show that our political parties believe in their people, their nation and the trust conferred when they make a pledge.

10.33 am

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see you chairing the debate, Mr Streeter. Following the contributions this morning, I think the Minister and I will be the more pro-European contributors, which is perhaps ironic. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stone (Mr Cash) on securing the debate and on his consistency, constancy and determination. I am sure he will apply as much rigour to his scrutiny of the new Minister for Europe as he did to that of the previous one; indeed, if anything I suspect his scrutiny will increase slightly. I am sure he will look forward to that. I, too, pass on my condolences to the hon. Gentleman; he spoke movingly about his father and mother. Many of the positions we adopt on European matters spring not only from an intellectual position but from an emotive argument that has sustained itself in our hearts. I do not say it is a bad thing; it is an entirely laudable one.

One area on which I agree with the hon. Gentleman is European scrutiny: we still do not do it properly—not only in this House but across Parliament. It tends to be done by a very small number of people who could perhaps be described as obsessives or anoraks—I include the hon. Gentleman, my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) and myself in that category—and we need to find a means of doing it better. The hon. Gentleman is right: we rarely vote on European matters and that ought to change. I have never understood why European affairs debates have to

be on the motion for the Adjournment or a general debate. I do not know why they cannot be on a substantive motion before the House, which might encourage the Whips to take a greater interest in ensuring that more people attend such debates, and might extend the range of issues that we discuss. The focus is often narrow—on what is going on in the European Union—rather than broad.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton North and I both nominated the same person for leadership of our party, but we may end up voting for different candidates. I say gently that I also believe in democratic socialism, but I do not believe that it can be built in one country alone. We have to strive for it internationally, because the rights and principles that one adheres to apply to all.

Kelvin Hopkins: The candidate that my hon. Friend and I nominated is a Eurosceptic.

Chris Bryant: Which shows what a generous soul I am.

It is good to see the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr Shepherd) in his place. He pointed out that Parliament consistently assents to such measures, which relates to the point I made earlier about the European Union and scrutiny in this House. Parliament assented originally in the European Communities Act 1972, and we continue to assent every time we choose not to have a vote, and every time we choose to do so and vote in favour. In a sense, therefore, the nub of the question about sovereignty is rather different.

Mr Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Bryant: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind I will not give way, which means I will shut up sooner. He spoke for some time and we want to hear from the new Minister.

There are some significant paradoxes and problems facing the Union. We all rightly fight for fiscal autonomy for each of the member states, but also know that we are economically interdependent. If the euro collapsed it would be bad for the British economy, not least because to all intents and purposes, in many regards we are Europe's banker. We want the rest of Europe to shoulder more of the security burden around the world, particularly in Afghanistan. At the same time, the only way we can achieve that is by cajoling and persuading. We want Europe to punch its weight in relation to the emerging economies—Brazil, Russia, India, China and so on—but we rely on self-discipline to achieve that and often, self-discipline does not work when Russia holds out its paw with an enormous financial offer.

We want better protection—for instance, for British people who have chosen to live in Spain and whose houses are being pulled down—but we are not prepared to ensure that Europe has the enforcement powers when rights are not being protected. We want better EU regulations so that financial services organisations in Cyprus, for instance, do a better and more legitimate job, but at the same time we want to ensure the autonomy of the UK financial services industry. We want Romania and Bulgaria to be members of the Union, but at the moment I can see no prospect of allowing Romanians and Bulgarians to work in the UK. I suspect that the same might be true of Croatia and the other countries we hope will become members of the European Union in the near future, such as the western Balkan countries. We want them to join, but I suspect that the Government want a derogation so that those nationals cannot enjoy freedom of employment in the UK from day one; perhaps the Minister will clarify that point later.

Likewise, I have always considered the operation of the common agricultural policy immoral in many ways, as other countries are unable to compete because we subsidise so much. At the same time, if there was not a common agricultural policy there would be a French, Italian, German or Greek one, which could be considerably worse. There is a constant clash at the heart of Europe between subsidiarity and collective action, and now is a key moment in European politics to decide how to reconcile such issues. I suspect that such a reconciliation will happen at a dinner on Wednesday evening when Angela Merkel and President Sarkozy meet up. Let me say gently to the Minister that I hope he ends up joining the European People's party, because it is easier to do business sitting at the table when the decisions are being made, rather than waiting for the moment after the decisions have been made by the big players.

The hon. Member for Stone did not refer much to his or the Government's sovereignty of Parliament Bill. I have expressed views on the matter before, so I will not bore the Chamber with them again. Suffice it to say that it will either mean nothing because Parliament is already sovereign—it could, if it wanted to, withdraw from the European Communities Act 1972, it could repeal the Act or decide that the legislation no longer applies—or it will mean something, in which case this House can say, "We don't care what has been decided through the co-decision process; we simply disagree." It could say, "I don't care whether the Government have signed up to it; we disagree and we are going to strike down that legislation." Such a move, however, is potentially very dangerous because it puts us on course for leaving the Union.

I have a few questions for the Minister. He told us that there would be a new Europe Committee—a Cabinet Sub-Committee. Has it met yet and is it to meet in public? It will be fascinating to see the Deputy Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary publicly debating Europe. Will the Committee include Members from the devolved Administrations in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland? Some of the issues that come up at such meetings are devolved responsibilities, so there might be a particular value in including those Members. I have similar questions about the committee on parliamentary sovereignty. Who will chair it and who will be on it? When will it meet and what resources will it have? Will it effectively be a parliamentary commission, and if not how will it conduct its business; and when will it complete its work? Finally, what is its precise position on whether Britain and countries outside the euro should be required to present their budgets to the Commission? It seems bizarre that the European Union or the Commission—in whatever format—should be able to have sight of a British Budget before the British Parliament.

10.43 am

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr Cash) on securing this debate, and also express my

[Mr David Lidington]

sincere condolences to him on the recent death of his mother. He clearly set out his views on sovereignty. In the last Parliament, he championed the United Kingdom Parliamentary Sovereignty Bill to allow for further debate and consideration of such matters. As my hon. Friend knows, the Government are now considering a United Kingdom sovereignty Bill, and the programme for government agreed by both parties in the coalition states:

"We will examine the case for a Bill to make it clear that ultimate authority remains with Parliament."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr Shepherd) pointed out, the common law is clear; Parliament is sovereign. European Union law takes effect in this country only by virtue of an Act of Parliament: The European Communities Act 1972 states that European Union law should have primacy. That means national laws, including Acts of Parliament, must be interpreted in such a way as to comply with EU rules. Where the two are incompatible, UK law is disapplied. The 1972 Act, therefore, gives EU law primacy over UK law for so long as that Act remains in force. However, as successive Governments and the courts have recognised, such measures do not impact on sovereignty, because it is always open to Parliament to amend or repeal an Act; it is Parliament's choice that EU law has primacy, and it can, if it chooses, change its mind. I do not want to underplay the enormous political consequences that would flow from such a decision, but those are the constitutional facts, and they were confirmed in the most trenchant language in the metric martyrs' case in 2002 when the courts ruled that

"Parliament cannot bind its successors by stipulating against repeal, wholly or partly, of the [1972 Act]...there is nothing in the [1972 Act] which allows the Court of Justice, or any other institutions of the EU, to touch or qualify the conditions of Parliament's legislative supremacy in the United Kingdom. Not because the legislature chose not to allow it; because by our law it could not allow it...being sovereign, it cannot abandon its sovereignty."

The Government are now exploring how they can ensure that the fundamental principle of parliamentary sovereignty is upheld. They want to assess whether the common law provides sufficient ongoing and unassailable protection for that principle. It is an important process, and it is only right that sufficient time is allowed for discussions within Government and for appropriate advice to be taken. Once the Government have decided on whether there should be a Bill to reinforce the principle of parliamentary sovereignty, we will make an appropriate statement to the House.

Mr Cash: My hon. Friend the Minister will know that I have spoken on both this subject and the metric martyrs' case on many occasions. Does he not accept that we voted against the Lisbon treaty, which is a consolidating treaty and incorporates all the treaties? In addition to that, the issue of primacy is already clearly stated in Costa *v.* ENEL and in other cases. They say that the European Court of Justice asserts its primacy over our constitution. I hope that the Minister will come on to that, because that is where a big problem starts to get even worse.

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend will have to forgive me if I say that the kind of questions that he asks are precisely those that the Government will wish to consider in the exercise that I have just described—when they come to a view as to whether we should introduce primary legislation to reinforce the principle of parliamentary sovereignty. So far, as he knows, the British courts have upheld the principle of parliamentary sovereignty. We want to ensure that such a principle is unassailable and ongoing.

Chris Bryant: Before the Minister's speech, we were told by the Government that a committee will be set up to do such work. Now, however, he seems to be saying that there will not be a committee, but just a general process of cogitation, regurgitation and general thinking. Does he describe that as the backburner or the long grass?

Mr Lidington: It is certainly not the long grass. The work has already started, but it requires proper consideration. I understand the hon. Gentleman's impatience and eagerness for an outcome to this exercise, but given that we are only a month into the new Administration, he will have to bear with us a little longer before we come to a conclusion. I can assure him that as soon as a decision is taken, we will make a statement to Parliament, so that he and other hon. Members can question and challenge us on the outcome of that debate within Government.

The Government have been clear about what we intend to propose in legislation at the earliest opportunity. We have agreed that there should be no further transfer of sovereignty or powers from the United Kingdom to the EU over the course of this Parliament, and that commitment is written into the coalition programme. The Government are also committed to increasing democratic and parliamentary control, scrutiny and accountability in relation to EU decision-making. We will introduce a Bill to ensure that the British Parliament and the British people have more of a say, and that will increase the democratic accountability of the European Union. The Bill that was listed in the Gracious Speech has two main elements: a referendum lock and greater parliamentary control over the use of the so-called passerelle or ratchet clauses in the Lisbon treaty.

Let me describe briefly what we propose in terms of a referendum lock, although my hon. Friend the Member for Stone and the House will appreciate that very detailed work is now going on to determine the precise language of the Bill. Any proposed future treaty that transferred competences or areas of power from the UK to the EU would be subject to a referendum. No Government would be able to pass more powers to the EU unless the British people had agreed that they should be able to do so and no Government would be able to join the euro unless the British people had agreed that they should do so.

My hon. Friend said that there might be an attempt to bring about treaty change to create some form of economic governance in light of the current financial crisis. I can say to him that there is no consensus so far even in the euro area that there should be a further treaty. Any EU treaty, even one that applied only to the euro area, would need the unanimous agreement of all 27 member states, including the UK. Each of those 27 member states would have a veto. Even in the case of a hypothetical treaty that the British Government were prepared to endorse, the fact remains that any treaty that proposed to transfer powers from the UK to the

institutions of the EU would require a referendum for ratification, under the terms of the programme for Government that the coalition has set out.

We also plan to change the law so that any Government would be required to pass primary legislation before they could give final agreement to any of the so-called ratchet clauses. There is a variety of those clauses; there is no easy definition of a ratchet clause. Some provide for modification of the treaties without using the ordinary revision procedure and some are one-way options that are already in the treaties, whereby EU member states can decide together to exercise those options, and which allow existing EU powers to expand. There are options, for example, in the common foreign and security policy, in justice and home affairs, and in environment policy. Besides the provisions on primary legislation, in our Bill we will also ensure that the use of any major ratchet clause that amounts to the transfer of an area of power from the UK to the EU would be subject to a referendum.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone and the hon. Members for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) and for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) spoke about the inadequacy of our current system of parliamentary scrutiny of European legislation. The Government plan to improve the scrutiny of EU decision making, and getting the scrutiny system right is a very high priority for us. I am currently examining ways of strengthening the existing system of parliamentary scrutiny and I am keen to discuss proposals with the new Scrutiny Committees of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, once they are formed. I hope that they will be formed in the very near future.

Kelvin Hopkins: There has been an honest division of view about how parliamentary scrutiny should be reformed. The hon. Member for Stone talked about having all the debates on scrutiny open. I took the other view, because we receive very valuable advice from Officers of this House—honest and frank advice, which I may say is often sympathetic to my view as well—and the Officers would not be able to provide such advice if the debates on scrutiny were carried out in public.

Mr Lidington: The hon. Gentleman makes a clear point that we in Government and the House as a whole will want to bear in mind when it comes to taking decisions about the scrutiny process. It is also important that we look at the practice of scrutiny in other EU member states. I had a meeting last week with the chairman of the Swedish scrutiny committee, and we are exploring the models of scrutiny that are in use elsewhere in the EU, to see whether there are any aspects of those processes that we might usefully adapt for our own purposes here.

Chris Bryant: The Minister is being very generous in giving way. I sensitively suggest to him that most other member states conduct scrutiny remarkably worse than we do, which is quite a thing to be able to say.

In addition, all I would say to the Minister is that we still do not have the European Scrutiny Committee set up. For the life of me, I cannot see why the chairmanship of that Committee was not established when the other Select Committees that we have already elected were established. Also, I hope that a new scrutiny reserve resolution will be tabled fairly soon. I urge the hon. Gentleman to try and make this issue as much a matter for the House as for the Foreign Office, because it should be a matter for the whole of the House to decide on.

Mr Lidington: I take very seriously the points that the hon. Gentleman has made. He also asked me about the new Cabinet Committee on European Affairs. That Committee is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, and the deputy chairman is the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. It has met; it met for the first time last week. However, I must disappoint the hon. Gentleman by saying that it does not meet, and does not intend to meet, in public. There is no difference in that regard to the system for any Cabinet Committee. Members of the devolved Administrations are not members of the Cabinet Committee on European Affairs but they continue to meet under the aegis of the Joint Ministerial Committee on Europe, to prepare for the European Councils each year.

Chris Bryant: Waste of time.

Mr Lidington: The hon. Gentleman says that, but we want to make our relationships with the devolved Administrations work a lot better than they used to during his time in office; that is one of the differences that the new Government intend to make. We want to turn not only those formal meetings but our regular contacts with our colleagues in the devolved Administrations into something that informs the development of our approach to European affairs. Now, having said that, I must press on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone asked questions about a number of detailed issues and I want to reply very quickly to those questions. So far, there are no proposals at all on the table that would require the UK or any other member state to submit its budget plans to the Commission in advance of informing Parliament, and my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor have all made it clear that we would be utterly opposed to any such proposal.

My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the importance of some of the current proposals on financial services, which are with the European institutions now. In particular, the de Larosière package on financial supervision is a matter of primary importance to the interests of this country. Yesterday, in both the formal proceedings of the General Affairs Council and in bilateral conversations with some of my counterparts from other countries, I said that we wanted to see the unanimous agreement that was reached on the proposal at ECOFIN in December 2009 maintained in any future drafts of that proposal.

The hon. Member for Luton North asked about agricultural policy reform. The Government remain committed to a policy of common agricultural policy reform that would see an end to the direct subsidy of production, a reduction in the external tariffs on foodstuffs, bringing them down to the same level of external tariffs that apply on other goods, and an end to the practice of dumping EU produce on the markets of developing countries, which undercuts those countries' own farmers.

A number of hon. Members spoke about excess EU regulation. I know that both the Cabinet Committee on European Affairs, which I am a member of, and the Regulatory Sub-Committee of the Cabinet Committee

[Mr Lidington]

on Economic Affairs will be keeping a very close eye on that issue. Excess EU regulation comes not only from Europe itself. Too often, there is gold-plating in Whitehall of European legislation, which is something that we are also determined to guard against.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone said one thing that I will quarrel with him about—in a good-humoured manner—and it was about EU enlargement. I disagree with him on this issue. I think that the enlargement of the EU has entrenched political stability, the rule of law and democratic institutions in Spain, Portugal, Greece and in central and eastern Europe. It is actually a tremendous achievement on the part of the EU. If one contrasts the picture today in those parts of our continent with what we saw in those same countries in the 1920s and 1930s, I think that the advantages and the strengths of the EU's approach are demonstrated.

My hon. Friend rightly said that many people in Europe are frightened, angry and disillusioned. That is why we need to push forward a positive British agenda, to get European people back to work, to free up markets, to enhance free trade with the rest of the world and to demonstrate an advance towards a cleaner and greener European economy. At the same time, we need to champion vigorously the interests of the UK within the EU, to increase accountability to the British people and to increase the democratic legitimacy of the decisions that Ministers take in Europe, ensuring that it is the people who can take the final decision on any future transfer of power from this country to European institutions.

Gaza

11 am

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce this debate. I appreciate that the whole House had an opportunity to debate the situation in the middle east yesterday, but I am sure that hon. Members will be tolerant of our having a debate today that concentrates specifically on issues affecting Gaza, given that they have been of so much concern in the past few weeks.

The crisis in Gaza is central to the broader crisis between Israel and Palestine, and that conflict, in turn, is one of the most important in global political terms. It is crucial that British parliamentarians and the UK Government, along with the European Union, the United Nations and the Quartet partners, redouble our efforts to ensure that the blockade of Gaza is lifted. However, that is simply the most immediate step towards a lasting peace settlement, without which we are doomed to see repeats of the present situation. Not least because this point is often misrepresented, it is essential to restate that Israel has entirely legitimate security needs that must be met; but that can happen only if the Palestinian people have the right to a viable and secure state within sovereign borders.

As we are all aware, the latest crisis was triggered on 31 May, when Israeli forces boarded one of six vessels in the flotilla carrying aid to Gaza, killing nine Turkish nationals. Accounts of the event vary widely, of course, and have varied over time as different presentations of events have appeared in the media. From the footage that we have seen, there seems to be no doubt that Israeli soldiers were themselves subject to violent attack. However, Israel originally stated that its soldiers were fired on first—a claim for which no evidence has been provided—and that they were equipped with paintball guns, whereas the BBC's "Newsnight" on 1 June showed that Israeli solders had been carrying lethal weapons from the beginning. Although we can draw some conclusions from the footage made available to date, we cannot yet be certain of all that happened on that day.

It is crucial that the inquiry into those events wins the confidence of the international community. Whether that can be true of an internal inquiry with foreign observers, as opposed to the independent investigation requested by the UN, is open to doubt at the very least. It would be interesting to hear the Minister's view of the robustness of the internal inquiry promised by Israel.

However grave the events involving the flotilla were, they also serve to draw attention to the wider predicament of Gaza.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. As she is moving on from the events involving the flotilla, may I take this opportunity to ask what her response is to the experience of one of my constituents, Theresa McDermott, who was on one of the other boats in the flotilla? Although live weapons were, fortunately, not involved, Theresa McDermott experienced what can only be described as brutality by Israeli forces, who fired sound grenades directly at people, tasered them and so on. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is another reason why an independent inquiry into what happened on the flotilla is needed, and that it would also be in Israel's own interests to clear up what happened?

Ms Buck: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. It is of course true that in discussing the flotilla, we have, perhaps understandably, concentrated on the terrible events that led to nine deaths, but there are certainly grave allegations about what happened on the other boats in the flotilla. It is in everyone's interests—including Israel's, in my view—that the inquiry is sufficiently independent to win confidence. That is so often the case with such inquiries.

I have visited Gaza twice in the past three years. I spent two days there in March as part of a parliamentary delegation. On both occasions, what I saw shocked and appalled me. As an important preamble, let me say that on my previous visit in late 2007—I was there with other hon. Friends here today—I was able to visit Sderot, one of the southern Israeli towns subjected to rocket attacks from within the Gaza strip. Although it should not be necessary, I restate that rocket attacks on the civilian population, such as those that rained down on Sderot, constitute war crimes. I have no doubt that everyone taking part in this and other debates condemns such attacks without reservation. Israeli civilians have a right to peace and security. It is right that reasonable steps should be taken to prevent the flow of weapons into Gaza and to expect that attacks on the civilian population should not take place from within Gaza.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and congratulate her on securing the debate. I am listening carefully to what she is saying. Does she agree that the key problem behind the current crisis is the fact that Hamas, which rules Gaza, refuses absolutely to recognise the existence of the state of Israel?

Ms Buck: I have not instituted this debate in order to act as an apologist for Hamas. There is absolutely no doubt that Hamas is a critical player in the crisis in the middle east, and neither I nor, I am sure, other parliamentarians are here to defend its role. The conflict is deep and intractable and Hamas must take responsibility for its share. However, with that important caveat, it seems to me that the issue underlying the wider crisis in Palestine and the situation in Gaza is the proportionality of the response and the collective punishment of the civilian population of Gaza.

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. Surely there can be no excuse whatever for the acts of terrorism against the people of Israel, and the best way to stop the blockade is by Hamas stopping its terrorism so that people can live together in peace and harmony?

Ms Buck: I am grateful for that intervention. I was not aware that I was in any way excusing acts of terrorism; I do not do that. However, although I do not want to be diverted into the chronology of recent events, it is also true that Hamas has instituted truces in the rocket attacks on any number of occasions, but that those truces have not led to the sort of response that would allow us to make progress. I am sure that colleagues seeking to participate in the debate will discuss that further. That is true in respect of both Gaza and settlement building in the west bank. The way forward to peace involves initiatives taken by both sides.

Mr Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Ms Buck: Yes, but this will be the last intervention for the moment.

Mr Slaughter: The general tone of the interventions so far seems to suggest that Palestinians have brought this upon themselves by electing a Hamas Government. Does my hon. Friend agree that, whatever the political issues in the middle east, punishing the Palestinian people collectively for exercising their democratic right is entirely wrong?

Ms Buck: I agree totally and that is the main thrust of my contribution today. There are issues of proportionality and collective punishment. The 1.5 million citizens of Gaza should not be subjected to the impact of the siege because of the Government that they chose—or, in many cases, did not choose—to elect.

Israel has stated frequently that the occupation of Gaza ended in 2005 with the withdrawal of 8,000 settlers. However, as it has at any time since 1967, Israel has remained firmly in control of Gaza's sovereignty, controlling its borders, airspace and coastal waters and retaining the right to enter at will. Gaza is surrounded on three sides by a security fence, and a seam zone extending up to 1 km into the territory is enforced by snipers to prevent anyone from approaching the fence. Palestinian farmers entering the zone are liable to be shot at by border guards, while fishermen seeking to fish away from the highly polluted coastline are regularly fired on by the Israeli navy. Leaving aside the casualties of Operation Cast Lead in 2009, 31 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces and 116 injured since the beginning of 2010 alone. On 7 June, six Palestinians were killed off the coast of Gaza.

Since 2007, the control of Gaza's borders has tightened further, to the extent of its being an all-encompassing siege. The people of that grossly over-populated strip—measuring only 10 km from east to west—have been denied all freedom of movement, have extremely limited access to vital goods and services and, perhaps most crucial, have been denied access to construction materials needed to rebuild the many homes and facilities destroyed during Operation Cast Lead.

The agreement on movement and access stipulates that 15,500 trucks a month should be allowed to enter Gaza via the crossing points with Israel. Since June 2007, however, the actual volume has typically been about 20% of that number. Between May and June this year, only 400 trucks entered Gaza—one third of the pre-siege level. The trucks are supposed to contain everything that the 1.5 million people of Gaza need to survive, yet only 73 sanctioned items were permitted. Items that were blocked—there has been very recent movement on this—included pasta, powdered milk, jam, cooking oil, school books and textbooks and T-shirts.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. Regarding imports and exports to Gaza, she is aware that one of my constituents, Ibrahim Musaji, travelled recently to the area with Bristol Gaza Link—the third time that that organisation has travelled with humanitarian aid for the

[Richard Graham]

people of Gaza. Does she agree that, given the heavy decline in both imports to and exports from Gaza, with 95% of private business in effect going bankrupt, life is no longer normal in Gaza? Restoring the normal pattern of trade and humanitarian aid into Gaza is a crucial element for helping the people of Gaza, but doing so while managing to exclude weapons from being transported there is a conundrum that we hope the Government might be able to help to resolve.

Ms Buck: I absolutely agree. That point goes to the heart of everything that I am hoping to say in the debate.

I mentioned a very recent relaxation of the inventory of items permitted to enter Gaza. There are reports that the Israeli authorities have recently approved the entry of 11 new food and hygiene items to Gaza, including jam, halva, soda, juice, canned fruits, razor blades and paste, yet overall Gaza imports have declined by almost 26% compared with last week alone. This week's figure constitutes 17% of the weekly average that entered during the first five months of 2007—2,807 truckloads of items—before the Hamas takeover. A relaxation of the inventory is certainly not reading across into a relaxation in the volume of vital goods. Diesel and petrol for general use have been delivered on only five occasions in the last 18 months. Industrial fuel for Gaza's only power plant is also restricted. Between May and June, only one quarter of the quantity required to operate it at full capacity was allowed through.

Operation Cast Lead destroyed or damaged 50,000 Palestinian homes, 280 schools and a number of hospitals and medical facilities, which I and other hon. Members in the debate saw for ourselves in early March this year. However, concrete and steel have, broadly speaking, not been allowed into the strip, and glass was allowed in only for a very short period. The result has been an almost complete lack of reconstruction since the war. That is clearly not in line with UN Security Council resolution 1860, which during Operation Cast Lead called for the

"unimpeded provision...throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance, including food, fuel and medical treatment".

The Goldstone report, arising from the UN fact-finding mission, further found that the blockade deprives Palestinians in the Gaza strip of their means of sustenance, housing and water, as well as denying them freedom of movement. The report found that Israel has specifically violated

"obligations it has as Occupying Power"

spelled out in the fourth Geneva convention, such as the duty to maintain medical and hospital establishments.

On 1 March, I and other parliamentarians present saw, during my second visit to the area, that sites continue to lie in ruins or badly damaged a year after Operation Cast Lead, including the American international school, which was destroyed by Israeli missiles in January 2009. Rubble has been cleared, but apart from some innovative "earth dwellings" to help the homeless, little reconstruction has taken place. In the southern town of Khan Younis, we visited some of the 2,600 housing units commissioned by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency that have stood unfinished since the start of the siege. In total, $100 million-worth of UNRWA projects are on hold. Sewage treatment and the provision of safe drinking water are among the most urgent public health necessities, yet there too, materials are on hold for that crucial project.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I apologise for missing the first part of my hon. Friend's speech. Did she also observe during her visit the psychological damage done, particularly to young people, by the sense of incarceration and imprisonment, lost ambitions and the inability to travel or see anything that the rest of us wish to see of this planet?

Ms Buck: I did indeed. We hear a great deal about the public health impact of the siege, and there is clear evidence that a shortage of minerals and vitamins in the diet of children is leading to very serious bone and dental health problems and broader public health problems, but mental health is of critical importance. It is of critical political importance as well. It is hard to measure and often people do not see mental health problems as representative of a traditional humanitarian crisis, of the type that we saw in the days after the Haiti earthquake, but it is arguable that a graver problem is being stored up, not just for the people of Palestine and Gaza, but for the Israeli people and for the future benefits of the peace process. Half the population of Gaza is under 18. Some 900,000 children and young people are trapped in an open prison. What that is doing to them and to the next generations of political leaders does not bear thinking about.

That is one of the reasons why I feel so sad. It seems that, again and again, we see a behaviour that is not necessarily in Israel's own best interests and is really counter-productive. The other example of that is the destruction, referred to in an intervention, of the private economy as a consequence of the siege. We have seen the virtual total destruction of private commercial enterprise in Gaza. That, of course, has contributed to poverty because it contributes to unemployment, but it has also—this is a perverse consequence—strengthened Hamas in important ways.

The siege has contributed to the thriving tunnel operation—the means used for smuggling on a massive scale from Egypt into Gaza. We saw for ourselves some of the estimated 1,200 or so tunnels under the border, which permit about 4,000 items to enter Gaza, from cars and satellite dishes to the fabled lion that was brought into Gaza zoo and even basic medicines and food. That further disrupts the operation of the economy. The tunnels take a significant toll in human life. Some might say, "That's the price you pay for what is in effect a criminal operation," but it is seen as a lifeline—a way of breaking some of the most destructive elements of the siege. Because it provides revenue in the form of taxation on the smuggling operation, it strengthens Hamas's hold on the economy, which is surely not what critics of the Hamas regime want.

Steps to close the tunnels, which are now being executed, will deprive Hamas of revenue, but tighten the screws still further on the siege of 1.5 million people. No doubt Israel is worried—I understand why—that a lifting of the blockade would be claimed by Hamas as a victory, yet it is hard to see a viable alternative strategy, unless it is believed that sheer desperation will lead the people of Gaza to punish Hamas in favour of a more

moderate strategy, which they have yet to see will read across into an effective political solution, as we have seen with the settlement building on the west bank. I suggest that anyone holding such a belief is doomed to be disappointed.

I hope that the Minister will give us his assessment of the independent inquiry into the events on the Gaza flotilla. I hope that he will report back from the EU Foreign Ministers' meeting in Brussels and advise us on what progress the EU can make, by itself and in discussions with other Quartet members, to lift the blockade urgently. Does he believe that any easing of restrictions will not merely ease the humanitarian situation, but underpin a strategy of reconstruction and the rebuilding of the private economy? Will the British Government do all that they can to strengthen the accountability of all parties in this conflict for war crimes and transgressions of international law leading up to, during and subsequent to Operation Cast Lead?

I shall conclude now, because many other hon. Members want to contribute to this important debate. I remain convinced that, whatever the larger politics of the situation in Gaza and the middle east, we must act with the utmost urgency to resolve the crisis afflicting 1.5 million civilians in Gaza—one of the gravest in the world today. Britain's longstanding connection with the area should be used even more effectively to achieve a resolution.

11.20 am

Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I thank the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), who regularly does this House a service by choosing topical issues, which she has done again. I hope that the way in which she spoke—her carefulness and informed contribution—will commend her comments to all parties.

I welcome you to the chair, Mr Streeter, not only because you are a good chair, but because you, with the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and I, co-chaired the all-party group on conflict issues in the previous Parliament. If there is one strategy that we as a Parliament and the new Government need to deploy, it is to use our skill in conflict prevention and conflict resolution. In that context, I also welcome my very good friend the hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) to his new ministerial responsibilities. He was sensitive when participating in the debate on the middle east yesterday in the House, and I know that he and his colleagues come to the subject with huge understanding and dedication.

To make a passing comment to link those words, those of us of the Jewish, Muslim or Christian faith—of course, other people in the House have other faiths or have no religious faith—should have a particular responsibility in this matter. If followers of the three great world faiths, for whom the part of the world that we are discussing is so important, cannot understand that the logic of our faith is that we should seek to accommodate followers of other faiths who share the same belief in the same God, not much of an example is set to the rest of the world when we seek to preach to them.

I have always described myself as both a friend of Palestine and a friend of Israel. I have been actively supporting the case for a Palestinian state since I was a teenager and have always argued that Israel has a right to exist with secure boundaries. I have had the privilege of visiting the area on several occasions, and although I have yet to have the opportunity to go to Gaza, I have frequently visited the west bank.

Let me make some brief comments following the worthwhile contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Stephen Williams) to yesterday's debate. First, we all hope that what Tony Blair said publicly yesterday will soon come to pass. The work done by the Quartet to bring about an end of the blockade, either wholly or significantly, is hugely welcome. Achieving such an end will be great progress, not least because the current situation is clearly nonsense, in the sense that although it is a terrible imposition on the people of Gaza by virtue of the tunnels and other things, it is a blockade with a conniving exemption. The whole thing has become a sort of international fiction, and the sooner we achieve orderly relations between people on either side of the border, the better.

Regarding the Government of Gaza, people must be allowed to choose their own Governments. They are not always comfortable choices, but the world must understand that it does not help by alienating those Governments entirely. I understand the difficulty. The Government of Gaza, Hamas, must understand—as they were moving to do—that the renunciation of violence and acceptance of the right of the state of Israel to exist have to be preconditions for international acceptance. However, that cannot mean that the people of Gaza or the west bank are not allowed to choose Hamas as their Government. The reason why they do so, as I understand it, is that that party stands strongly for the welfare of the people whom it seeks to represent. In many ways, it has done that more effectively than the other parties in the west bank. We must understand that. We must also understand that we may well have to deal with Hamas for a long time to come. I know that there are forces of enlightenment in the Government that want to make progress, and other Governments are helping them to do that. May we please be clear that precluding Hamas from being participants in the future is not a realistic option?

Israel is a democracy. As colleagues made clear in the House yesterday, it should be praised for being a democracy, although I share the view that certain forms of proportional representation are not helpful and that the Israeli system with a single chamber of Parliament might be one of them. The implication of a democracy is that the country respects international law. It cannot have it both ways. It cannot say, "We uphold democracy at home," as it does, "and an enlightened social and other policy," but then deny international law outside its own territorial waters or abroad.

I have talked to Israeli Ministers and officials about such matters. They really have to understand that international law has to apply to us all or it is discredited. When an inquiry such as the Goldstone report takes place, Israel cannot just then cast it aside because it does not like the findings. The eminent Judge Goldstone clearly did his job appropriately and properly. I heard the cautious words of the Minister yesterday; the Israeli Government must understand that their credibility regarding the events on the flotilla at the end of May

[Simon Hughes]

will be established only if there is an international inquiry rather than just an Israeli Government inquiry with some international observers. I really believe that.

I and others have met constituents who were on the flotilla. I have heard vivid accounts of how they saw Israeli troops in large numbers—for example, 400 troops on the sixth boat—descend on the fighting. There is video footage and recordings, so there is no shortage of evidence. I just ask the Israeli Government to reconsider their limited willingness to hold an inquiry and for it to be conducted only by them. I want it to be done in a way that they find acceptable, but under the UN's authority, as it has requested.

In that context, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West referred yesterday to the motion of the executive of Liberal International, the organisation that represents all Liberal parties throughout the world, which met on Sunday in Berlin. To summarise, it

"Deplores the use of force by Israel commandos"

on that occasion. It

"Deplores the violence caused by some activists on board the flotilla".

The executive expressed

"shock at the resultant deaths and injuries"

and

"Demands the restoration of liberty of the Israeli Arabs who have been on board the flotilla".

It

"Supports the UN Security Council's call for a prompt, impartial, credible and transparent inquiry"

examining the actions of all parties, and

"Strongly calls on the Middle East quartet, and the US government in particular, to urge all parties to return to the Road Map and observe international law."

Let me make one last point about the future. Gaza has a very difficult future. It is a small enclave surrounded by other countries, as the hon. Member for Westminster North rightly described. The history of enclaves in international law is not happy. Berlin is the last one that springs to mind—separate from the rest of its country with a corridor established. I understand the policy of both my party, and that of the Government. The traditional policy of countries such as ours is to accept a two-state solution: a Palestinian state and an Israeli state. That might be right but, just as there will need to be an imaginative solution to the future of Jerusalem, which will have to be the capital of both countries if there is to be lasting peace, so there needs to be an imaginative solution to how Gaza is linked with the west bank.

To have simply two separate territories without connection will not be an adequate way forward. There might have to be a special and protected connecting strip. There might have to be a renegotiation of land settlements that would include those settlements that are illegal as part of the package, as well as a return to old boundaries. There may have to be in the long term a United Nations presence to give security on what was mandated territory for us between the '20s and the '40s, and other international friends to support it. We, as a country, may have to play a significant role with the Quartet and other countries in guaranteeing the territories, the boundaries and the peace of Israel and Palestine if we are to persuade both Governments to feel confident about the future. I hope that my friend the Minister and his colleagues will be positive and think laterally about the way in which a solution might work, as well as work enthusiastically to make sure that the matter is one of the highest foreign policy priorities of the Government in the days and months ahead.

11.29 am

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I rise to my feet as a friend of Palestine, and much to the furious incomprehension of a large number of my constituents, I do so as a steadfast friend of Israel, despite the provocation. Last summer, I sponsored an Adjournment debate on the Spirit of Humanity—a boat carrying humanitarian supplies that was trying to break the siege of Gaza. On that occasion, Israeli forces intercepted the boat—we presume in international waters, although the Israeli Government refused to provide details of the boat's position, despite requests from British Ministers—but thankfully there was no violence. In the light of that and other previous incidents, should not the British Government have been alert to possible problems with the latest flotilla? Given that the Israeli media reported threats from the Israeli defence forces, making it clear that the ships were likely to be attacked, what actions, if any, had the British Government taken to avert those attacks, particularly knowing that British citizens were on board?

My constituent, Alex Harrison, was on board the Spirit of Humanity last year, and undeterred by that experience, she was also a passenger on the Challenger 1 ship, which formed part of the flotilla that was attacked again by Israeli forces on 31 May. Could the Minister tell us what assessment the Government have made of the legality of the Israeli attack on the humanitarian convoy? What assurances has he had from the Government of Israel about whether there will be any more attacks in international waters on boats carrying British citizens?

Over the weekend, we heard more detail about the inquiry that is to be set up by Israel. We understand that it will include a foreign element and observers such as David Trimble. Will the international community have full confidence in that inquiry and its findings? Will it be independent and transparent? Will the Israelis, the Palestinians and, perhaps most importantly, the people of Turkey have full confidence in its findings? As Cathy Ashton, the High Representative of the European Union put it in *The Times* yesterday, will that inquiry be "credible, rigorous and impartial"?

In the debate yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) stated the obvious: there have been inquiries in the past on Israel, and perhaps one need go no further than to ask Tom Hurndall's family about their experience of Israeli inquiries to explain why some people might be slightly cynical about an Israeli inquiry. Another issue is just how wide that inquiry will be and who will be questioned.. Will Alex Harrison be asked about her experience on that boat?

In preparation for this debate, I spoke to Alex. As I said, she was on board Challenger 1. It was flagged in the United States. She would like me to highlight the illegality of the Israeli action. The men who were killed

were on the Marmora, which was registered in the Comoros islands, which are off Madagascar. It is her view, and that of many others, that the seizing and killing of the flotilla's passengers while in international waters is nothing less than piracy. She says that they were some 80 miles away from Israel and were sailing away from Israel when they were boarded.

The Israeli action on 31 May may constitute breaches of international law that could be tried in the International Criminal Court. Alex was one of the boat's crew. She told me that the Israeli forces came on to the boat, firing plastic bullets. All the glass on the boat broke. People were then pushed to the ground on to the glass. She was the last to be stopped, as she was on the bridge. Two members of the Israeli defence forces came up. Two Australian journalists—Kate and Paul from *The Sydney Morning Herald*—were with her, and they identified themselves. In response, they were tasered. It was a completely terrifying experience.

There was no violence from Alex's boat towards the Israeli defence forces, yet those on board were treated with huge violence. She says that she has hand marks on her arms and legs from when she was picked up and carried from the boat. Once they were carried from the boat, all their items were bagged up and labelled. They have not had them back. The Israelis now say that they do not know where they are. She was told that she would be deported to Turkey. She had the clothes she stood up in. She had no passport and no money. She had not been to Turkey—she had come from Greece—and yet the Israelis said that they would deport her to Turkey.

Alex refused to go and so was one of the last to be deported. She was in a pen with 15 other women, and she witnessed some women next to her being hit about the head. They were not treated as badly as the men. She saw some men at the airport who were badly beaten, including Ken O'Keefe, who was so badly injured that he was not able to board the plane. She was some 5 yards away from an Irishman called Fiachra O'Luain as he was beaten around the head—she saw that going on. She also saw Turkish men, who had been injured and come out of hospital, being put on to the plane. Well, to say that they were put on to the plane is inaccurate—they were walking on to the plane as best they could. Some had been shot in the feet and were on crutches. There were no wheelchairs. She was not allowed to assist the men. If any attempt to try and assist them was made, people were hit again. Although she had experienced brutality from a distance in the past, she had never experienced such face-to-face, one-to-one brutality over such a sustained period. She said that they were sworn at, abused and laughed at throughout. That was unnecessary—gratuitous, in her view—and she certainly would like to give evidence to any inquiry. If necessary, she would like the matter to be taken to the International Criminal Court. One can understand why, given her experiences.

Mark Lazarowicz: May I put it on the record that the constituent whom I referred to was also one of the protestors on the Challenger 1? She reports a similar account of what happened on the boat and in Israeli custody. Her account illustrates the real issues being raised by a number of credible people from the UK, and I hope that the Government will respond to them in the positive way that my hon. Friend requests.

Emily Thornberry: Many hon. Members have constituents who have been on the flotillas. I suspect that we have many constituents who will be on them again. Alex Harrison has said that she will go back.

The terrible events of 31 May have brought the eyes of the world back to what has been going on in Gaza, highlighting the suffering of its people. The three-year blockade of Gaza has been compared to a mediaeval siege. There are some similarities: there is no free movement of people; no goods can leave Gaza, leading to the complete collapse of most businesses; no building materials have been allowed in to repair the damage caused by the Israeli attack of December 2008; one in 10 babies in Gaza are malnourished; one third of babies have anaemia; and a large proportion of the population is food insecure. However, the big difference between a mediaeval siege and the siege of Gaza is that the third crusade, when besieging Acre for two years, was intended to topple the garrison and not to behave in such a way that actually bolstered the garrison. That is effectively what has been happening. Instead of undermining the regime—which they seek to do—the Israelis are, by their actions, bolstering Hamas. Israel has got this fundamentally wrong. It is incumbent on those of us who are genuine friends of Israel to tell the truth: this is wrong, and to continue to behave in that way towards Gaza and Hamas undermines the security of Israel.

Mrs Ellman: Does my hon. Friend accept that approximately 15,000 tonnes of goods a week have gone into Gaza, although that is clearly inadequate? Does she agree that if the European Union and the Palestinian Authority had been able to carry out their responsibilities in manning the crossings, goods could have gone into Gaza at a much faster rate?

Emily Thornberry: In the end, if Gaza were treated how it should be treated, the gates would be open and the tunnels would be closed. Yes, I fully understand. I have been to Sderot and have seen how Israeli children are terrified of incoming bombs that rain down on their town. I fully understand why it would be necessary to search trucks going in—to make sure that they do not have weapons in them. However, it is not a challenge to Israeli security to stop biscuits going into Gaza, and that is the fundamental point. Gaza is being treated completely differently and in a way that is fundamentally unfair. It is incumbent on us to say loudly and clearly that that is wrong.

Stephen Williams (Bristol West) (LD): The hon. Lady referred to biscuits. On the visit that I attended with the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), we saw the bombed biscuit factory that, ironically, produced goods for export to Israel. Does the hon. Lady agree that, in controlling the substances that are allowed into Gaza, Israel has been entirely arbitrary? Such substances change from week to week and include random items such as jam and pasta, which were referred to by the hon. Member for Westminster North. When we were there, we were told that nappies—or diapers, as they were called—were not being allowed in. The sole purpose of that seems to be to play with people's minds and do psychological damage to the civilian population.

Emily Thornberry: It goes further than psychological damage: the fact that there is not a steady stream of proper goods going into Gaza also undermines people's health. Moreover, the fact that no exports are allowed

[Emily Thornberry]

out of Gaza means that the economy has been undermined and that the people are dependent on Hamas, which allows and taxes the tunnels. Civil society is therefore undermined even further and people become increasingly dependent upon Hamas. When a poor woman wakes up in the morning wondering how to feed her six children, she does not think to herself, "This is Hamas's fault," but, "This is Israel's fault." That continues to feed extremism and undermine the very security of Israel. Those of us who believe in a two-state solution are fundamentally worried about that and are very concerned about what is happening.

I will not go through all my examples—I am sure that hon. Members are aware of them—but Cadbury's creme eggs somehow get through the tunnels and nobody can afford them. Some 12,000 buildings need to be rebuilt, and 44% of Gazans are unemployed and so on. The fundamental point, however, is that the siege of Gaza is not hurting Hamas; it is destroying the lives of thousands of ordinary Gazans. The EU is the largest donor to Palestine, but aid is not enough. It is also Israel's largest trading partner, and we have some clout at EU level. We in the EU must be more confident and do more to put pressure on Israel to ensure that the people of Gaza are treated fairly. I very much hope that EU Foreign Ministers will adopt a united position and that Britain will fully support it. That may include questioning whether an internal Israeli investigation of what happened to the flotilla on 31 May is sufficient.

It is also important for us to be more active diplomatically in the middle east. The problem is not going away—we must address it. We must end the blockade, which is morally outrageous and politically self-defeating, and as I said here last summer, we must open the gates and close the tunnels. Many organisations based in my constituency—such as Medical Aid for Palestinians, Save the Children, UNICEF and Merlin—work very hard to support the people of Gaza; but, ultimately, their good work simply gives us the space to exert moral and political courage to ensure a two-state solution and peace for everyone.

11.42 am

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Streeter. I apologise for missing the start of the debate and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) on securing it. It is extremely important.

I have had the good fortune to visit Gaza on five occasions over the past 10 to 12 years, and I was last there with many of my colleagues as part of a European delegation led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman), during which we saw for ourselves what the situation was like in Gaza. As I said in an intervention, we saw the people of Gaza's sense of imprisonment and its psychological effect on young people. I also noticed for the first time—I had never seen it before—a sense of youth disaffection, with higher levels of drug taking, vandalism and antisocial behaviour, which was never previously a factor in the life of Gaza.

Gaza has a very young population. Teenagers and young people often have a good education—the UN schools are pretty good—and there are high levels of university education. Palestine has the highest level of graduation of any country in the region, but people have no possibility of employment unless they can get a job with the UN, a non-governmental organisation, or the Government of Gaza. NGOs clearly require sufficient resources, because the private and business sectors have virtually completely collapsed. The two basic ingredients for running a small business or a store are customers and goods to sell. In Gaza, there are no customers, because they have no money, and there are no goods to sell, because they cannot be got in. One therefore walks down streets and streets of boarded-up stores and shops, and there is a sense of deep depression in the environment.

During our visit, we had a lengthy meeting with members of all parties of the Palestinian Parliament in Gaza in the bombed-out ruins of the Parliament building. What possible purpose was there in Operation Cast Lead specifically bombing the debating chamber of the Palestinian Parliament? What kind of message was that trying to give? Why were mortar shells fired through the upper floors of a school? The last time I had been in that school was as an election observer the year before, when it was teeming with people queuing up to vote. The school was bombed, which was clearly gratuitously insulting to the people of Gaza. There was no point or purpose to it whatsoever. There was no possible military objective; nor was there in the destruction of many homes, among other things.

As we left Gaza on our way to the Rafah crossing back into Egypt, our bus was filled with an unbelievable stench from the sewage works. They had been damaged and bombed and no chemicals had been allowed through to operate the sewage treatment system. The result was tens of thousands of tonnes of raw sewage being pumped into the Mediterranean. At some point, that sewage will start polluting the beaches of Israel when presumably public opinion in Israel will say something should be done to allow equipment in to repair the sewage works in Gaza. That kind of gratuitously insulting behaviour makes people so angry and is utterly counter-productive.

I have spoken to many people who were on the flotilla the week before last, and listened to their descriptions, including that of Alex Harrison, the constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry). The way in which the Israeli soldiers behaved was disgusting: people were shot, imprisoned and denied access to phones, legal advice and, particularly in the case of older people, food and water.

I was at a meeting last week when an al-Jazeera journalist, who had been on the vessel, described in excruciating detail what he had observed. He clearly has a vivid and photographic memory. That account needs to be told because it was of an incident taking place on the high seas in international waters. An inquiry headed by a series of Israeli judges—with all due respect to David Trimble, the only international observer—is not good enough. We want an international inquiry from the United Nations with an international committee of jurists. I guess Israel would not be happy about that because the last international observation of Israel's behaviour was the Goldstone commission on Operation Cast Lead. I would be grateful if the Minister could let us know what progress has been made on the Goldstone commission and its process through the UN Security Council.

I do not want to go on too long because many others want to speak. In reality, the situation is simple: Palestine is under occupation. In the case of the west bank, it is

under occupation through checkpoints, endless military intervention, targeted assassinations, the construction of the wall, denial of water, trade and ordinary life, and the sense of collective fear of many people living on the west bank. In the case of Gaza, it is encircled by walls, barbed wire, aerial buzzing—including targeted bombings—and by Israeli naval vessels off the coast to prevent fishermen going further out and the flotilla and aid vessels getting in.

Although public opinion in Israel undoubtedly supports what the Government are trying to do, a significant number of people argue, demonstrate and act collectively to say that the strategy is complete madness, collective punishment and illegal, and creates a sense of isolation in Israel. Israel is now more isolated in world opinion than it has ever been. It broke the law, in my view, in the case of the flotilla. The Goldstone commissioners reported on Operation Cast Lead. British and other passports were used in the Dubai assassination. There are numerous examples of how UN law and resolutions have been flouted by the state of Israel. So we come to the conclusion: what do we do about the situation?

First, we send all the aid that we possibly can to the people of Palestine to allow them to survive. I was at a fund-raising event last week for medical aid for Palestine. The organisation, which is based in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury, does fantastic work. Many of us have also supported many other charities. Why do we have to send medical aid to Palestine? Why do we have to send aid at all? The people of Palestine and Gaza are suffering not from a tsunami, an earthquake, a volcano, a hurricane or a tropical storm but from something specifically designed to punish, to hurt and to damage people's lives. That is what the occupation and imprisonment of the people of Gaza are all about.

Why, then, do we not impose some kind of sanction against Israel for its constant illegal behaviour? Why do we not suspend the EU-Israel association agreement by which Israel survives so well economically? Why does the US continue to pour aid into Israel, including military aid and a new missile defence system, other than because it sees Israel as an extension of its own foreign policy in the region? If we want a nuclear-free middle east and peace in the middle east, the siege must end. The blockade must be lifted, and the people of Palestine and their legitimate right to live peacefully and to survive must be recognised.

I sat down with the right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) and others at several lengthy meetings during our visits with the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, the Arab League, the Hamas Government and parliamentarians in Gaza. The one thing that came across in the last two meetings with the Hamas Government and the other parties was that they want to be part of the process. They want to be part of the future, and of a settlement. Isolation, ignorance, occupation, killing and murdering, which is what it is, are not making things better. They are making the situation worse, and we look to the Government to be assertive in their policies towards Israel's ending the blockade.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Order. Colleagues, winding-up speeches will begin at 10 minutes past 12, so we have 18 minutes to go. I have two colleagues on my list and two new Members have just indicated that they would like to speak, and we will try to get everyone in. You can do the maths yourselves.

11.52 am

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): It is important that we discuss the shocking events of 31 May, but it is also important that we discuss the context in which they occurred, even though some of the facts about that context disturb a number of people. There may be things that they would rather not hear or know about. However, the facts are that Israeli settlers left Gaza in 2005, but that was followed not by Palestinians and the people of Gaza trying to build a new society and attract international investment. It was followed by the violence of Hamas overthrowing Fatah and engaging in a civil war with it, and by Hamas continuing to state its absolute opposition to the very existence of Israel.

Hamas's charter is readily available. It constantly puzzles me why people who are legitimately and genuinely concerned about social justice wilfully ignore the contents of that charter in a way that they would not if it belonged to any other organisation. The charter includes statements about killing the Jews. It says that the day of judgment will not come until the Muslims kill the Jews. It says that there is no way except jihad, and that peace conferences and negotiations are a waste of time. It talks about the protocols of the elders of Zion, and the false allegation that Jews run the world. It claims that Jews are responsible for all revolutions, including the French and Russian revolutions. Indeed, the charter goes beyond being anti-Israeli: it is clearly anti-Semitic, and when it is combined with Hamas's actions in targeting rockets at Israeli civilians, is it surprising that Israelis are genuinely concerned about their security?

There is increasing concern about the involvement of Iran with Hamas in Gaza. That concern was intensified when, last November, a vessel was intercepted off the coast of Cyprus, filled with armaments coming from Iran on their way to Gaza. Those weapons were aimed not only at Sderot, which has suffered too much and for too long, but at Tel Aviv. Israel's concerns about security are real.

Something needs to be done about the crossings and the current state of affairs. Last June, the European Union said it was willing to contribute to post-conflict arrangements, yet what has happened? Very little. Egypt was also involved in addressing what was happening with the crossings, but it has withdrawn. I hope the statement made by Tony Blair yesterday about new proposals will become a reality, so that the long-suffering people of Gaza can have their needs addressed.

Disturbing questions must be asked about the events of 31 May. Six vessels were involved, and it must be asked why five of those six vessels landed at Ashdod as requested and unloaded their humanitarian aid, while on the sixth vessel something was very different. When those five vessels landed their humanitarian aid at Ashdod, Hamas refused to allow that aid to be delivered to Gaza. That is deplorable, and I do not hear cries of concern and criticism directed at Hamas for taking that action.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): My hon. Friend is aiming her fire at something nobody in the debate has sought to defend. Why does the picture that she paints of Gaza appear to be so different from

[Richard Burden]

the weekly reports given by the United Nations and other agencies about the situation, and about the causes of that situation and Israel's responsibility for it? Those agencies are there, so why does she think they have got it so dreadfully wrong? I suggest that it might be a good idea for her—and a number of other hon. Members—to visit Gaza and talk to people there and get their views on their situation.

Mrs Ellman: The reality is that Gaza is run by Hamas, an Islamist organisation that is proscribed by the EU, the USA and Canada as a terrorist organisation. Its regime has led to this dreadful situation for the people of Gaza. That cannot be ignored; it is a fact. More questions need to be asked about that flotilla, focusing on that sixth vessel. What is the role of the Turkish IHH—again, a charitable organisation linked to Hamas and other terrorist organisations? What about the recording that was made in relation to that sixth vessel, showing that when the Israelis repeatedly asked it to land at Ashdod, the reply came back, "Go back to Auschwitz"? What about the fact that people on that sixth vessel were armed with metal rods with knives, and that a lynching of Israelis was attempted? I have no doubt that the majority of people on those vessels were genuine peace activists, but were they infiltrated by somebody else with other ideas?

What about the reports that we have seen since those events in the Turkish media? Families of people who were regrettably killed on that vessel have stated that their partner—the husband in one case—said that he wanted to be a martyr. Even more damning, what about the broadcast that was made on Hamas TV on 30 May, the day before the incident happened, when a university lecturer said that the participants in that flotilla wanted to die as martyrs even more than they wanted to reach Gaza? What a condemnation.

Mr Slaughter: My hon. Friend is repeating the information—if I can call it that—put out by the Israeli authorities in the immediate aftermath of the incident, for which no evidence has been produced. Is she seriously saying that, because Israeli forces normally get away with abseiling heavily armed on to ships in the middle of the night, when, on one occasion, people resist and nine of them are shot dead, they had it coming to them? My hon. Friend should consider the language she uses, even in putting forward her case so strongly.

[JIM SHERIDAN *in the Chair*]

Mrs Ellman: The detail of what happened on the ship will come from the inquiries, but the information that I have brought to this debate—I think very damning condemnation of what happened—does not come from Israeli sources. It comes from the Turkish media and what has been shown on Hamas TV. Those facts might be very inconvenient for people who do not want to know about them, but they are there and they are part of the picture.

Mark Lazarowicz: I understand the strength of feeling of my hon. Friend and her view on the issue, but does she agree that the differing accounts that are being given are themselves a good reason why the inquiry into the incident should be seen as genuinely independent and international, and as having credibility on all sides? Will she at least agree that that would perhaps provide some way forward from that unhappy incident?

Mrs Ellman: There are indeed differing accounts of what happened, and that is to be expected in an exceedingly fraught and tragic situation such as the one that occurred. That is why I agree that it is important that inquiries should take place; but it is not possible to ignore the facts that I have stated: what happened on that flotilla, what was involved in its planning, the statements that have been made on the TV, the information that has been in the Turkish media, and the context in which Gaza is run, by an organisation with a charter that is simply genocidal.

There is a way forward. The statements made by Tony Blair, the middle east envoy, point a way forward to dealing with the issue of the crossings, but more than that must be done. The most constructive thing would be for Hamas to review its situation, withdraw its charter and state its agreement to accepting the existence of the state of Israel, and join Fatah in negotiations to secure a two-state solution to this tragic problem.

To pick up a comment from one of my hon. Friends about going to Gaza, I have been there—a long time ago, in 1967, just after the six-day war. That was certainly not a golden age for the people of Gaza, which had at that time been administered by Egypt under the armistice agreements of 1949. The people of Gaza were deeply distressed and dissatisfied with the rule of Egypt. They were in poverty and distress. After that war it was hoped that there might be a negotiated solution to the whole conflict, but the Khartoum conference, where the Arab states said clearly "No recognition, no negotiation, no peace" put an end to that. I hope that, whatever our different perspectives on why we are in the current position, we can all make a new start and there can be a negotiated peace on the basis of two states living together in peace and security.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Jim Sheridan (in the Chair): Winding-up speeches will start at 12.10 and three hon. Members have said they want to speak, so I suggest brevity if possible.

12.3 pm

Mr Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Before what I hope will be brief remarks, I point out by way of a declaration of interest that my constituency party has received donations from individuals and organisations supporting the rights of Palestinians, and I made several visits to Palestine, Gaza and the west bank in the previous Parliament.

As to the flotilla, about which we have heard quite a lot in the debate, we clearly have heard very different versions of what happened. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) said, perhaps for that reason more than any other, an independent inquiry—one that is seen to be independent—is demanded. The way the news came out was entirely predictable—an entire news blackout and suppression of information by the Israeli authorities for the first 48 hours. They gave their version of events, and with regret I must say that some of the highly partisan and unsupported

accounts, blackening the name of people who were travelling on that flotilla by way of exonerating the Israeli actions, have been repeated in this debate and yesterday on the Floor of the House. That does not help, and nor does the way the Israeli information services deal with those matters.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Slaughter: I do not think that I have time to take interventions.

Travelling on that convoy were many independent, well-respected people, including an Israeli-Arab member of the Knesset, Hanin Zoabi, and Henning Mankell, the respected Swedish author. All those people have given eye-witness testimony as to the brutality and violence of the Israeli forces, who wholly unnecessarily stormed the convoy in international waters in the middle of the night. No real explanation can be given as to why that was necessary. I have heard a number of those eye-witness accounts, which are compelling and have the ring of truth about them. However, the solution to the absolutely black-and-white situation that we have heard described by the two sides so far is an independent inquiry.

I have three sets of questions for the Minister. On the responsibilities of the British Government, the treatment of British citizens needs to be looked into. Issues include the violence and brutality that many of them allege the Israeli forces meted out to them over a prolonged period, and the confiscation of their belongings. There is also the refusal of consular access. There has been great criticism of the embassy in Tel Aviv for not pressing as hard as other countries' embassies to get access to our citizens. All those matters require answers.

The second issue on which the Government should be prepared to act is the search for a more independent role for the inquiry. It would be useful to hear the Minister talk about the effectively tokenistic gesture of appointing Lord Trimble, who is known as a supporter of the boycott of Hamas and a friend of Israel, and who cannot be seen as impartial, and a judge who does not believe in an international element to the inquiry. That is not an independent inquiry; it is the basis for a whitewash, and it would be useful if the British Government asked for a genuine international inquiry.

Thirdly, the Minister was quoted as saying that he did not think that

"the British Government is talking about lifting the blockade"

on Gaza. That quotation, which was in *The Guardian* last Thursday, may be wrong, but it would be disappointing if it was correct. We need to lift the blockade on Gaza; we need not to ease the restrictions or simply to see a greater number of supplies going in, but to restore full commercial and civil life to Gaza. Again, that is something that the Government should strongly support.

We are talking not about factional organisations, but about organisations such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which have said clearly and in terms over the past few days not only that the blockade is "illegal" and a "humanitarian catastrophe", but that it constitutes

"a collective punishment imposed in clear violation of Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law."

I would like the British Government to make similar pronouncements and at last to put pressure on the Israelis to lift the wholly unjustifiable and inhuman punishment of 1.6 million civilians, which they have imposed simply because they have the ability to do so and because the rest of the world is not, at the moment, prepared to stand up to them.

12.8 am

Mr David Ward (Bradford East) (LD): The firing of rockets from Gaza into the south of Israel presents a menacing and deadly threat. It is completely wrong and it needs to stop because it is taking innocent lives. It is wrong because it provides the justification for Israel's retaliation, although not for its disproportionate response, which is merciless at times.

The question that I am constantly asked in Bradford East is why the state of Israel is allowed to get away with this. People simply cannot comprehend why international action is not taken. The answer, I have to conclude, is that Israel can get away with it and regularly does. Yes, Hamas is proscribed, but why is the state of Israel not proscribed? Everyone says that a peaceful solution is necessary, but why on earth should the state of Israel agree to a peaceful solution when brutal force has achieved so much for it over such a long period? In my view, the two-state solution is almost an impossible dream. The situation has gone too far. I hope that that is not the case, but I fear that it is.

Why should we take a lead? We should do so because the British are up to our necks in responsibility for the situation in the Palestine region. From 1917 onwards, we gave away something that was not ours; we turned a blind eye to the ethnic cleansing that took place after the second world war; and now we are participating in the international acceptance of an apartheid state. People say that that would not be allowed anywhere else. In fact, it was not allowed anywhere else—certainly not in South Africa.

Unless things change, they stay the same. We must take a lead with our European partners, as has been said. We must go back to Obama, who started by making a very positive speech in Cairo. However, we must also consider boycotts, divestment and sanctions, because those were the only things that carried any weight in South Africa. Those policies must extend not only to weapons but to sport and academic boycotts as well. The United Nations has made a score or more resolutions. It is not resolutions we need; it is resolve—

Jim Sheridan (in the Chair): Order. I apologise, but my earlier plea for brevity failed. I call Ivan Lewis.

12.11 pm

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) on securing this debate and on her passionate, balanced and highly effective contribution, which was an extremely good start.

There is absolutely no doubt that the plight of the people of Gaza is both a humanitarian tragedy and a political crisis. The blockade of Gaza is unacceptable and unsustainable, and it is now essential to remove all obstacles not only to humanitarian assistance but to the materials and resources required to begin rebuilding homes, public infrastructure and the Gazan economy. However, that will happen only if Israel can be assured

[Mr Ivan Lewis]

that systems are in place to ensure that arms and arms components cannot be smuggled or got in any way into Gaza. It is therefore essential that the Quartet and the Arab League work with Israelis and Palestinians to come up with a credible plan to end the blockade while meeting Israel's legitimate security concerns, which is the basis of resolution 1860. The Opposition warmly welcomes the work of Tony Blair and Baroness Ashton on those matters.

I have a couple of questions for the Minister. What do the British Government believe should be the EU contribution to such a plan? How quickly can a plan be put in place? Neither in this debate nor in yesterday's did anyone refer to the Egyptians putting in place security infrastructure to close the tunnels and prevent smuggling. Has that been done and, if so, what effect has it had on the tunnels?

On the Israel defence forces' raid on the Gaza flotilla, I made it clear during last night's debate that we welcome the Israeli Government's decision to set up an inquiry with the involvement of two international observers. However, we will watch closely to ensure that the inquiry meets the tests of independence, transparency and credibility. My questions to the Minister about the flotilla relate to many of my hon. Friends' contributions. Will British citizens who were on the flotilla have the opportunity to give evidence to the inquiry, and what efforts will the British Government make to facilitate that? What happened to the humanitarian assistance on the flotilla? We hear different accounts.

On aid, this country can be very proud of the aid that we provided to both the west bank and Gaza. The sad irony of this debate, for reasons that many hon. Members have raised, is the contrast between progress on the west bank and in Gaza. We should always pay tribute in such debates to the leadership of Prime Minister Fayyad and to President Abbas for the improvements in security and economic growth on the west bank. We should also continue to support the two-year plan launched by Prime Minister Fayyad towards Palestinian statehood.

I have some specific questions for the Minister. Will the new Government maintain our commitment to £210 million in aid over three years for the west bank and Gaza? Was the £19 million for UNRWA in Gaza announced by the Secretary of State for International Development last week new money, or part of the £210 million that was already committed?

Let me briefly raise the continued detention of Gilad Shalit. I think that all Members agree that his detention is unacceptable and that he should be released without delay or precondition. It was very moving for me to meet his father not that long ago and hear the human misery that the family is going through. What more does the Minister think that the UK and the EU can do to secure the release of Corporal Shalit, particularly in their dialogue and contact with Arab states?

Jeremy Corbyn: As we are on the subject of the release of prisoners, does my hon. Friend think that the Palestinian parliamentarians should also be released?

Mr Lewis: I think that I dealt with that question last night, and my hon. Friend heard my answer then. He probably was not satisfied with it, but I give him the same answer now. Clearly, if people are being held without trial and without charge and there is no evidence that they have committed criminal offences, they should be released. If there is evidence of criminal offences, that evidence should be brought before the courts, and whatever the person's status—we have recently had a debate about status and parliamentarians in this country—they should be charged. That is my very clear position.

Finally, I have some specific questions about Hamas for the Minister. Do the Government stand by the three conditions laid down by the Quartet that Hamas must meet to be brought into the political process? Are the Government reviewing Britain's position on that issue, or is Britain arguing within the EU or the Quartet that that position should change? A question that is never sufficiently asked in these debates is whether we have an assessment of the treatment of Gazans in terms of human rights, and of Hamas's attitude and behaviour towards UN agencies and non-governmental organisations in Gaza. What is the international community's assessment of the people of Gaza's experiences of the Hamas Government? How many rockets have been fired into Israel in the past 12 months? Can the Minister give an assessment of where we believe Hamas's financial support comes from? Some hon. Members have referred to the relationship between Hamas and Iran; it would be useful to know what the British Government's assessment is of the nature of that relationship.

I also wish to ask a question that nobody has asked for some considerable time. We, as a Government, were giving tremendous support to Egyptian efforts to reunify the Palestinian leadership. I think that we all accept that that would ultimately be in the best interests of a peace process. Things have gone very quiet, however, and it is not clear whether the Egyptians have stopped playing that facilitator role or whether the process is ongoing and the British Government continue to support the Egyptians in fulfilling that role.

In conclusion, as my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North said at the start of the debate, what matters most is political progress towards two states. The current proximity talks are important, but until we move to direct talks on the comprehensive issues that will lead to a fair and just two-state solution, the vacuum is dangerous because it could lead to a return to serious violence. I hope that the British Government will continue to do everything in their power to support the move towards direct negotiations as quickly as possible.

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Alistair Burt): It is a pleasure to be here under your chairmanship, Mr Sheridan. I begin by echoing the thanks of the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) to the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington North—

Ms Buck: Westminster North.

Alistair Burt: None of us should forget that. I congratulate the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) on securing the debate and on the balanced way in which she put her case, marking out clearly what she believes, but also making due reference to the needs of Israel and its security on a number of occasions. All

of us, I believe, appreciate the way in which she made her points. I also welcome the work that she has done with the all-party group and the report that she has produced, which illustrated her remarks.

I will do my best to cover as many questions as I can, but I will not go through all of them as there are many. It is quicker to ask questions than to answer them, but I will do what I can. I also appreciate the engagement of the hon. Member for Bury South with my office on the debate and the issues that he raised, about which he knows a great deal.

Mr Ivan Lewis: Old habits die hard.

Alistair Burt: Yes, I remember. It is difficult for a while to stop, and the hon. Gentleman is clearly in that mode, but he is doing extremely well.

I shall remark on the incident itself and then say a little about the situation in Gaza. The Government unequivocally deplore the deaths of the nine people who lost their lives as the result of the recent events. The Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister were in touch with the Turkish Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to offer our condolences, recognising that most of those who died were Turkish citizens. We have consistently made the following point clear to the Israeli Government, both in public and in private: we look to Israel to do everything possible to avoid a repeat of the unacceptable actions.

The hon. Member for Bury South asked about the United Kingdom's role in the events and the investigation. The UK has played a key role, working closely with the international community, including the EU and the Quartet representative Tony Blair, to stress to Israel the importance of an investigation that ensures accountability, commands the confidence of the international community and includes international participation. The Government have discussed those matters with Israeli counterparts on a number of occasions, most recently on 13 June, when the Prime Minister spoke directly to Prime Minister Netanyahu just before Israel announced a public commission to investigate the incident.

It is important that the investigation ensures full accountability and commands the confidence of the international community. The announcement yesterday by the Israeli Government of a commission headed by a Supreme Court judge and including David Trimble and Ken Watkins, a Canadian, as international observers is an important step forward. We welcome the commission's international membership and broad mandate. It is important that the inquiry is truly independent and the investigation is thorough. We will watch the progress and conduct of the inquiry before we make any further remarks.

Richard Burden *rose—*

Stella Creasy *rose—*

Alistair Burt: I will give way to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), because she has not spoken.

Stella Creasy: I thank the Minister. Please forgive me, as it is my first time participating in such a debate, but I am a little concerned that we have not heard many details about the remit of the inquiry, particularly on the question of consular access, which was incredibly important to a number of people from Walthamstow, members of whose family were on the flotilla, and on the lack of information that we, as the British Government and as British MPs, were able to get hold of. It does not seem clear to me, as far as we have seen the remit of the inquiry, that the issues about how international citizens are treated in such kinds of incidents and what lessons can be learnt will be covered. I hope that the Government will take that point on board.

Alistair Burt: The hon. Lady makes a fair point. Clearly, we are not responsible for the remit of the inquiry, but a number of Members have mentioned the consular problems that occurred. I will make some inquiries with the Israeli authorities on that matter. I would like to say a little about the consular problems, because a number of Members raised them.

Richard Burden: Will the Minister give way? I have a small point.

Alistair Burt: No, because I have only six minutes.

The consular service is one of the most important aspects of the Foreign Office's work. Our travel advice clearly advised people against travelling to Gaza, and we made that specifically clear in relation to the flotilla as well. I will meet those who were involved in the incident tomorrow. The meeting was set up at my request so that people could discuss their experiences both with me and other consular officials at the Foreign Office. I shall listen to them very carefully.

As far as I am aware, our consular staff in Israel worked tirelessly from the moment that they were alerted to the situation to ensure that they could get access to those involved and that people had everything they needed. We raised with the Israeli authorities the need for immediate consular access, and that was granted the following day. Our officials spent several hours visiting those who were in detention and in hospital before they were deported, and we had a large presence in Istanbul to meet those who arrived there. We are also aware that some people's passports and luggage have not been returned. We will raise that issue with the Israeli authorities because such goods must be returned.

Richard Burden *rose—*

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman's persistence must be rewarded.

Richard Burden: Does the Minister believe that the Israeli Government's inquiry has the confidence of the international community? Furthermore, Does he believe that it should be an international inquiry rather than an internal inquiry with an international dimension?

Alistair Burt: No, the inquiry meets the United Nations Security Council resolution requirement of an independent and impartial inquiry with an international element, but we will wait to see how it evolves. We believe that it has met the initial requirement set out by the international community, which was not for an international inquiry or a UN inquiry; it was exactly as the UN resolution delivered. The point is we should not be distracted by the remit or the structure of the inquiry. The important

[Alistair Burt]

thing is what it looks at and what emerges from it to give some credibility to the assessment of what happened. We know that there are competing versions of events out there, and we know that the world will not be satisfied unless there is a process that gives everyone the chance to say what they saw and what conclusions they came to. The state of Israel understands that as well as anybody else, and we have made that point very clearly. We should not get hung up on the structure of the inquiry, because, in testament to those who died or who were involved, we should let the inquiry get on and see what emerges, and that is what we are concentrating on.

It is very important to see the incident not in isolation, but as part of the continuing misery and drama of Gaza. We and other members of the international community have underlined the need to lift current restrictions in United Nations Security Council resolution 1860. As for the blockade itself, the UK's position is that there is a role for the EU, both diplomatically and as part of the Quartet, in dealing with the easing of the restrictions.

In terms of semantics, when I talked about not lifting the blockade last week, I meant not lifting the blockade to allow completely free access to Gaza of everything that anybody wants to bring in. No one is talking about that. If conventional wording means to allow the unfettered access of goods that are both humanitarian and necessary to help with the reconstruction of Gaza, but not including arms, that is what I meant, so there should be no disagreement between us there. We support the attempts that have been made to change the nature of the blockade and to get the right goods in.

As far as our support for the UN work is concerned, we announced £19 million for UNRWA's work with Palestinian refugees across the region. That is part of the tranche of money that was already agreed. In relation to the question of the hon. Member for Bury South about continuing that flow of money, such a decision is subject to the same concerns about Government expenditure generally. None the less, I share his belief that that support is necessary and should continue. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the Government's commitment to international aid and development.

The position of Hamas was raised by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) and a number of others. Hamas does play a part in the whole tragedy of Gaza; it is wrong to ignore it or to ignore its part in that tragedy. There is no suggestion that the United Kingdom will change its position in relation to contact with Hamas; we intend to keep that as it is.

The hon. Member for Bury South asked a number of questions about Hamas, but he also called for the unconditional release of Gilad Shalit and asked what we can do about that. We in the Conservative party have also pressed for the unconditional release of Gilad Shalit for a number of years. As a Government, we will continue to do that—

Jim Sheridan (in the Chair): Order. We must now move to the next debate.

Lymington River

12.30 pm

Mr Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): I feel almost like a country parson reading the banns of marriage—"this being for the third time of asking"—given that this is the third time I have dragged a Minister to Westminster Hall to answer for the actions of the Government on the protection of the Lymington river.

Furthermore, as with the controversial actions of country parsons in respect of changing hymns and modern unpopular liturgies, I find that my own actions in my assiduous dedication to this task have proved equally unpopular. While I was going about my duties in Lymington on Friday, a charming but forceful lady took me aside and demanded to know why I was so "anti-ferry". Actually, I am not "anti-ferry" at all. My starting point is that there is a critical need in both the Lymington and Yarmouth economies for the ferry service and I want to see that ferry service preserved. However, there are other interests that have to be balanced against those of the ferry service, not least the protection of the European Natura 2000 sites, the importance to the local economy of the yachting interest in Lymington, and indeed the long-term survival of Lymington as a harbour, which is protected by the local mud flats. The diminution of those mud flats poses a long-term threat to the future of Lymington. So, all those interests have to be balanced.

It is the law that provides protection and balance. The fact that we are now having a third Adjournment debate on this issue and that we have had two spats in court, both of which the Government lost, is down to the failure to implement the law properly. The Government gave all sorts of commitments in signing up to the relevant European directives, but then failed properly to transpose those directives into English law.

I do not want to repeat the entire history of this subject; those who are interested in it can read the *Official Report* of the two previous Adjournment debates. However, I shall give a potted history now. We have always been led to believe the received wisdom that the erosion of the Lymington salt marshes was an inevitable consequence of nature—"It's the weather and there's nothing we can do about it". Of course, those salt marshes are vital to Lymington, and the Lymington harbour commissioners have come up with a plan worthy of our Victorian forebears in its engineering prowess. They are going to build a sea wall—a monument to King Canute—to hold back the waves and save at least some of the salt marsh. I am not qualified to say whether that plan will survive current economic realities or whether it will actually work.

However, as a consequence of this controversy, a number of studies have been carried out of bathymetric data—a subject on which I am uniquely unqualified to pontificate. I understand, however, that the findings of the Southampton university team who carried out one of those studies suggest that the salt marshes, if left to nature alone, would actually be accreting—growing and extending—and that it is only the introduction of the particular form of propulsion used by the Lymington ferry from the 1960s onwards that has led to the swift erosion of the salt marshes. That erosion has been even swifter since the introduction of the new "W"-class ferries, a development that has sparked the recent controversy.

These are issues well beyond my competence, as I said, but they are precisely those that must be clearly understood and examined in that appropriate assessment. A principal reason for the court's determining that the new ferries had been unlawfully introduced on to the Lymington river was that Wightlink was its own competent authority for the determination of that appropriate assessment. Notwithstanding reams of assurances, in correspondence from Ministers and in parliamentary answers to my questions, that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency was the appropriate authority, when it came to the crunch it turned out that because the Government had been so cack-handed in implementing the habitats directive, Wightlink was its own competent authority. The judge said it had shown a complete disregard for its public responsibilities, separating them from its own commercial interests, and that as a consequence it was absolutely invalid.

The question is what to do next. Wightlink has said it will rerun the appropriate assessment and, in addition, do a full environmental impact assessment. The difficulty is that Wightlink remains its own competent authority. Wightlink will still be judge and jury in its own court. Wightlink has said, "No, no. We're going to form a new company—Wightlink CA, or Wightlink competent authority—to judge the appropriate assessment." Key questions arise. How will the commercial interests of Wightlink CA be different from the commercial interests of Wightlink itself? Will it have a different board of directors? There is a clear need in these assessments for an independent referee.

Wightlink has said it will carry out a full environmental impact assessment. That is a huge undertaking, involving public consultation. It must consider the whole environment, including the increase in heavy goods vehicles traffic through the Forest to take advantage of the greater capacity of the ferries, especially as the bridge restrictions at the mouth of Lymington at the Ampress site mean that those lorries have to travel through the sensitive parts of the national park. All those issues give rise to great local concern about the impartiality of Wightlink, because it already has form on this matter. Why should we trust it now, given that the court could not trust it earlier?

When Wightlink announced that it would do an environmental impact assessment, it set out the details of how it was to be achieved, including the setting up of Wightlink CA, in a letter from its solicitors. The letter concludes by saying what the outcome would be before the assessments have begun. It states:

"Natural England have advised on a rate of erosion of the existing habitat areas in the European Sites that can, in their view, be attributed to the operation of the 'W' class ferries. The mitigation works will prevent loss of an equivalent or greater area of habitat (than the loss attributable to the ferries) elsewhere in the European Sites."

There it is: it has already concluded that the mitigation works it is to undertake will compensate for any erosion. Before the assessments are undertaken to establish the rate of erosion and other facts, we have the conclusion that the mitigation works will take care of it. The conclusion has been announced before the studies have even begun.

Wightlink goes on, in a most extraordinary piece worthy of Alice in Wonderland, to say:

"The effect of the mitigation works is therefore to prevent an adverse effect on the European Sites by reference to their conservation objectives. Consequently, adverse effects on the integrity of the European Sites are avoided and the tests and approach under article 6(4) (and regulation 62 of the Habitat Regulations 2010) are not engaged. The mitigation works will prevent the harm occurring and consequently the works are appropriately considered mitigation and not compensation."

In plain English, that gobbledegook means, "Notwithstanding the damage we are doing to the Natura site, because we are compensating by dumping some mud somewhere else, no damage has occurred." This is a most ridiculous interpretation. It did not fool the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. In a classic piece of English understatement, in its letter to me it says:

"We remain to be convinced that on a practical level the proposals have been sufficiently well considered and will deliver the habitat benefits that would be required to provide assurance that the introduction of the new ferries will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site. We also continue to seek clarification as to whether the scheme is in fact compensation rather than mitigation."

So we have this issue of compensation and mitigation. Natural England has already accepted a measure of damage and adverse effect on the sites. It tends to rather understate it. In its stakeholder response to the study carried out by Natural England, Wightlink says:

"The revised impact requiring mitigation is quantified by Natural England as increasing from 1.05 to 1.55 ha per decade (for explanation see Appendix 5). This predicted impact is still very small year on year (0.16 ha) only building to a more substantial impact and risk of adverse effect over several years."

When people put things in newspeak, it is an attempt to confuse the general reader. I did not come across "ha"—whatever "ha" is—in my O-level maths, so one feels intimidated and does not ask the question but simply accepts the conclusion that it is very small. I suspect it is a hectare.

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr James Paice) *indicated assent.*

Mr Swayne: The Minister nods, so it is a hectare. So 0.16 of a hectare is 1,600 square metres, and that is the impact each year. I do not consider that to be very small at all.

Let me outline for the Minister what I think the law states should happen. For the purposes of the habitats directive one has a plan or a project. That was one of the first battles in court. Yes, it is a plan or a project. Will it have an adverse effect? In order to determine that, one needs an assessment. Whether one needs an appropriate assessment or a full environmental impact assessment in addition is a question of law, but one needs the assessments to answer the first question.

If the assessments suggest there is no adverse impact, one can go ahead with the project; if yes, stop. Then, ask the next question. Is there an alternative—a question that has been completely avoided by the current process? There are all sorts of other alternatives, including a smaller ferry with a different means of propulsion that is not so damaging to the river. Nevertheless, is there an alternative? If yes, take the alternative. If no, that is when it lands on the Minister's desk.

If the answer is no then the Minister has to decide whether there is overwhelming public interest in the project proceeding, notwithstanding the damage it will

[Mr Swayne]

do to the sites. That is where, if I were the Minister, I would probably take a step back and say, "Well actually, when it comes down to it, we do need the ferry." But we have not been through that assessment yet; we have not reached that point. It is at that point, if the Minister decides there is an overwhelming public interest in the project proceeding, that he considers compensation and doing something else to build up the salt marshes elsewhere.

The process that has been undertaken in Lymington has put these elements in completely the wrong order. We are already talking about compensation, although an attempt is being made to say that it is actually mitigation: "Don't mention the word 'compensation'—it's really mitigation—because of the implications that arise from that definition." Clearly, however, that is the process that ought to be followed and I fear that if it is not, we will end up with another expensive spat in court.

Let me briefly describe to the Minister my desired end state. I hope that we end up with a viable ferry service between Lymington and Yarmouth, and that we can come to an accommodation on the basis of preserving the Natura sites and the yachting that is vital to Lymington's economy. I fear that we will be presented with a fait accompli: regulators were asleep on the watch. Whatever the reason, we now have expensive ferries, built in Bulgaria, operating on the Lymington river and doing damage. How do we get round that? I hope that with some means of determining the compensation and the way forward, we can reach an agreement that Wightlink will go to some lengths to ensure that those ferries are, in a reasonable period, sold on for use elsewhere, or used on another of its routes, while an appropriate ferry for the conditions of the Lymington river is introduced as a replacement. In reality, this is a highly profitable route. It has one of the highest charges per passenger mile of any ferry in the world, a monopoly inherited from British Railways. The company ought to be able to make a go of it. There should be no question of any threat to the viability of the continued service.

I close by asking the Minister to reflect on this. Notwithstanding the failure of Government and the regulators to spot this on the horizon and deal with it effectively, and leaving aside the Adjournment debates that I held in order to raise the issue with Ministers, it has been a small number of local yachtsmen who have had to take the initiative and raise the huge sums of money to take the matter to court. I hope that they are not going to have to do so again.

12.47 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr James Paice): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne) on, as he says, his third Adjournment debate, the first to which I have had the pleasure of responding. I know that he feels strongly about the issue. I think he is aware that the matter falls within the remit of the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who is responsible for marine issues, but unfortunately cannot be here today. I preface my remarks by saying that if, as I strongly suspect, I do not entirely allay all the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary would be happy to meet him and go through them in more detail.

On the issue of biodiversity, I was astonished when reading the brief by the scale and significance of the salt flats to which my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West referred so clearly. Lymington harbour is part of a complex of estuaries in the Solent which supports a diverse coastal ecology. Large parts of the area, as he has said, are designated under a number of directives because of the habitats and species there.

By way of background, for which my hon. Friend will understand the need, the sites designated under the habitats and birds directive enjoy a degree of protection commensurate with their biodiversity importance. Any plans or projects, as he rightly said, proposed in the area are subject to an initial screening to decide whether the plan or project may have a significant effect on the site. Unless a significant effect can be conclusively ruled out, the plan or project needs to be subject to a full assessment via a legal procedure set out in those regulations. That is known, as my hon. Friend said, as an "appropriate assessment" and responsibility for undertaking it rests with the "competent authority", the identity of which is clearly one of his concerns. It is the body proposing to undertake, or give consent to, the plan or project. The purpose of the assessment is to ascertain whether the plan or project is likely to have an adverse impact on the integrity of a protected site. That assessment includes a detailed study of impacts and mitigation measures, and an assessment of alternatives. In carrying out an assessment, the competent authority is required to "have regard to" the advice of the appropriate statutory nature conservation body, which in this case is Natural England.

Having said that legal bit, I should say that I fully understand my hon. Friend's concerns about Wightlink's decision a year ago to introduce larger ferries on the route. I could argue with him about some of the issues to which he referred, although I would be arguing from almost the same position of lack of understanding to which he referred in other contexts. The Department is not aware of having lost two cases, as I think he suggested. There have been two cases in court, one was the judicial review, to which he referred, and the other was an application for an injunction to stop the ferries that was refused. We could debate the rights and wrongs of the issue, but they were fully aired at the hearing in December, which culminated in the judgment handed down in February that is now a matter of public record. I strongly endorse the point made at the outset of his remarks about the importance of the ferry and the commercial need for it in his local economy and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner). Ferries are crucial for both.

We now need to concentrate on the measures being taken to ensure that the protected sites suffer no adverse impacts from the new ferries so that the service can continue as intended. I do not want to open a debate into all the issues covered by the judicial review hearing, but two key points emerged from the judgment. First, the introduction of the type of larger ferry in question was, as my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West said, a plan or project under the terms of the habitats directive, and, secondly, the judgment confirmed that Wightlink is the competent authority responsible

for assessing the impact of the ferries. Although DEFRA has a role to oversee the implementation of the directive in the UK, the court agreed that it would not be appropriate for the Department to assume the role of competent authority, which I think is what my hon. Friend was suggesting, nor did the court suggest that the fact that Wightlink is a private company disqualifies it from discharging its duties as a statutory harbour authority.

Some of the faults that my hon. Friend described, and his desired final outcome, are issues that Wightlink itself, as the competent authority, should take into account, particularly the consideration of alternatives. I fully understand his desire for those alternatives to be considered. Since the judgment, Wightlink and Natural England have worked very closely to assess the potential impacts of the new ferries and to consider what mitigation works would be needed to avoid any adverse impacts. Both parties have invested considerable time and money in that process and used their own expert consultants. That assessment includes mapping evidence to assess changes to the navigational channel, consideration of sediment movement and a review of other influences on the navigation channel. The work also considered propulsion and ship wash modelling, and other likely effects from the increased size of the new ferries.

My hon. Friend referred to the damage that he believes has already been done by the ferries. My understanding is that the studies into the loss of the salt flats and salt marshes go back much longer: apparently, the Keyhaven marshes experienced a 50% loss between 1971 and 2001, and the Lymington marshes experienced a 63% loss between 1946 and 2001. No study to date has been conclusive on the cause of the loss. I fully understand my hon. Friend's concern at those losses. Having grown up in a similar area on the east coast, I fully understand the importance of the salt marshes, but we need to have a sense of perspective and not necessarily to blame everything on what has happened recently.

My hon. Friend had a little tease about the meaning of the word "ha", and I think he understands that it is, as he implied, a hectare. Natural England has quantified the predicted habitat loss and deterioration caused by the ferries and requiring mitigation as 1.6 hectares of inter-tidal habitat per decade. My hon. Friend suggested that the organisation had come to a decision before the assessment, and we can argue about the precise detail, but it is important that we start with a marker as to where we need to be on mitigation.

Wightlink and Natural England have had detailed discussions about mitigation works that Wightlink could undertake to ensure that the operation of the ferries has no adverse impact on the protected sites and can thus continue without breaching the Government's obligations under the directive. A programme of work has been proposed that involves taking material acquired from the regular dredging of the local moorings and depositing it in an area of deteriorating and eroding salt marsh. That would prolong the life of the salt marsh and mudflat habitat and offset the possible increase in the erosion of the mudflat attributed to the ferries. That work will of course be undertaken and funded by Wightlink, and it will require the consent of other regulators. I understand that Wightlink intends to start the work next spring.

Let me address my hon. Friend's point about whether the proposals comply with the habitats directive. I am satisfied that it is acceptable to take into account proposed mitigation works when coming to a conclusion about whether a plan or project would have an adverse impact on the integrity of a protected site. I am also satisfied that works intended to avoid an adverse impact should be regarded as mitigation rather than compensation. I understand that Wightlink and Natural England have taken counsel's opinion on the issue.

Clearly, this is a complex area. Like my hon. Friend, I do not pretend to be an expert on it, but we need to look at what we can do to counter the risks. First, the ferries are being monitored. As he said, the Lymington harbour commissioners undertake regular bathymetric surveys, which will pick up any long-term erosion. Wightlink has also placed graduated stakes at various points to work out whether there is any evidence of ferry thrusters affecting the mudflats. So far, there is no evidence to suggest that the impacts will be different from those already predicted. However, we are clearly in an unknown area, and the science suggests that any erosion will be gradual and cumulative, so it may take several years to build a firm picture. That is why the monitoring is designed to give early warnings, which will enable us to move quickly if we need to.

That brings me to my last point, which relates to my hon. Friend's question about what happens if Wightlink and Natural England have got things wrong. Ultimately, the most important safeguard is the Secretary of State's power to control the operation of the ferries. If, at any stage, Natural England provides advice that there is evidence to suggest that the operation of the ferries is likely to damage the site, the Secretary of State has the power under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 to make a special nature conservation order and to serve a notice on Wightlink requiring it to stop any operation specified in the notice. I must repeat that Natural England predicts that the impact of the ferries is most likely to be gradual and cumulative. On that basis, it has advised that provided that Wightlink successfully delivers mitigation works starting next spring, it will avoid any adverse effect on the integrity of the protected sites. As things stand, therefore, we have no clear scientific basis on which to support a decision to stop or suspend the ferry operation at the moment.

I am really grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this subject, because the debate opened my eyes to an issue with which I was not familiar. Clearly, our main priority is to comply with our obligations under the habitats directive and to protect these important habitats, and that is what we want to achieve. If we can do so while catering for the commercial needs to which my hon. Friend referred, that will satisfy us all. If he wishes to pursue the matter, he can talk to the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury. If all else fails, the Government ultimately have the power to stop the ferries, but I imagine that my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West and I would like to think that we can work things out without having to do that.

Building Schools for the Future (Barking and Dagenham)

1 pm

Jon Cruddas (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Sheridan, for giving me an opportunity to say a few words. I wish to make a few comments and raise a few questions about the future of the Building Schools for the Future programme in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham. To begin with, I shall refer to a couple of recent statements emanating from the new coalition Government which imply that different positions on the future of the programme are being developed in the Department for Education.

First, in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Jim Dobbin) at the first Prime Minister's questions following the recent election, the Prime Minister said:

"I know that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to see that in making the £6 billion in-year reductions—many warnings were given about what that would mean—we have protected the schools budget, and ensured that schools and Sure Start are protected. In terms of building schools for the future, let me be clear: our plans—and our passion, when it comes to education—are to ensure that new schools are provided so that we have real excellence, in the secondary sector in particular. That is what it is about. Building schools for the future is exactly what our plans involve."—[*Official Report*, 2 June 2010; Vol. 510, c. 430.]

That was, of course, very good to hear and very welcome in our part of London.

Given that response, I was slightly unnerved to come across some recent press coverage which implies that a slightly different approach is being developed in a different part of the Government. I refer the Minister to a report in *Building* magazine of 4 June headlined "Government to halt BSF projects within weeks". The article states:

"The government could announce a formal halt to the £55bn school building programme within weeks, amid growing pressure from contractors for clarity over the future of the scheme. It is understood that the Department for Education is likely to make an announcement alongside or before the Budget on 22 June in response to uncertainty about the status of projects under the Building Schools for the Future initiative…officials are preparing to put all schemes that have not reached preferred bidder stage on hold…These include about £2bn of projects approved by the previous government as far back as last July…It is understood that all projects that have received financial close and virtually all those at preferred bidder stage will progress as planned, although sources have warned there may be 'some grey areas'."

Since the report in *Building* and the Prime Minister's welcome words a couple of weeks ago, the Department seems to have gone quiet on the subject. The only trace of formal comment I could find was a 10 June press release from the Department which was headlined "Department for Education statement on BSF". It stated:

"The Department for Education has not taken any decisions on the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. The Department is reviewing BSF to ensure that when we build schools for the future, we do so in a more cost-effective and efficient fashion. Any future rollout decisions will be announced in due course."

Therefore, today I search for a bit of clarity on the status of the programme, with specific reference to the situation in east London. This is a vital issue for all residents, parents and political representatives in the council and here in Parliament.

Before last month's elections, Barking and Dagenham was due to receive some £275 million of capital investment in secondary schools through the BSF programme. The programme included £250 million for school buildings and £25 million for information and communications technology investment. The BSF programme will enable the council to modernise all its secondary schools, including Trinity special school, and to build a new secondary school that will include special school provision in Barking Riverside, which is a major regeneration site in east London. The programme includes the modernisation of all the ICT provision in schools, and two schools—Dagenham Park Church of England school and Sydney Russell school—are sample schools for the procurement process.

The outline business case was approved by Partnerships for Schools in July 2009. Since that date, the council has been involved in the procurement of a local education partnership—LEP—to build schools and provide facilities, and a managed ICT service provider partner, to provide a managed ICT service for the schools.

Contracts were advertised in the *Official Journal of the European Union* in August 2009, which named the London borough of Havering and Thurrock council in Essex as contracting authorities, as well as ourselves in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham. That means that both those bodies can use our LEP when formed should they choose to do so, although they will fund their own developments. If they use the LEP, as shareholders in the LEP we would reap a shareholder return.

Let me mention a few specific points. On 8 June, the borough cabinet approved a recommendation for the ICT selected bidder. Yesterday, the cabinet approved the LEP selected bidder. Notwithstanding the fact that we do not yet know the Government's position on the future of the BSF programme, and assuming that we are able to continue the process, we would expect to achieve financial close in late summer or early autumn—a matter of weeks away.

Given the press coverage that I alluded to earlier, we must assume from those reports that the £55 billion national BSF programme is under threat from the new coalition Government, as part of their public sector cost-cutting drive. If the Government decide to scrap the programme in the next few weeks—as has been rumoured—that will have a huge impact on Barking and Dagenham. Critically, if BSF is cancelled or significantly delayed, from 2012 there will be a significant and growing shortfall in school places in our borough.

Council projections suggest that the borough will need an additional 2,250 secondary school places by 2015, rising to 2,875 places by 2017. Perhaps the Minister is aware that this part of London has been subject to extraordinary demographic change over the last few years, much of it off the radar of the state because it has occurred since the 2001 census. Those changes should not be underestimated in terms of the sheer velocity of movement into the borough.

Local councillors are also worried that, in addition to BSF funding, the primary school capital programme could be hit by Government spending cuts in the near future. The number of primary school places needed is estimated to rise to 11,595 by 2017. Over the past few years, the rate of increase in births in the borough has led to a significant rise in the demand for school places.

For example, in 2000-01 there were 2,380 births in the borough. By 2007-08 that number had risen by over 50% to 3,541. In addition to the extra pressure on school places due to the higher birth rate, the borough remains a significant area of economic regeneration. It has the lowest-cost housing market in Greater London, which has acted as a magnet for young families moving into the borough over the past few years. The housing represents good value and is attractive to young families, which in turn places additional pressures on our school places and buildings, and on the physical infrastructure across the borough.

The current coalition Government place great store in their new politics, in greater transparency in public policy making, and in ensuring that they give the public a major say in where the cuts should be made. I am sure that I speak for many parents in Barking and Dagenham by saying that one area where we do not want to see cuts is in money that is desperately needed to modernise our school buildings to make them fit for the 21st century.

If BSF funding is cut for the borough's schools it will have huge implications, not only for our schools but for the regeneration agenda, which I touched on briefly. If we do not receive BSF investment, the knock-on lack of school places will have a big impact on housing development across London and at the heart of the Thames gateway. Without investment in our schools, we will not be able to meet demand. We will have a shortfall in school places which, in turn, will make the borough a less attractive place for young families to move to.

Last week, the council leadership wrote to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to seek assurances on BSF funding. The council now intends to step up the campaign at local level to save funding for the borough's schools by organising an online local residents petition to the Prime Minister. It is also urging local people to write to the Prime Minister, calling on his Government not to abandon BSF investment. I can fully understand both initiatives. The stakes, for BSF and local education provision, are high.

The possibility of major cuts to the BSF programme must be seen alongside other cuts at local government level. Following announcements in the past two weeks by the Chancellor and the Department for Communities and Local Government about the Government's economic savings plan, local councils across the country are being required to find an extra £1.165 billion in savings, amounting to 20% of the Government's £6.2 billion in cuts to public expenditure this year.

That means that the borough of Barking and Dagenham will have to find additional savings of between £4 million and £5.8 million in the next year, on top of savings of approximately £14 million this year to offset some of the losses, especially in the operation of the housing revenue account, which have put great pressure on the authority's budgetary process.

The precise amount of the cuts will not be known until the new Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition reveals its full emergency Budget next week, but there are already worries that housing money and Government cash normally reserved for local authorities in charge of areas with significant deprivation will be cut.

There are also concerns at local level about the future of funding for the 18 children's centres in our borough. I understand that the funding grant is secure until the next comprehensive spending review in March 2011, but the future is uncertain after that. Moreover, although BSF does not affect primary schools, a primary capital programme exists, and there is concern for the future of that funding string as well.

Overall, therefore, BSF is vital to the overhaul of the secondary schools in our borough to help us meet the extra demands created by the birth rate and patterns of migration in east London. BSF is a major investment programme that will totally modernise all schools in the authority, including our special school. Works will vary from major rebuilding, remodelling and refurbishment to combinations of the three. The only exception among the secondary schools is the recent new-build Jo Richardson community school, which will receive ICT investment.

The borough has a selected bidder for the ICT, as well as an LEP-selected bidder. We hope to finish the whole process by late summer, assuming no policy change at the national level. We therefore seek reassurance for the project as a whole. The BSF LEP-selected bidder has passed the various stages of the BSF LEP evaluation process. The BSF programme is a key element of improving the well-being of children in the borough, reducing inequalities and ensuring integrated children's services, given the guidance that we received under the Childcare Act 2006.

BSF will bring many benefits to the borough, including extended schools, raised attainment and expanded education services as the school-age population in the borough grows. I therefore return to the two quotes that I reported at the beginning of my contribution. I welcome the commitment to the BSF programme that the Prime Minister made clear among his first parliamentary answers. I hope that the Minister can support the programme in Barking and Dagenham, not least because we have concluded the selected bidder part of the process and are nearing completion of the total process, which is why the report in *Building* magazine caused such concern locally. We seek reassurance that our scheme will not be put on hold. The magazine stated that

"all those at preferred bidder stage will progress as planned, although sources have warned there may be 'some grey areas'."

I simply seek reassurance that we will proceed as planned and that we are not one of the grey areas. The borough's changing demographic profile, birth rates and existing pressures on the education sector combine uniquely, with the result that this capital programme is vital for our residents and children. I look forward to the Minister's response and, hopefully, to some reassuring noises.

1.14 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) on securing this important debate. He speaks eloquently on behalf of his constituents. He has emphasised the importance of the BSF programme to the borough of Barking and Dagenham, including its importance to issues such as extended schools and raising educational attainment. I pay tribute to him for his fight against extremism and the British National party and his commitment to campaigning against poverty.

I listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's comments, including his forecasts for secondary school places and

[Mr Nick Gibb]

a 50% increase in the birth rate, rising from 2,380 in 2000-01 to 3,541 in 2007-08. He is right to emphasise the importance of the fabric of a school building to the issue of raising attainment. Our ambition is to raise standards throughout the education sector, to improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged, to restore confidence in our qualifications and exam systems, and to ensure that children leave school with the knowledge that they need to succeed in further education and the world of work. Our coalition agreement sets out a progressive programme of reform to achieve those aims, based on the fundamental principles of more freedom for teachers and professionals, more choice for parents, more help for the most disadvantaged, and less bureaucracy and process.

If we are to effect real change and recast Britain's education system as one of the best in the world, our focus on raising standards in all schools, reforming the curriculum and securing the best and brightest for the teaching profession must be relentless. We must also retain a focus on the school estate, ensuring that schools provide an environment conducive to education, with high-quality technology and facilities, space that supports different types of education—from one-to-one tuition to whole-year groups—and, importantly, a pleasant environment where children want to be. I welcome the opportunity the hon. Gentleman has given us to debate the issue, and congratulate him again on securing the debate.

Building Schools for the Future was a flagship programme of the previous Government, who had high ambitions to rebuild or refurbish every school in the country by 2023. Of course, there are many schools that need to be rebuilt and many are in a very poor condition. With a rising birth rate in parts of the country, including, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, his constituency, we will need to make more places available, and both those issues will require capital spending. We shall clearly need to build schools in the future.

The hon. Gentleman rightly quoted the Prime Minister as saying that building schools for the future is something we shall continue to do. However, that does not mean that we must go through the bureaucratic and wasteful procedures that were the previous Government's approach. I understand that the process in Barking and Dagenham started in 2007. Here we are in 2010 and the diggers have not yet moved in; £250 million was spent before a brick was laid or earth was moved. Of that, £60 million was spent on consultants or advisory costs. Let us be clear: the previous Government said they were spending money on schools; but in the seven years since the scheme was announced only 95 new schools have been built out of 3,500 secondary schools. In the current financial climate, where front-line services are under pressure to do more with less, we cannot afford to direct lavish amounts of money away from pupils, teachers and children's services into the pockets of consultants and bureaucratic processes.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education stated in the debate on the Gracious Speech that for the remainder of the financial year there will be no cuts in front-line funding for schools, Sure Start and sixth forms. We have secured additional funding from outside the education budget to fund the pupil premium, which will ensure that more money reaches the most disadvantaged pupils, who already start out with a financial and knowledge deficit in comparison with their peers. Capital programmes and investment in the school estates are very important to the coalition Government, but we must ensure that those programmes represent good value for money.

As the hon. Gentleman pointed out in his opening remarks, we are reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that we can build schools more effectively and cost-efficiently in the future. We definitely will not halt projects that have been started, where diggers have been engaged and holes have been dug in the ground, as the Labour Government did when the college building programme had to be put on hold because of "catastrophic mismanagement". Many colleges stood to lose hundreds of thousands of pounds. Indeed, the Association of Colleges said that some stood to lose millions following the abrupt cancellation of projects. It said that 24 colleges stood to lose between £2 million and £5 million; indeed, 17 stood to lose more than £5 million.

I know that the hon. Gentleman was not part of the previous Government—indeed, he was an effective and constructive critic of them—so he cannot be blamed for what went wrong, and he is right to raise the issue of the Barking and Dagenham BSF plans today. However, he will appreciate the financial backdrop against which this debate is being held—an inherited budget deficit of £156 billion. As a result, the previous Government had already committed themselves to reducing capital spending across Departments by more than 50%, with a reduction of 17.5% in each of the next three years. The right hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls), the former Secretary of State for Education and now shadow Education Secretary, admitted to the House that school capital spending was not protected in those plans. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman's first port of call should be the shadow Secretary of State, in order to find out from him what he had planned to do if their party had won the last general election.

Jon Cruddas: I want to put it on the record that we had this row about the BSF plans in Barking and Dagenham with the previous Government. There was a controversy in the first phase of the BSF programme, in that we were on the list and were taken off it because of some difficulties with the imposition of academies. So this is an argument we have had with Governments either side of the aisle.

Mr Gibb: I am grateful for that intervention and I will bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman has said. He also gives me an opportunity to correct something I said earlier. I think that I gave a very disparaging view of the previous Government when I said they had completed only 95 schools in the seven years since the project began; they actually completed 97. So, for underestimating their great achievement in completing 97 schools out of 3,500, I apologise and set the record straight.

We will be looking extraordinarily sympathetically at two sets of circumstances as we review the BSF programme: deprivation and particular need. I know the projects in Barking and Dagenham are very important to the hon. Gentleman and his constituents, and especially to the

pupils and school staff who will be affected, but I am afraid that that is all I can say at this point; I cannot give specific guarantees at this time about particular projects. Nevertheless, I promise to keep in touch with the hon. Gentleman as we continue to review capital spending. I know that that will not be enough to satisfy him or his constituents, but I am afraid that that is all I can say at the moment.

I reiterate that capital programmes are important to our programme of school improvement, but they must be delivered efficiently and cost-effectively, and must also be focused on where spending is most needed and will have the most impact.

1.22 pm

Sitting suspended.

Constituency Boundaries (Islands)

1.25 pm

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): First, I take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), on his appointment as Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office. I have known him for many years. The Prime Minister quickly recognised the many qualities that I know he possesses, and the people of the Forest of Dean also knew a good thing when they saw it: they had the wisdom to elect him in 2005, and again last month with an increased majority. I know that he will bring common sense and good judgment to his office.

I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss constituency boundaries for islands. Not many of us are greatly affected by the issue, but it is extremely important to those of us who are. Islands come in many shapes and sizes. There are those with a tiny population, such as the Scillies with scarcely 2,000 residents. There are islands joined to the mainland by road or rail, such as Anglesey and Hayling island, and even Portsmouth. Most important for this debate is that there are islands with significant populations that remain isolated, with no physical link to the mainland. They include Na h-Eileanan an Iar—more commonly known as the Western Isles—Orkney and Shetland, and my own constituency of the Isle of Wight.

Last month's election was fought on boundaries with average constituency sizes of 71,000 electors in England, 66,000 in Scotland, 56,500 in Wales and just over 63,000 in Northern Ireland. The UK average was 69,500. I agree wholeheartedly with the Minister that England as a whole is under-represented in the current system, particularly since devolution has introduced another layer of politicians in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. With roughly 110,000 electors, my constituency is the largest by quite a margin. The constituency of the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil), whom I am glad to see here today, has fewer than 23,000. His, at a fifth of the size of mine, is the smallest constituency, again by a significant margin.

The coalition Government intend to increase the size of constituencies generally, creating fewer, more evenly sized and, in the majority of cases, more populous ones. I understand that the aim is to have an average electorate of 77,000, which would reduce the number of MPs by 10% and cut the cost of politics. The principle of greater equality is good, the aim of reducing the cost of politics is laudable and, from experience, I know that it is perfectly possible to represent a large constituency. My noble Friend Lord Norton of Louth's excellent report from the commission to strengthen Parliament found that larger constituencies may foster

"a closer, longer-term relationship between member and constituents".

We must, however, remember and examine the practicalities.

We can learn from the wisdom of those who have looked at the issues in depth before us. The Boundary Commission last reported on the Isle of Wight constituency in 2007, using figures from 2000. The electorate in 2000 was 103,000, 33% larger than the average. The commission considered severing part of the island and putting it with a mainland constituency, but concluded that to do so would

"disregard the historic and unique geographical situation"

[Mr Andrew Turner]

and

"create confusion and a feeling of the loss of identity"

for islanders. It also stated that

"communications would be difficult both for the electorate and the Member of Parliament."

We were on the point, under the current system, of having two MPs, which I would have supported, but I understand that that proposition is no longer on the table.

If the island had one MP with 77,000 electors, 32,000 people or 12 electoral wards on the island would need to be included with a mainland seat. I have looked at all the possibilities. It could mean either a ferry from Ryde, with a hinterland from Wootton to Arreton to Bembridge, or a ferry from Yarmouth, with a hinterland from Cowes to Ventnor—the southern most point on the island—or from Cowes, East Cowes and Newport. I have to say that all of those proposals are barmy.

Experts from the Boundary Commission for Scotland have looked carefully over the years at the case for merging the Western Isles with Skye. The commission found in 1981 that that would be "unworkable or intolerably difficult", and, in 2004, it came to the same conclusion, saying that the arguments against change

"remained as strong now as they were then."

To get anywhere near an electorate of 77,000 would mean the Western Isles being lumped in with a huge part of the Scottish mainland. If including Skye in the constituency would prove "unworkable or intolerably difficult", how on earth would merging the Western Isles with the mainland work in practice?

Such difficulties are even more acute in Orkney and Shetland, a constituency with a population of more than 32,000. Meeting the new quota would likely entail a union with the nearest mainland constituency, Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross. Such a drawing of boundaries would result in a constituency that was hundreds of miles from end to end.

Part of the problem is geographical. The only access to the Isle of Wight is by sea. There is no tunnel, bridge or scheduled air service, and crossing the Solent can be expensive and time-consuming. The even bigger problem, however, is that islands and islanders are very different from the mainland and mainlanders. Those who live on islands are, by definition, more insular. The word "insular" means being of or pertaining to an island or islands, but it also means being detached, standing alone or isolated. It is clear to me why the word is used in both ways, but one must live on an island to really understand. Many people on the Isle of Wight travel to the mainland only rarely. The Solent is much more of a barrier, both physical and psychological, than any other English county boundary If any part of the island were to be merged with the mainland, it would be reasonable for the mainland MP to live on the north island. After all, that is where the majority of his constituents—about 46,000—would live. He would not, however, be considered a part of the island community. I suspect that the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar recognises that feeling in the communities that he represents. It would be a very sad outcome if people were made to feel more distant and remote from their elected representatives.

There are good reasons why both the largest and smallest UK constituencies are island constituencies, and those reasons should be respected. We should not simply disregard the work of those who have looked at the issues before, sacrificing workable and sensible proposals on the altar of principle, however good and well-intentioned that principle might be.

It might seem odd that I am arguing for more rather than less work than other Members of the House, while at the same time arguing for the continued existence of the smallest UK constituency. However, it is because I live on an island that I understand the unique nature of islands. They are very special communities and special places that need special consideration. I understand that these matters are still being deliberated and that final decisions have yet to be made about how the policy is to be implemented. Will the Minister please give me an assurance that, when the Government move forward with plans to equalise constituency sizes, they will recognise the unique nature of island electorates? I hope that his common sense and good judgment will applied in spades to this question.

1.36 pm

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Today, we see an alliance of islanders—an alliance that was perhaps created by the *Daily Mail*. During the election campaign, the newspaper sent one of its reporters, Mr Robert Hardman—perhaps all the reporters from the *Daily Mail* are hard men—to both Na h-Eileanan an Iar and the Isle of Wight. Whether his aim was to create some mischief, I do not know—far be it from me to cast aspersions on such an august publication as the *Daily Mail*—but we were chosen because I represented the smallest constituency in terms of the number of voters, and the Isle of Wight is, of course, the constituency with the largest number of voters. The *Daily Mail* succeeded in uniting us in a common cause. The largest and the smallest numerical constituencies in the UK are of one mind: their islands are indeed special.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner) spoke eloquently and forcefully for his constituency. I will confine my remarks to my constituency, other than to point out to the Minister that it is odd for a democracy to be looking to cut the elected element of Parliament while almost daily—certainly monthly—we have news of further appointments to the unelected portion of Parliament. Does that mean that, when the Government leave office, the percentage of Parliament elected by democratic means will be far smaller than when they entered office? Quite how that makes the UK look internationally, other than like a laughing stock, I am not certain. Quite how the Government feel about that, other than queasy, I shall not speculate.

My constituency is the length of Wales. The Prime Minister might want to give me a territory the size of the Yukon, but that would not serve voters well at all. Areas, of course, need coverage. When a population grows in an area, a constituency with a maximum headage is usually created, obviously with some sensible anomalies, such as the Isle of Wight. That is to ensure an equality of treatment so that all voters have the same kind of representation and access to their MP as voters have in a more urban and populated setting. I speak particularly from my own perspective in Na h-Eileanan an Iar.

To give the Minister a small example, last Friday I conducted what I consider to be a small surgery on part of one the islands in my constituency, on the west side of Lewis—actually, we went down to Harris for part of it. We had an ordinary day. We covered 279 miles that Friday—a distance just a little longer than that between Glasgow and Liverpool. That is what I have to do to serve people in a remote island rural setting. I mention that just to give an idea of what has perhaps not been considered when people look on a purely numerical headage basis.

I think that it is right that people in rural areas have the same services and access as those in an urban setting. In the islands, we are used to a poor broadband service—British Telecom has a number of exchanges in the area that it has not upgraded yet, although I hope that it will—and I would hate to see democracy and people's expectations of democracy reach the same standards. In a democracy, everybody requires equality of treatment, representation and access to their MPs.

Finally, I wish to make a more political and perhaps more constitutional point. The Union is supposed to be a union between two nations; it does not mean having a 50:50 split of MPs between Scotland and England, as the Minister is no doubt aware. Obviously, as a Scottish National party Member, I would like there to be no MPs at Westminster who represent Scottish constituencies, but we live with the present situation and the way in which the cards have been dealt. In the meantime, I cannot allow what is proposed to proceed without protest and without making common cause with the Isle of Wight in the far south of England and alerting the Government to the dangers of exactly what the Prime Minister and his Liberal Democrat friends might do if they cut the representation of the highlands and islands.

I am sure that the Government will not do that. They will reflect, particularly on the strong arguments made by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight, and act with thought and consideration. They will make sure that Scotland does not lose any more MPs, because that would be a retrograde step for people in the highlands and islands and, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out earlier, it would be almost impossible to represent the Western Isles and Skye. We hope that such a mistake is not made, that the Minister will listen and that the right decision is reached. In the meantime, until the day of independence, I shall continue to make common cause with the hon. Member for Isle of Wight.

1.41 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr Mark Harper): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Sheridan, in my first outing on this side of the House—strange though it seems, but very welcome. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner) for his generous opening remarks and for how he represents his constituency so ably. I want also to mention, in passing, how he pronounced the constituency of the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) better than I just did. The hon. Gentleman will remember when I tried to pronounce his constituency in the House of Commons four years ago. I mangled it a bit then, but he gave me credit for at least trying rather than just copping out and calling it the Western Isles so I am sure that he will forgive me if I make a mess of it again.

When researching for the debate, I was interested to note that, before the Great Reform Act of 1832, the Isle of Wight was represented not as ably as it is now by my hon. Friend, but by more Members of Parliament. Indeed, eight Members of Parliament represented it in the House. The three boroughs of Newport, Newtown and Yarmouth each elected two Members of Parliament, and the rest of the island outside those boroughs was represented by the two county Members for Hampshire. The world has indeed moved on from a rather over-represented island to one that is probably under-represented given the number of Members of Parliament, but outweighed by the quality of its one Member of Parliament.

My hon. Friend is right that the Government have set out proposals for fewer and more equally sized constituencies. He is also right in saying that no decisions have been taken. He said that the Government were planning on having a quota of 77,000 electors with a 10% cut in the number of Members of Parliament. That was the policy set out by the Conservative party before the election, but Ministers are currently considering both the size of the House of Commons and the electoral quota that flows from it. As yet, no decisions have been taken by the coalition Government. I thought that it was worth putting that information on the record in case people assumed that the Conservative party's proposals were being automatically rolled forward. My hon. Friend welcomed the general thrust of our proposals to reduce the number of Members of Parliament in the House of Commons and to reduce the cost of politics. He is a demonstration, as are other hon. Members who represent constituencies with larger than average electorates, that it is perfectly possible to represent them very ably in the House of Commons and make sure that they receive a good service.

It is now worth picking up the point made by the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar about the unelected House of Lords. He is right that several peers were appointed to that House in the previous Government's dissolution honours list and that more peers might be created. He will also know that that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has set up a cross-party Committee charged with bringing forward by the end of the year a draft Bill to introduce either a wholly or a mainly elected second Chamber, which will deal with the issue that he highlighted about the number of unelected Members in that House. Those proposals will be scrutinised by a Committee of both Houses and will be taken forward. The issue that the hon. Gentleman raises is real, but it is in hand.

It is also worth saying that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight said, the work on considering boundaries, setting the size of the House of Commons and deciding on the guidance that the boundary commissioners will have as they set about their work needs to be approached with great care. Many Members of Parliament have already been lobbying me on what they think the rules should be and making cases both in the House and privately for their own constituencies, and I am listening to them intently. However, we must balance against the concerns raised by my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman the fact that, at the moment, electors' votes are worth different amounts depending on where they live. As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister said in the main Chamber, it is the

[Mr Mark Harper]

ultimate postcode lottery that some electors' votes are in effect worth more than others because it takes fewer of them to elect a Member of Parliament.

Mr MacNeil: Surely the way to address that anomaly is through proportional representation and perhaps the single transferable vote. Even if there are numerically even constituencies, some voters will still be worth an awful lot more if they happen to be in a swing seat. In a safe seat, the power of the voter is not as great as it would be in an area or a country where the single transferable vote is used.

Mr Harper: I am sure that you, Mr Sheridan, would not want me to be tempted into a discussion of the various electoral systems that we could have, so I will not be tempted by the hon. Gentleman. As he knows, when the Government introduce their Bill on the alternative vote and boundaries, there will be ample opportunity in the House, both on Second Reading and in a Committee of the whole House, to debate electoral systems. I am sure that he will take part in those debates with his normal vigour and good spirits, so we shall leave that question until then.

With regard to both the points that have been made, it is important, when we consider the rules and the framework that will be set for boundaries, to consider how Members of Parliament are able to do their jobs and the accessibility of their constituencies. I have looked carefully at the constituencies that are entirely constituted of islands and those that have significant islands as part of them, and it is worth saying that they do raise a number of issues, which my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman outlined clearly and which Ministers are considering carefully.

We will consider carefully how the process of the boundary reviews will be undertaken. We will listen to colleagues and, when we have published our proposals in a Bill, which we expect to introduce in the House before the summer recess, we will listen to colleagues' representations in the Chamber. They can be assured that it is a constitutional measure, so it will have its Committee stage not in a Committee Room, but on the Floor of the House. Therefore, if hon. Members are not happy with the proposals when we have published them, they will of course have a full opportunity to debate them and raise them with Ministers on the Floor of the House.

Mr Turner: Did I hear the Minister say that there would not be a Boundary Commission, or was that a misunderstanding on my part?

Mr Harper: No, there would be a Boundary Commission. The decisions for Ministers are on, first, the size of the House of Commons—the Government have yet to reach a decision on that; we are considering the matter carefully—and secondly the instructions and guidance that the Bill will set out for the four Boundary Commissions for the four constituent parts of the United Kingdom as they set about their work. That will be about the quota for the constituencies, the number of electors that each constituency should have; the amount by which the Boundary Commission can vary from that number—the margin, if I can put it like that; whether there are any other considerations, as there are now, that it can take into account; and the extent to which those other considerations, such as the island nature of constituencies and the geography, are allowed to override numerical equality. We are currently considering those matters, which we shall bring before the House.

Mr MacNeil: May I extend an invitation to the Minister? If his mind is wavering and not fully made up and he would like to come on a fact-finding mission, he is more than welcome to be my guest in Na h-Eileanan an Iar. We could drive from my office to my house, which is a distance of about 150 miles, using two ferries, or we could get two flights. That would perhaps underline the issue of geography in the Minister's mind, because when a person is pondering something on paper, it may not be understood as easily as it is during a five-hour drive or two flights.

Mr Harper: The hon. Gentleman tempts me with his very generous invitation, and I will bear it in mind. None the less, I understand the issues. I have been to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight on a number of occasions, and I have grappled with the ferry, so I know how difficult it is to get to. One of the other island constituencies affected is Orkney and Shetland. I visited the Shetland islands a few years ago, and have spoke to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) about the matter. I recognise the problems of constituencies that are accessible effectively only by air and at significant expense. Such points were made very ably by the hon. Gentleman, so I have an inkling of what the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar has to grapple with when he meets his constituents in surgeries and has to visit different parts of his constituency. I will bear in mind his very generous invitation, but he can rest assured that I have a pretty good idea of the issues involved because of the visits that I have made to other island constituencies. This will not just be a paper exercise that takes no account of the realities. The hon. Gentleman can also be reassured that Ministers considering the matter are constituency MPs who recognise the work that colleagues have to do when they represent their constituents. We will think about our own constituencies and how those challenges are magnified in the particular circumstances that were set out.

I hope that the two Members who have spoken will recognise that no decision has been taken. Their constituents can be satisfied that they have very ably set out the unique nature of island constituencies and some of the challenges that they face in representing them both in the House and outside. Ministers will listen very carefully to those arguments as we frame the legislation and as it is introduced on the Floor of the House. We will take these very delicate matters forward with great care and attention. I thank my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman for setting out those points and for giving the House the opportunity to consider them at an early stage.

Question put and agreed to.

1.52 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 16 June 2010

[DR WILLIAM MCCREA *in the Chair*]

Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*(Jeremy Wright.)*

9.30 am

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): It is pleasant to serve under your chairmanship, Dr McCrea. Let me say straight away that it is unfortunate that this debate is necessary. All of us in the last Parliament hoped that when we were re-elected, the issue described as "MPs' expenses" would have been dealt with once and for all. Enough controversy occurred in the last Parliament. Let me make it clear to the chair of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, and the interim chief executive, that I have no wish to conceal from the public in any way the amount of money that we claim. I am sure that that applies to other colleagues, whichever party they belong to. Indeed, I was one of those who strenuously opposed the attempt to exempt Parliament from freedom of information legislation. If we claim public money—and it is public money—the public are entitled to know what we claim. That is not at issue, and it is important that that is understood.

It is perfectly understandable that in the closing stages of the last Parliament, as you know, Dr McCrea, IPSA was unanimously agreed to without any vote. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw), who is present in the Chamber, put the reasons why a new body should be set up, which we all understood. However, what has occurred since we returned after the election has put these issues back on the agenda. The reason for that is simple: the system that IPSA introduced, without any consultation with Members, is complex and difficult. When it comes to legitimate claims—obviously, all our claims should be legitimate—for constituency offices and related bills such as council tax, rent, telephone, electricity and so on, it is difficult to get any sense out of IPSA.

The person whose title is "independent expenses compliance officer" was quoted yesterday in the press as dismissing the complaints as coming only from older MPs. I am not here to apologise for my age. I am no more responsible for that than I am for the colour of my skin, my racial origin or my gender. However, over a third—35%—of the Members are new to the House of Commons and they cannot be dismissed as "older MPs". Presumably, those MPs coming to the House for the first time are somewhat younger than me—I would be surprised if that was not the case—but it is not a matter of saying that they should "get used to it", because that is nonsense. Criticism coming from new Members is no less than that coming from those of us who have been re-elected.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I think that I am correct in saying that my hon. Friend was elected to this House for the first time in the 1960s. In *The Guardian* yesterday, Mr Alan Lockwood commented that most MPs were happy with the system and he made some pejorative statements. If he were to hear a complaint against my hon. Friend, or if my hon. Friend made a complaint about IPSA, does he think that he would get a fair hearing?

Mr Winnick: I am not going to take up what the independent expenses compliance officer said. I do not think that his comments deserve any response from me; they speak for themselves. However, if the situation has been difficult for returning Members—as many of us are—how much more difficult has it been for new Members? It must be an outright nightmare for them, and that is set against a background in which they would find it far more difficult to criticise the system because their local paper might say, "Look what they complain about the moment they are elected." At least returning Members have constituency offices, however difficult it is to get IPSA to agree on rent and related matters. New Members have to start from scratch, without being able to go to IPSA and say, "This is what we want to do. Is it legitimate? Is it within the rules?" Those are elementary questions, but they will not get any answers because, at the moment, the system does not provide for anything of that kind.

Mr Tom Harris (Glasgow South) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend find it perturbing that although it is virtually impossible for Members of Parliament to get a face-to-face interview with a senior IPSA official, it is extremely easy for almost any member of the press to do so?

Mr Winnick: I take that point entirely. If IPSA spent as much time trying to resolve the genuine difficulties of new and returning MPs as it gives to the press, that would be an advancement. The national press will say, as in one recent article, that MPs are too obsessed with their own position. However, what we want to do is on behalf of our constituents; it is not about our salary. Perhaps our salary has not been paid in full due to a technical fault, but that is not the subject of today's debate. We are not going to town about that, far from it. If we want to have constituency offices and to get matters resolved, it is so that our constituents can come to our constituency offices and we can pursue their complaints. IPSA gives the impression that our concerns are all about ourselves, and that is what it tries to get over to the media.

Mr Brian H. Donohoe (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate; it is a subject that I feel passionate about. Is it not wrong that long-standing, loyal staff find themselves in the predicament that, as a consequence of the ceiling that has been set, they might be made redundant?

Mr Winnick: Indeed, and I shall come to that.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Winnick: I would like to make some progress as I know that a number of colleagues wish to speak. IPSA's justification is that the system works. I do not claim to be an expert in computer technology. My secretary makes the claims. I am not sure that when she was appointed, many years ago, that was one of her jobs. Be that as it may, it could be argued that whether or not we are acknowledged computer experts, that is the system.

[Mr Winnick]

Let me, however, give some illustrations in order to challenge what IPSA has said. One new MP—not of my party—told me that since he was elected, 80% of his time has been spent being an administrator. He did not consider that to be the reason he stood for election. If my party had won that constituency, it is likely that the Labour Member would be in precisely the same position.

Another colleague—not a new Member—said that he had spent four hours trying to submit a claim for the cost of petrol to and from his constituency. Four hours, and then the system crashed. On "Newsnight", which some colleagues will have watched, a newly elected Conservative MP was shown using a computer. She said that trying to deal with the computer system set up by IPSA was far more complex than working as a GP in the national health service. Why should that be the case? Why should MPs, be they Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat, have to do that? We should not be spending hours and hours on such matters; we should be getting involved in the things that we were elected to deal with in the first place. It is indefensible that IPSA should have set up a system that is so difficult and complex, and which, particularly for new Members, has made life a nightmare.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware that 20 central London MPs have, on a cross-party basis, signed a letter to Sir Ian and held meetings with IPSA to highlight the historical problems that we have had in balancing our budgets—a difficulty greatly exacerbated by the changes in the rules? The penultimate sentence of our letter states that

"no thought has been given to the needs of central London MPs when designing this scheme of allowances."

Mr Winnick: I am sure that that is an important and interesting intervention.

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): On computers, I managed to get access to the expenses system using my own password—

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): Order.

Phil Wilson: However, the expenses that appeared on the screen were those of another MP. A member of my staff managed to get through to IPSA to point that out and was told that it was a computer glitch that would be sorted. In my view, that is not a computer glitch but a gross intrusion into another Member's privacy, and it needs to be looked into before we go any further.

Mr Winnick: My hon. Friend's point is valid, and I hope that it will be noted by IPSA. I am not sure whether IPSA is represented here today—I shall talk about its senior personnel in a moment.

Another of my hon. Friends said that trying to deal with IPSA was like dealing with a brick wall. That sums up the experience very well. IPSA has provided a helpline, but if there ever was an anti-helpline, that is it. In many instances it is impossible to get through, and if one does, one gets no information but is told to send an e-mail. One would have thought that if a helpline is provided, it should be a genuine one. Time and again, colleagues have complained that they send e-mails to IPSA and spend a great deal of time doing so—as Members of Parliament, we should not be spending anywhere near as much time on that as we do—but they receive no response at all. One would hope that one could phone somebody, apart from the helpline, and get information, but that is out of the question. IPSA will not give out another phone number.

Allegations have been made about rudeness to staff. I do not blame the staff employed by IPSA for the problems. They are not responsible. If any colleague, from whichever party, has been rude, that is wrong and I would be the last person to defend them. Responsibility lies with the chair and the chief executive of IPSA and not the staff, many of whom, apparently, are interns who were employed only because of their technical knowledge of how to work the computer system. They are not in a position—they admit as much—to give advice to any Member.

Mr Russell Brown (Dumfries and Galloway) (Lab): My hon. Friend, like those others of us who were here before the last election, will easily recognise the difficulties that everyone encountered last year, when the whole expenses and allowances fiasco was dragged through the press. I have every reason to believe that those involved in setting up the IPSA system visited the Scottish Parliament and spoke to the staff in the allowances office there, who are held in high esteem. The point was raised: why do we not have such a system? It now appears that IPSA visited and paid no attention whatsoever to the advice and help that was given.

Mr Winnick: I would like to have the response of the chair of IPSA to my hon. Friend's very important point about the Scottish Parliament.

Regarding submissions, if IPSA says that it is absolutely vital that the system is online, so be it, but I do not see any reason why that is necessary. Why can we not make submissions in writing, with all the documentation? Of course the documentation should be checked thoroughly—there should be no repeat of the embarrassment and shame that was brought on Parliament as a result of the abuses, although we should bear in mind that most of those involved in the abuses are no longer in the House of Commons—but no reason has been given why submissions cannot be made in writing. If approved, they could immediately be put on the IPSA website. In that way, those who cannot sleep at night unless they know what their MP is claiming can be satisfied. All the information will be on the website, so everyone will know the details immediately a claim has been submitted and approved.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Winnick: I will give way to my hon. Friend, who does not usually like to get involved in controversy.

Mr Skinner: I think my hon. Friend is now at the kernel of the subject: the online system. We have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield

(Phil Wilson) that he reported a breach of security—that is what it was—when an e-mail was sent to him in error. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) agree that that is not an isolated case? I have a letter here that was sent to me on 2 June. It belongs to another Member of Parliament. I have sent it to IPSA and told it about the mistake, and I have heard that several other Members have had similar e-mails, not destined for them. That is a serious breach of security. We all know that three Ministers in the previous Government lost their jobs because of dodgy e-mails, and the IPSA system will end in tears if we are not careful. This debate is not about IPSA itself, as my hon. Friend said at the very beginning, or about its being an independent body. We all welcome that, and voted for it. It is about the fact that the system is not secure. Already, in just a few weeks, we have seen many breaches of security. IPSA must look for a different system to get the show on the road, and then everybody will be satisfied.

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): Order. Interventions will have to be interventions, not speeches.

Mr Winnick: My hon. Friend has touched on an important question, which I mentioned earlier: why are we having this debate at all? Why was the issue not resolved in the previous Parliament? Why are we back to the point where the media can say that MPs are discussing what they call their expenses again? My hon. Friend has mentioned other matters on the Floor of the House, and IPSA should take them up immediately.

I take the view that the most senior people in IPSA—the chair and the interim chief executive—should understand the widespread concern that is reflected in the attendance at this debate. This is not an attempt to undermine IPSA or to undermine the concept of what we claim becoming public knowledge as quickly as possible. It is an attempt to get those responsible to recognise that there are genuine difficulties, which it is up to them to resolve.

The chair of IPSA receives £700 per day, plus what are called "reasonable expenses". Whether or not those expenses have to be claimed online, I do not know. That is the equivalent of more than £100,000 a year for a three-day week. The chair is a distinguished public servant—I do not question that for a moment—but he has a responsibility to get a grip on the situation. The interim chief executive is paid somewhere between £105,000 and £115,000 per annum. That is quite a sum, and one would hope that someone in such a senior position and with such a substantial salary would recognise the considerable disquiet, to say the least, among Members of Parliament and staff. The Unite parliamentary branch has expressed much concern that some of its members could be made redundant as a result of the changes.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I put on record that I am here today only because of the inordinate amount of time that I spend on IPSA matters when I should be seeing to the interests of my constituents. Is it not the case that the system has been badly thought through and hastily and sloppily introduced, and that the impact is not just on MPs but on staff, not just in terms of redundancy but in the fact that IPSA has completely overlooked the payment of maternity and sickness leave?

Mr Winnick: I totally agree.

I mentioned IPSA's chair and interim chief executive. A communications director is also being advertised for, with a salary of up to £85,000. Apparently, one is not enough, and the intention is to appoint two others. Inevitably, one asks oneself why on earth IPSA requires three, or indeed any, spin doctors. My debate is about Government policy on IPSA, and I know that the Minister will do his duty by explaining what that policy is. However, it would be interesting to know why it is necessary to have three spin doctors, with the salary of the most senior being advertised as £85,000.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a serious impact on Members' families as well as an effect on staff? One of the most serious issues, in addition to all the points about administration, is that once children reach the age of six the entitlement to accommodation is cut off and spouses are given no travel allowance. Does my hon. Friend agree that IPSA is behaving not only independently but above the law? Is it not clear that that discriminatory rule will impact on not only the way we do our jobs but who can be elected and who can do the job?

Mr Winnick: My hon. Friend could not have set out better the effect on family life. We could go back to the situation that we had many years ago when only those with independent means could become Members of Parliament. That would be a very undesirable state of affairs to say the least, and I am sure that that view is not confined to Labour Members. I see no reason why family life should be undermined in that way.

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): May I just go back to my hon. Friend's point about communication officers? Does he agree that the real issue with IPSA is that there are no channels of communication? There is no way of having contact to resolve issues about parts of the policy that it is has imposed without consultation and that are not fit for purpose.

Mr Winnick: I mentioned how difficult it is to get in touch with IPSA, apart from with its interns, whom I would be the last person to criticise. I have not seen the chair or the chief executive. Where are they? Do they come to the House of Commons? They apparently have very luxurious accommodation in central London, but why do they not come here? Why can we not meet them? Have they imposed some sort of rule that means that they cannot meet Members of Parliament? Parliament has been back for two or three weeks, but anyone who has seen the chair or the interim chief executive is fortunate. I would not recognise them—I might try to remember them from their photographs, but that is about all.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): Last week, I received a letter telling me that I had not submitted my bank details to IPSA so that I could be paid. That struck me as a little odd as I was actually paid, and the money was put in my bank. Today's edition of *The Times* contains the statement that many MPs have not submitted their bank details to IPSA. First, I would dispute a communications policy that

[Mr Adrian Bailey]

allows such information to be divulged. Secondly, I deeply resent the implication that MPs are somehow engaged in a conspiracy to avoid giving IPSA their bank details and getting their pay. Lastly, I would ask that we apply what pressure we can, perhaps collectively, to get the National Audit Office to look at these procedures to see whether they give the public value for money.

Mr Winnick: That is a good point. I spoke about the compliance expenses officer, who is supposed to be an independent watchdog, but that person is appointed by IPSA and occupies its offices, so I do not know how much of a watchdog he is.

I have yet to find a single Member of Parliament of any party who is in favour of what IPSA has done—if there is one, they should quickly put their hand up—and I am not likely to find one among the 47 colleagues who have come along today, presumably to support the criticism of IPSA.

To a large extent, IPSA is working with the mindset that we got into such a position in the previous Parliament—that we were so embarrassed and shamed—that the public will not be on our side. That is a possibility. If that is IPSA's mindset, it is unfortunate. However, I hope that I have made it clear today that we are not complaining for ourselves, but because what has happened since we returned after the election is undermining the work that we do as Members of Parliament on behalf of our constituents. That is our concern: our constituency offices and the bills to be paid. The system that is in operation should not be so complex or difficult that, as I mentioned, a colleague has to spend, unbelievably, four hours trying to process a petrol claim.

The public should understand that this is not a matter of a few pounds. Normally, when people talk about expenses, it might be a matter of a cab fare—not for us, of course—a meal and the rest of it. However, when our expenses—the constituency rent, the bills, our rented accommodation and the rest—are totalled up, they come to quite a substantial sum. That sum is perfectly legitimate and above board, and I am not aware that anyone has suggested otherwise. We hope that it will be processed properly and without taking too much time.

I hope that IPSA's chair and interim chief executive understand that our criticism is justified and that we have merit on our side. I also hope that they will come to grips with the situation as quickly as possible and end this rather embarrassing position, which has seen us having to come here to discuss the issue again. Following what happened in the previous Parliament and the setting up of IPSA, we had all hoped, as I have said, that this issue had gone for ever.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): Order. I draw Members' attention to the fact that I will start the winding-up speeches at 10.40 am. I want to get as many of the Members who requested to speak into the debate as possible.

9.56 am

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I wish to declare an interest as one of the many Members of Parliament who have been deemed to be a London-area MP with a constituency outside London. I also wish to state that I am among the many MPs of all political parties who were not asked to pay one penny back by Sir Thomas Legg.

I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) on initiating the debate; he has done a great service to parties in all parts of the House. New Members, in particular, might well ask how it is that they arrived in the House on 6 May to find the expenses scheme creating such enormous difficulty for them and, indeed, for returned Members. It is therefore worth stating that that occurred because the final IPSA scheme was published only on 29 March. On the very same day, it was brought into being, when the Speaker laid it before the House without debate, consideration, the opportunity for amendment or a vote. I hasten to say that that comment represents no criticism whatever of the Speaker; that was the procedure laid down by the House in the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009. That is why we are in this situation, debating a scheme that has hitherto been wholly undebated and that is incapable of amendment or vote by Members of the House.

I want to focus on one fundamental issue, which has thus far, I believe, received no consideration inside or outside the House, although I drew it to the attention of IPSA's chair, Sir Ian Kennedy, in my letter to him of 21 December last year. That issue is the interface between parliamentary privilege and IPSA's decisions. I should make it absolutely clear that the aspect of parliamentary privilege to which I am referring has nothing whatever to do with the application of the criminal law to MPs' expenses. I am referring to a quite different aspect of parliamentary privilege—the privilege of freedom from obstruction in the performance of parliamentary duties.

I have taken advice from the Clerk of the House as to the ambit of that privilege. He has drawn my attention to page 75 of "Erskine May", under the heading "What constitutes privilege". He has also drawn my attention to page 143, under the heading "Obstructing Members of either House in the discharge of their duty", the first paragraph of which reads:

> "The House will proceed against those who obstruct Members in the discharge of their responsibilities to the House or in their participation in its proceedings."

He has also drawn my attention to the report of the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege, at paragraph 264, where, among the contempts of Parliament that are listed, are

> "assaulting, threatening, obstructing or intimidating a member or officer of the House in the discharge of the member's or officer's duty".

I do not, of course, suggest that IPSA is in the country of assault, but there are serious issues to be raised about obstruction.

The Clerk of the House has made it clear to me that the privilege of freedom from obstruction applies only to work in connection with parliamentary proceedings. It does not apply to constituency work. However, he has also confirmed to me, in writing, that the protection of MPs from obstruction in connection with parliamentary proceedings applies whether the House is sitting or not. So, just as the IPSA scheme and any obstruction occurring under it applies throughout the year, the protection from obstruction for MPs applies equally throughout the year.

The issue before the House is whether IPSA is obstructing Members of Parliament in the discharge of their parliamentary duties, other than their constituency duties, by, for example, forcing them to spend many hours a week travelling, when they could be working in connection with their parliamentary duties; or whether in countless other ways, as we heard from the hon. Gentleman and in interventions, it is obstructing Members in the efficient and effective discharge of their parliamentary duties.

Helen Goodman: The right hon. Gentleman makes a fascinating and pertinent point. Is he aware that some of our colleagues have been told that they cannot recoup the cost of going to conferences on subjects that are of relevance to their work in the House and their constituencies? Is not that precisely the sort of issue that would be covered by the points he has made?

Sir John Stanley: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that important point.

No one can say with certainty at the moment whether IPSA is violating the privilege of freedom from obstruction; that is a matter for the House of Commons only. Equally, no one can reasonably deny that the issue must be addressed by the House, as early as possible in the life of this Parliament. We are in an unprecedented situation. Never before in the history of Parliament has a statutory body outside Parliament been created with the ability to introduce rules that directly impact on the ability of Members of Parliament to perform their parliamentary duties. It is clear that the boundary between the authority of IPSA and the ambit of the parliamentary privilege of freedom from obstruction needs to be defined. It is at the moment wholly undefined. For that reason, the issue must be placed at an early date before the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges. I intend to achieve that, with, I hope, the support of other Members. I hope the Minister will agree that the issue of the boundary between the authority of IPSA and the privilege of freedom from obstruction needs early consideration by the Committee.

10.5 am

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) on bravely initiating the debate on behalf of other Members. Many of us have felt totally frustrated in the past months, particularly during the expenses scandals, and I blame all the party leaders for failing to protect Members of Parliament. They vied with one another to wear the most painful hair shirt. They have thrown us to the dogs.

This is my 26th year in Parliament and I have never felt as humiliated as I was during the expenses scandal and during the general election. I had nothing to apologise for, but in our constituencies people shouted "You're all the same; you're all crooks." I object very strongly to that. I am not a crook. The majority of my colleagues are not either.

Because of IPSA I have spent many hours on accountancy, clerical work, and repeating that clerical work because forms have not been received or have been lost, and I should not have had to do that. Also, when one is doing that work from constituency offices, the online system often breaks down and cannot be accessed. Members spend a lot of time hanging around waiting for it to come back. I agree that it would be much better if the work could be done in writing. We all know that we are asked to repeat things; we are asked to send original receipts, which then get lost. We must keep photocopies of the originals and produce those again.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): We have an online computer system, but I also submit every receipt in writing and must establish my own internal office system to track the fact that I have sent the receipts. I submit the information in writing and online, and therefore duplicate the process. I am not against computer systems, but I want to find a way in which my right hon. Friend and I can do things once, not twice.

Ann Clwyd: I agree; and, by the way, I want to say to the press that we are not whingeing MPs. I object to that title. We are raising matters that it is legitimate to raise because they affect our performance as Members of Parliament. If anyone describes me as a whingeing MP again—and I do not know if any members of the press are responsible for such expressions—I ask them please to come and see me.

Andrew McDonald said in a letter to me dated 9 June that IPSA had met almost 600 MPs face to face at the induction sessions. I must have been at a different induction session, because the person dealing with my induction was a civil servant from the Department for Work and Pensions who is not even a member of IPSA. Where were the people who should have met me face to face? Were they the people who smiled and nodded at me on the way into the induction session? Will they please introduce themselves next time as members of IPSA, so that I can acknowledge them? It has been impossible, as we have already heard, to talk to somebody responsible at IPSA. Instead, we are asked to submit things in writing, which is time-consuming.

IPSA is hosting training sessions around the country for MPs' staff. Again, I object that there is not one training session in Wales, so my member of staff is expected to travel to Bristol for it. That cannot be right.

Mr Kevan Jones: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the problem with the so-called induction system or briefing session was the fact that it was designed only to show us how to use an incompetent computer system? First, if we raised any questions, staff could not answer; secondly, the default position with IPSA seems to be, "Put it in an e-mail." My right hon. Friend may have experienced the fact that even if we send e-mails, we get no replies.

Ann Clwyd: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The comments made by other Members show that we have all shared these experiences. Indeed, I can hardly sit down now in the Tea Room without somebody talking to me about IPSA. Of course they do, because it takes up such a great amount of our time, but it should not be taking up our time in that way. The organisation cannot even get our salaries right; it says that that is an administrative error, but with all the staff or accountants that it has working for it, how on earth can it make an administrative error? I suggest that it is totally incompetent if it cannot get the simple matter of our salaries right.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): As with the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), the young man who came to explain the system to me could not answer any of my questions. Does the right hon. Lady agree that it was not his fault? He had been an administrative back-office person in the private office of the former Lord Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw). Those who are responsible are those who put him into that job without giving him the answers.

Ann Clwyd: That is disgraceful. It puts unfair pressure on those people. We expect answers and if we do not get answers we obviously feel frustrated. I have not yet screamed or shouted at anyone, or banged the table, but I am getting to the point of saying that I would not have come back to Parliament if I had realised what a hassle the system would be for me and my staff. I would not have returned. That is a shocking thing to have to say, because throughout my time here I have enjoyed being a Member of Parliament; to spend my time now having to do this kind of thing irritates me beyond explanation.

I note that the Leader of the House is here. He will know that a few weeks ago in business questions I raised this matter in response to a question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North. My hon. Friend did not receive an answer to his questions; he was told that no one was responsible for answering on behalf of IPSA. I then discovered that the Deputy Prime Minister would have policy responsibility for IPSA; the Leader of the House told me that in reply to my question. If the Deputy Prime Minister is responsible for IPSA policy, he should be here listening to this debate. I am sorry he had to send his right hon. Friend to take the flak on his behalf. I would like to know what "policy" means. If answering questions on IPSA is not part of policy, what is?

Mr Winnick: The reply to the questions I tabled to the Leader of the House was that no responsibility falls on the Government for what are basically day-to-day matters. Downing street then said that it was the responsibility of the Deputy Prime Minister. I put the same questions to him, but got the same response. It is not its fault, but the Table Office now blocks all questions on the workings of IPSA. The organisation is a law unto itself; it is impossible, except at business questions, to raise issues by way of parliamentary questions. That in itself is pretty disgraceful.

Ann Clwyd: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that we allow enough time for the poor man who has to answer the debate to give a comprehensive reply.

I read again in the paper this morning that MPs will be given face-to-face advice surgeries with officials, starting in September. At the moment, advice is given largely via telephone helpline and e-mail. None the less, despite the complaints of MPs, Sir Ian said that it is not a complicated expenses system. Who is he kidding? It is complicated, and I object very strongly on behalf of my fellow Members that the system has been imposed upon us and that nobody seems to be accountable.

Mr Donohoe: Is my right hon. Friend aware that we cannot talk to IPSA but have to speak to an agency in Manchester called Calyx? When we ask a question, all the staff there can do is to say, "We'll call you back; we have to get in touch with IPSA." Surely that is ridiculous.

Ann Clwyd: It is all ridiculous. We must have answers today, because we are not going to put up with it. Of course it is right that the expenses system should be transparent. We all agree with that—nobody disagrees—but we disagree with the way that IPSA is operating and the extra stress that it causes Members of Parliament.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): Further to what the right hon. Lady said about information being given in different regions, an information day was held in Northern Ireland on Monday. I believe that four MPs were notified about it—a total disgrace, given the other difficulties that we are expected to deal with—and as a result, hardly anyone turned up.

Ann Clwyd: That is yet more evidence that IPSA is not working.

I have been trying to finish my speech, Dr McCrea; I have tried to resume my seat twice. I now do so.

10.17 am

Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) on raising the real threat to the operation of this Parliament and to the ability of democratically elected Members to do the job for which they were elected. I sincerely hope that the Minister was listening and will give feedback and take action. I hope that the leader of the council—*[Laughter.]* It could almost be a council, could it not? I hope that the Leader of the House hears what has been said and takes immediate action. Our work is being seriously interfered with and Parliamentary privilege is therefore being compromised.

I have not yet found a Member of Parliament who thinks that IPSA is doing a good job, but we should acknowledge and appreciate that its staff—those who are trying to do the job—are wading through treacle, just as we are. It is down to the Government—my Government—to put it right.

I am not technically proficient, so it goes way over my head, but those MPs who do know how to operate the computer system are spending many hours on it—or their staff are doing so. We had a simple system before and a few Members made it go wrong, but that was to do with second homes. I am not aware of anything seriously affecting the way that our staff operated. Why should they be penalised? Why should they suffer because of the sins of MPs? Why should new MPs have to tolerate a system that would not be tolerated in any other walk of life?

I have been to IPSA—I doorstepped it. If I can do that, I am amazed that no investigative journalist has done so. I can tell colleagues that the accommodation is luxurious—the best that I have ever seen and better than anything in a Cabinet Minister's office. The work done there could easily be done from an industrial estate in Romford. IPSA does not have to occupy very expensive offices in central London.

I repeat: we should not criticise IPSA staff. It is their bosses who created this monster. It is not fit for purpose. This is not a question of MPs wanting to line their pockets; it is a question of MPs being able to pay the bills, so that they can operate their constituency offices and their staff can get on with their jobs. I honestly believe that if the job had been handed over to Tesco, it

would have been done more efficiently, because Tesco knows everyone who goes in its shops and what they purchase. If every MP were issued with a House of Commons credit card, at the end of the month the printout would say what had been purchased and it would be deducted automatically. No money would go out of or into an MP's personal account.

It is an affront that I have found it necessary to open a separate bank account. I do not see why the private bank account of my wife and I should be called upon to pay the office costs of an MP and that money then paid back into our private account. It is a real affront. Please, let us take up the excellent research undertaken by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley). We have the Leader of the House and the Minister here, and I can guarantee that the Deputy Prime Minister will hear about this at 5 o'clock tonight.

10.21 am

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr McCrea. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) on securing the debate.

It is almost a year since the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009 went through its Commons stages. I remember it well. The Act created the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority and gave it a number of administrative and regulatory functions, including payment of MPs' allowances, dealing with allowance claims and revising the allowance scheme for MPs. The key aspect of the Act is that it gave IPSA those functions in relation to Members' allowances, yet when IPSA published the first scheme for consultation, it changed the word "allowances" to "expenses".

Most right hon. and hon. Members understand the anger and annoyance generated in the public by the term "MPs' expenses" following the scandal of last year. It therefore seems to me to be incorrect and somewhat provocative of IPSA to describe allowances designed to support MPs in carrying out their parliamentary functions as expenses. We could debate the different definitions, but the definition of "allowance" is money defined or set aside for a purpose—in the case of MPs, to pay essential costs such as staff salaries and national insurance, rent, business rates and utility costs. It includes the sense that the sum specified in the allowance may or may not be used, but IPSA seemed to react to the term "allowances" by suggesting that if it made an "allowance scheme", MPs would use all of the allowance allocated. That has not been the case in the past.

There is a wide variety of definitions of expenses, but a common one is that of costs incurred by an employee that are payable by an employer. As other Members have said, that does not fit the situation of MPs as we are not employees of the House. I strongly feel that "expenses" has overtones that work to hamper Parliament's recovery from the scandal generated by the discredited system used in the previous Parliament. As my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North has said, we all want to get over it. In my view, IPSA would be well advised to describe the scheme as an allowance scheme, as the 2009 Act laid down.

Interestingly, IPSA uses a different definition of expenses when it comes to its own reporting. It states on its website that it will publish all expenses and hospitality incurred by the IPSA board and senior staff. If it used the same definition of "expenses" for its own staff, it would report its office costs and the salaries and other support costs of its staff, as well as personal expenses. What it actually publishes is travel and accommodation costs.

What was called the office costs allowance is now split by IPSA into two allowances: constituency office rental and general administrative expenditure. The previous allowance was more than £22,000 and could be supplemented by transfer from other allowances if office running costs were higher than the allowance. The IPSA scheme split the allowance into two parts and reduced it by £1,300. One part of the allowance has to be used to pay office rent, business rates, utility bills and office insurance, and the other for office furniture, computers and printers, phone systems and bills, stationery and postage. Why does IPSA feel that it is right to reduce the total amount of allowances for running an MP's constituency office?

The Committee on Standards in Public Life looked at the previous allowance and, in its report, recommended no change. Not only has IPSA reduced the allowance, but it has arbitrarily split it and insisted that office rental and associated costs must somehow fit into the reduced half, with the other part of the allowance not able be used for rent, rates or utility bills. Apparently, the level of rental used by IPSA to set the constituency office rental cap is about £5,000 a year, which is meant to pay the annual rent of offices for the MP and up to three and a half staff, plus filing space, printers and space to meet constituents. It is not adequate. The cap is said to be the average office rent paid in the previous Parliament. The concept of an average rent is strange—rents vary up and down the country and probably half of the MPs in that Parliament had a higher cost than the £5,000 average. Many MPs are able to rent office space at low cost from constituency associations or have subsidised offices from their local authority, but for other MPs such subsidised and low-cost offices are not available. There is a danger that IPSA's splitting the allowance and setting such a low cap on the office rental element could drive MPs out of their current constituency offices and into unsuitable premises.

Helen Goodman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is even more absurd to put things over which no one has any flexibility into one budget. We sign up to all the things included in the rent five years beforehand—they are not under our control—and all the flexible things are in another budget. Putting those two budgets together would make management of the money far easier.

Barbara Keeley: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North referred to new MPs setting up their offices from scratch. Some new colleagues have told me that they cannot afford the offices used by their predecessors. The rent will last for a number of weeks and then they will be pushed out of those offices.

On the same day that my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr Timms) was stabbed at a constituency surgery, I challenged a person whom I thought was breaking into a property neighbouring my constituency office. The police advised me that challenging would-be burglars is not a good idea and that I should

[Barbara Keeley]

desist from doing so in future. My current constituency office is a place in which I feel that my staff and I are safe—it is not a shop, it is not on the ground floor and we have good security protection in the building—but I am very aware of the possibility of crime in the area and the other security threats posed to MPs and their staff.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I am an MP for a new constituency following a boundary change. It would plainly have been the wrong decision for me to try to inherit the premises occupied by my former colleague, David Clelland, which are on the outskirts of the new constituency. In Gateshead town centre, there is a significant transport hub that feeds virtually every part of my constituency, so it would be right for me to establish a new constituency office there. However, the IPSA recommendations on rents do not take account of town centre locations, where rents are necessarily higher because of market conditions. That precludes my establishing a constituency office that is handy for my constituents to access, unless I subsidise it out of my own salary.

Barbara Keeley: That is a well made point.

I am short of time, so I want to end my remarks on that aspect by saying that I cannot get another office that I believe would be safe for my staff at the rent that IPSA has used to calculate office costs. IPSA is considering my case, and presumably that of other Members in my situation. I hope that it will be true to its word and not force me and other MPs out of our constituency offices. If it forces us into cheap premises in unsuitable areas, what does that say about security and safety considerations? Following on from my hon. Friend's intervention, I am now thinking about finding ways to subsidise my office costs. That is the position we have been pushed into.

In summary, why has IPSA changed the terms laid down in the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009? Why does it describe our offices and staffing costs and other essential elements of MPs' costs as "expenses", given that the word has such a particular resonance with the public? Why has it caused a great deal of doubt, uncertainty and problems to MPs by reducing the office costs budget and splitting an allowance that worked well into elements with caps that are too low to work properly for a number of MPs and that, by forcing MPs into cheaper office premises, could have very serious implications for the safety and security of MPs and their staff?

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): We have 10 minutes left, and three Members are trying to catch my eye. I leave it for Members to decide whether they wish to allow others to get in.

10.31 am

Jim Sheridan (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) on securing this debate. In anticipation of press reporting of this debate, may I say that we get it—but we have had it? Also on press reporting, I would really welcome Mr Kennedy's coming out of his luxurious bunker to tell us whether a member of staff said to an MP, "Don't shout at me because it wasn't me who fiddled my expenses." I very much doubt whether that was said by a member of IPSA, because the staff are extremely helpful if they can be. I raise the matter because it relates to the whole question of staff budgets. IPSA has effectively cut £5,000 from staff budget levels. That means that 175 MPs will have to reduce their staff, which is unacceptable.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): As a new Member, I inherited the staffing structure of my predecessor. He and I and our constituents have been served by those staff with both dignity and diligence. If there is no change in the staffing levels, I will have to sack someone. Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that that is unfair?

Jim Sheridan: That is grossly unfair. The worrying aspect is that the hon. Gentleman may even be taken to an industrial tribunal, and who will pay the cost of that? IPSA has also denied our staff the opportunity to be awarded performance-related bonuses. What we want to know—we have been trying to find this out and it has been very difficult—is whether IPSA staff receive performance-related bonuses. If they do, what is the criteria for them and how much do they get? As for redundancy, we cannot pay staff a basic redundancy, and we have little opportunity to enhance that, which is causing us concern.

There is also the question of gender in this place. Maternity pay for our staff now comes from a contingency fund, and it is approved or rejected at the sole discretion of IPSA. There is no possibility of an appeal or anything else. Again, that is extremely worrying.

I am conscious of the time, but let me finish by referring to the question of the stand-in Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell), who asked why we could not have a credit card. I asked IPSA that question myself, and it came back and said:

"Your email asks whether IPSA can consider an alternative system for processing expenses, based on a credit card similar to the travel card. The system used by IPSA has been assessed to be efficient and cost effective for the purposes required. A significant advantage of the system is that it has been specifically designed to help MPs by preventing them from making mistakes at the initial stage of inputting an expense claim - this automatically reduces the level of incorrect claims and therefore reduces associated administration costs."

If we had a simple credit card system that is transparent and accountable—that is what the general public wants and what we want to give them—we would not need all these compliance officers, communications officers and press officers. We have created an administrative monster. If we had a simple credit card system that is, as I said, transparent and accountable, we would not need all of that.

10.34 am

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): I strongly endorse the point made by the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Jim Sheridan). If we can have a House of Commons travel card for our train or plane tickets, why can we not have it for anything else? The hon. Gentleman made a very good point.

People will not be able to take up the excellent suggestion of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) about privileges until the Standards and Privileges Committee is established. There is one other thing that Members can do now.

Many people have said that IPSA is not accountable, but that is wrong. It spends public money, which, therefore, makes it accountable. The IPSA chief executive is an accounting officer. The Comptroller and Auditor General is an officer of the House of Commons; he is the head of the National Audit Office. His address is 157 Buckingham Palace road, London SW1 W9SP. I encourage all Members of Parliament to write to him with their own experiences, because he is responsible. He is charged by Parliament, under the National Audit Act 1983, with ensuring the effective, efficient and economic use of public funds. In due course, he will need to take an interest in this question. It is a simple suggestion, but people should encourage the Comptroller and Auditor General to look at IPSA, because eventually, if there is enough pressure, he will have to look at it, and IPSA will then have to account for how it is spending public funds. It is that simple.

10.36 am

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I promise to be extremely brief. I appreciate that many Members do not have a great deal of sympathy for us London MPs because we have the huge advantage of being able to go home every night and see our families, but we do have particular difficulties. Historically, we have had problems balancing our budgets. The current rules mean that the office limit of £12,761 is simply far too low for London MPs. The amount of money allowed for staff is too low for central London. IPSA suggests that we spend 20% more on our staff, but not a penny more is given to us to be able to employ them. The requirement for staff pensions creates new pressures on that tight budget, and the money allowed for staff bears no relation to the needs of the constituency.

It is the opinion of central London MPs that there should be an objective test, perhaps based on the index of multiple deprivation, on the basis of which we should be allowed additional case work. We have confessed to each other that, over the years, we have been putting large amounts of our own salaries into our staffing budgets. Frankly, this is the last straw. We are quite sure that IPSA intends to support Members of Parliament in their work, but it has got a number of the issues completely wrong, and that needs to change. We are pleased that IPSA has agreed to an early review, but we ask it to

"develop an objective method of assessing constituency need. Assess how many staff would be needed to meet that need. Fund that number of staff. Commit to funding increments for staff with long service. Commit to funding London weighting for London-based staff. Develop an objective method of assessing local rent levels. Fund a constituency office large enough to hold the assessed number of staff plus volunteers."

We are asking for that not for ourselves but for our constituents. Our constituents would not believe it if we told them that MPs' expenses meant that we could not do a proper job for them.

10.38 am

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): I express my gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) for raising this very important issue. It is important not only to every colleague in the House, but, indirectly, to every constituent. It will become very apparent from this debate that concern about the structure and administration of the new allowance system goes right across the House. It is a matter of concern regardless of party or of previous experience. In his important remarks, the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) said that IPSA was the first body ever to be created with power effectively to adjudicate over the conduct of Members of Parliament, and that is true. However, it is worth reflecting on why this time last year, the whole of the House of Commons, all three party leaders, and some of us caught up in a vice by those party leaders, were under such pressure to establish a separate and independent allowance system.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I want to raise one issue that probably has not been mentioned yet. We are talking about value for money for the public purse and the taxpayer. As a matter of public record, at the moment the cost of my accommodation in London is £252.54 a month. Under the IPSA system and the proposed changes, that figure will rise to about £1,200 or £1,400 a month, so the cost to the taxpayer will be four or five times greater. Does the right hon. Gentleman think that that represents value for money?

Mr Straw: Of course I do not.

Mr Donohoe: IPSA does.

Mr Straw: From what I have seen, IPSA itself recognises that there are a number of anomalies in the system—although I do not remotely speak for IPSA. Those include the anomaly that if a colleague lives in a second home that they now own they cannot make a claim in respect of that second home. They could, however, rent the home out to a third party and then use an IPSA allowance to rent further accommodation. That is plainly irrational and I gather that it is going to be changed.

Bob Russell: Will the right hon. Gentleman please confirm that the public anger during the last year was directed at MPs' second home allowances and not at our staff, our constituency offices and the office costs? IPSA has created problems that were not there before.

Mr Straw: I was going to come on to that very important point.

Just to go back slightly, it is true that this is the first time that there has been a body adjudicating on the conduct of Members of Parliament. However, the reason for that is not an invention of the board of IPSA; it was because of the egregious and outrageous conduct of some Members of the previous Parliament. We know what happened. We also know that the Commons, during a period of years, although it was never presented with the full facts, failed to take—

Jim McGovern (Dundee West) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Straw: This will be the last intervention that I take.

Jim McGovern: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. When he mentions the "outrageous conduct" of Members of the previous Parliament, does

[Jim McGovern]

he not agree that it is a fundamental principle of British justice that someone is innocent until they are proved guilty?

Mr Straw: Of course I accept that point. The truth of the matter was—we know this—that quite a number of our former colleagues, although they were of course a minority, were being unjustifiably imaginative, to say the least of it, in their expenses claims, especially for second homes and associated expenses. Because of variable decision making by the Fees Office, bluntly the system came crashing down and confidence in the body politic was brought to the lowest ebb that I have ever seen in my political lifetime.

It was because of that situation that the party leaders agreed in May 2009 that we should set up a separate authority, and the House endorsed that decision. It then fell to me as the Justice Secretary at the time and to a team of very good officials to try to hold discussions with the other parties and to bring forward what became the—

Jim Sheridan: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Straw: If my hon. Friend will allow me, no, I will not give way. We brought forward what became the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, which gained Royal Assent at the end of June last year.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North and, I think, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) and others have said, there was and is, I believe, widespread agreement that we could no longer continue with a system—

Mr Donohoe: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Straw: No. We could no longer continue with a system of allowances whereby we set the allowances ourselves. And yes, my right hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) is absolutely right to say that all of us felt humiliated by that situation, and still do. It was and is a collective humiliation, but we cannot place responsibility for that on the board or the staff of IPSA. I am afraid that we have to look to ourselves.

There is now, however, this other factor, which hon. Friends and other colleagues have referred to this morning, that almost every one of those who transgressed the rules is now outside this House, so the 400 returning Members and certainly the 260 new Members are now paying the price and the penalty not for their own offences, because they have not committed those offences, but for the offences of predecessors who have now left the House. That is a point that I continually make to members of the IPSA staff and board. They have got to recognise that, collectively, the Members of the new Parliament are not the culprits; those culprits, with perhaps one or two minor exceptions, have left Parliament.

Helen Goodman: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Straw: No, I am afraid I cannot, as my time is very limited.

I just remind the House that we had to set up IPSA, because that was a requirement put on us by all parties in the Commons, in double-quick time.

Mr Bacon: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Straw: No, I am afraid that I need to make very quick progress.

Mr Bacon: You are not making any progress.

Bob Russell: You are defending the indefensible.

Mr Straw: No. I am just putting on the record—*[Interruption.]*

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): Order.

Mr Straw: I am just putting on the record what Parliament itself agreed. We then had to get an interim chief executive of IPSA appointed in September and a board appointed in November. In addition, the Committee on Standards in Public Life itself decided that it wanted to second-guess what the new IPSA board was doing. That led to further pressure on the establishment of that board. All the time there was that imperative, and I do not remember any colleague from any part of the House saying that we should not have pushed forward with that timetable to try to get the new system established, at least in embryo, by the beginning of this calendar year, with a view to it coming into force at the general election.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Straw: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Jim Sheridan).

Jim Sheridan: If my right hon. Friend had known then what he knows now, would he have done anything different?

Mr Straw: My view is that the basic structure of the Act is probably satisfactory, and I have heard no suggestion to the contrary. I just remind Members that, if we are going to have an independent authority—

Mr Kevan Jones: Jack, sit down.

Mr Straw: No. If we are going to have an independent authority, we have got to give it some independence.

There are two fundamental problems. One is the structure of the allowance system that the authority has decided on; that is something that it decided on. Having done that, the second problem is the system of administration.

Mr Donohoe *rose—*

Mr Straw: I have only two minutes left.

So far as the structure of the allowance system is concerned, my view is that the authority has failed to take account of the reality of Members' work and it needs to change that. It has failed to take account of the fact that we are in a wholly different position from most people, because we do not have an office provided for us; we are expected to provide that office ourselves, and we have to do so. That is why I believe the authority has made an error in assuming that a system for incidental expenses, which could operate for staff in a normal organisation, can be brought in to operate for the complete administration of an office. None of the people

who are running that system has ever been in the position of having to run a complete office system altogether.

Secondly, there are major problems about the treatment of families. I have no interest in that issue; my family is grown up. But the fact that travel for spouses and children over the age of six is not properly supported is unacceptable.

I make two final points. First, on the administration of the system, I strongly believe in and support what the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) said about the importance of direct payments. There was no scandal that I can remember about the system of office administration—none whatever. It would have been sensible for IPSA simply to have taken over the direct payment system, which is transparent anyway. By the way, it is not the IT system that will stop abuse of the system in future; total transparency alone will do it. The elaborate system set up to stop abuse is not needed. Unless people are suicidal, there will be no more abuse.

As I perceive it, IPSA staff and Members of Parliament have been talking past one another. IPSA made an error in not ensuring that high-grade staff were available at an early stage to talk people through the system.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Straw: No, I have no time.

I hope that all members of the board of IPSA have sought to register themselves and make claims in order to see how the system operates, rather than looking over somebody else's shoulder. I think that that would be instructive for them. Ensuring personal contact and a phone system that is not Kafkaesque in its operation is critical, as is, above all, responding to the entirely legitimate concerns and complaints raised by hon. Members from all parties.

Colleagues may recall that an amendment to the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009 was made in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, which was passed just before Parliament dissolved. The amendment established a general duty on IPSA to

"have regard to the principle that members of the House of Commons should be supported in efficiently, cost-effectively and transparently carrying out their Parliamentary functions."

I hope that the board of IPSA is applying itself not only to its duties to administer the allowance system but to its clear statutory duty to support the conduct and work of Members of Parliament.

10.51 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr Mark Harper): I do not have a great deal of time. I will try to address as many of the issues raised by right hon. and hon. Members as possible as I go along, but I may not be able to take many interventions if I am to make progress. For those Members who have mentioned it, I will also try to set out exactly what the Government's role is in policy on the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, IPSA's own responsibility and, to respond to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon), what other avenues of accountability exist to ensure that the system is run in a sensible and cost-effective manner.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) on securing this debate and on how he has conducted it. He reminded us why we are here and emphasised the importance of transparency and accountability for the costs that we incur while doing our jobs, including for the IPSA staff trying to administer the system. He described that well, setting a tone for the debate that I hope will be reflected in the coverage of it. He cannot be accused—to use the words of another hon. Member—of not getting it. He absolutely does get it, and his interest seems to lie in ensuring that a workable, sensible system is in place to enable Members to do their jobs.

Ian Paisley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Harper: Let me make some progress. The fact that there are some 47 Members in Westminster Hall today—the largest number I have ever seen—indicates the concern that exists on both sides of the House. I am sure the IPSA board will pay attention to that, listen to this debate and take note.

To start off on a good foot—before I go on, probably, to disappoint everybody—it is worth saying for the benefit of those who did not see the coverage this morning that at its board meeting yesterday, IPSA made a number of changes that I think Members will welcome. IPSA has agreed to make one-to-one, hands-on help with the expenses system available to MPs who need it. IPSA has recognised the system's complexity and will deal with it. As the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) mentioned, IPSA has also said that it will offer MPs one-on-one advice surgeries with IPSA officials who understand the scheme.

Mr Bacon: If it is a bad system, it will be like the Rural Payments Agency, which finally sent people to meet farmers face to face. What we want is a system that works. As a colleague said, a credit card system, which would be totally transparent, would be much simpler, cheaper, more efficient, more effective and more economical.

Mr Harper: If my hon. Friend will let me get to the end of my list, he may hear some positive news. To pick up that point, IPSA has also said that in its review of the scheme, it will consider a direct payment system. It is therefore incumbent on Members—*[Interruption.]* I am sure that IPSA will have listened to the advice from my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) about a credit card system. There are alternatives, but I think IPSA recognises that a direct payment system for office costs is a sensible venture, and it will consider that system during its review in the autumn.

Mrs Anne McGuire (Stirling) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Harper: I will give way once more, but then I need to make some progress.

Mrs McGuire: Does the Minister have any idea how much it has cost to reinvent the wheel on direct payment of office costs? Many of us already had such a system in place under the previous Administration and did not handle any cash in our offices.

Mr Harper: The right hon. Lady makes a good point. Under the old system, with which Members of the old Parliament will be familiar, no money passed through our hands. That system was completely transparent. I think IPSA will want to bear that in mind as it conducts its review. Members ought to tell IPSA what they think was powerful about the old system—[HON. MEMBERS: "How?"] I am sure that they will, and I am sure IPSA will listen.

In the four minutes remaining to me, I will explain clearly to Members the methods for accountability and what the Government are and are not responsible for.

Jim McGovern: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Harper: I will not take any more interventions. I have only four minutes.

The shadow Secretary of State, who was responsible for taking some of the measures through the House, explained clearly the history behind them, the reason why they were introduced and the consequences of moving to an independent system. He also explained why it was necessary. The details of IPSA's internal workings are for the chairman of its board and its senior management to explain, not the Government. I will not discuss individual details of how the expenses scheme works.

However, the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has an oversight role. It must agree IPSA's budget and lay it before the House. Members will be aware that the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, an analogous body, answers both written and oral questions in the House from Members. I understand that at its first meeting on 30 June, the Speaker's Committee for IPSA will consider whether that is a suitable model for enabling IPSA to answer Members' questions about its internal workings.

My hon. Friend the hon. Member for South Norfolk, an experienced and well-respected member of the Select Committee on Public Accounts during the last Parliament, made the point that IPSA is subject to audit by the National Audit Office and therefore also by the Public Accounts Committee. I would expect the new Select Committee on Political and Constitutional Reform to take an interest in the matter as well. Those bodies will deal with the scrutiny oversight arrangements and ensure that IPSA is discharging its duties in a sensible way.

Sir John Stanley: Before my hon. Friend sits down, will he answer the fundamental question that I put to him? Does he agree that it is necessary and desirable that the Standards and Privileges Committee should consider the interface and boundary between the authority of IPSA and Members' parliamentary privilege of freedom from obstruction?

Mr Harper: It is not for a member of the Government to tell the Standards and Privileges Committee—when it is set up—what it should consider. The Chairman and members of that Committee are perfectly able to decide that. However, it is worth remembering and reiterating the point made by the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) that under the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, IPSA has a statutory duty to ensure that it supports Members in carrying out their parliamentary functions efficiently, cost-effectively and transparently. IPSA is legally obliged when running the scheme to ensure that it is helping us do our jobs as Members of Parliament. That was put into the Act from the beginning.

As I am about to run out of time, I will just make the point that the Government support the independent system of regulating our parliamentary expenses that has been in place since the election. We want to enable IPSA to get on with doing the job it is legally obliged to do in order to help us do our job of serving the public, but we will keep its role and functions under review. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Walsall North for securing this debate. It has been helpful, and I am sure that members of the IPSA board will take note of all the concerns raised. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who was here earlier, has been speaking with IPSA regularly about any concerns raised by Members regarding their ability to do their job, and I know that he will continue to do so.

Alleged War Crimes (Sri Lanka)

11 am

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I am grateful for the chance to highlight again the appalling treatment of Tamil civilians by the Sri Lankan Government. Many hon. Members share my interest in the subject, and although the debate is short, I will take as many interventions as I can. I pay tribute to the former hon. Member for Enfield North, my great friend Joan Ryan, who has always been one of the most powerful and passionate supporters of human rights and who continues to care deeply about what has happened to the Tamil community.

Before I begin my speech properly, I want to go over some old ground, as there have been several very good debates about the Sri Lankan Government's treatment of Tamils in the past 18 months or so. In that time, hon. Members persuaded the previous Government to support a number of measures, including an end to GSP plus—the generalised system of preferences, which is a preferential trading agreement between the European Union and Sri Lanka. GSP plus was stopped because the European Commission conducted a major study of human rights in Sri Lanka and found a variety of abuses, including the lack of a free press, unlawful killings, torture, disappearances and so on. For similar reasons, the Commonwealth decided not to make Sri Lanka the host of the next Commonwealth conference, largely as a result of the British Government's leadership. I would welcome the opportunity to hear confirmation from the new Government that they support the decisions on GSP plus and the Commonwealth conference. Those decisions have been debated several times in the House of Commons, and many hon. Members have spoken in favour. Can the Minister confirm that the present Government will support them?

The reason why I called for the debate is that since Britain acted against Sri Lanka's human rights record, even more disturbing questions have emerged about Sri Lanka's activities. I am referring to evidence of war crimes. I shall quote from the International Crisis Group report of 17 May, which is called, very starkly, "War Crimes in Sri Lanka", but first I shall mention a report by Desmond Tutu and Lakhdar Brahimi, who are members of The Elders, a group of eminent global leaders brought together in 2007 by former South African President Nelson Mandela, who is a hero to many of us here. Their report states:

> "There is a growing body of evidence that there were repeated and intentional violations of international humanitarian law...in the last months of the war."

They note that President Mahinda Rajapaksa has decided to appoint

> "a commission on lessons learnt and reconciliation"

and call that

> "a step in the right direction".

However, they say that it is "not nearly enough." They go on to say:

> "There is no indication, as yet, that the commission intends to hold anyone to account for any violations of domestic or international law.
>
> Without a clear mandate for legal accountability, the commission has little chance of producing either truth or reconciliation. Nor will victims and witnesses feel safe in giving evidence."

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on all the excellent work that she has done on this issue. In the last Parliament, the then Government appointed a special envoy to try to cut through the difficulties of talking to the Sri Lankan Government. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is perhaps one appointment that the present Government can make to show their determination to try to deal with the horrific consequences of the war?

Siobhain McDonagh: I agree. I thank my right hon. Friend for all his work on behalf of the Tamils and I ask the Minister to address the point that he raises.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the United Nations Human Rights Council failed to carry out its duty to investigate war crimes and abuses on both sides in the conflict in Sri Lanka, and that that is an indictment of those members of the UN system that blocked it—specifically, China, India and Russia?

Siobhain McDonagh: I agree. As I have often admitted, I am a novice in international issues. When dealing with these matters, I have been shocked by the behaviour and procedures of the UN.

Desmond Tutu and Lakhdar Brahimi believe that an independent international inquiry is needed. They say:

> "In our experience in South Africa and other countries, these kinds of inquiries work best alongside a full and open reconciliation process. This would allow the suffering—and mistakes—of all communities during decades of war to be acknowledged."

What happened to Tamil civilians in Sri Lanka was disgraceful, but equally disgraceful is the fact that what took place there was so hard to document because of the restrictions on monitoring and reporting and the lack of a free and open press.

Mr Lee Scott (Ilford North) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. Does she agree that however an international investigation is conducted, one of the most major things that needs to be dealt with now—indeed, it should have been dealt with a long time ago—is that not one displaced person should still be in a camp, not one person should still be suffering and everyone should be returned to their homes in safety? That should happen immediately.

Siobhain McDonagh: I agree.

Independent analysis was extremely difficult, but the ICG report is the most comprehensive investigation so far into what happened. It concludes:

> "The Sri Lankan security forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam...repeatedly violated international humanitarian law during the last five months of their 30-year civil war ...Evidence...suggests that these months saw tens of thousands of Tamil civilian men, women, children and the elderly killed, countless more wounded, and hundreds of thousands deprived of adequate food and medical care, resulting in more deaths."

Mr Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I associate myself with my hon. Friend's words about the former hon. Member for Enfield North, who was indeed a true champion of the Sri Lankan Tamil issue. The evidence that my hon. Friend has presented is overwhelming. In the light of the failure of the United Nations to do anything in relation to human rights in Sri Lanka, is it

[Mr Andrew Love]

not now incumbent on the west and particularly the United Kingdom to take a lead in having an independent investigation into these war crimes?

Siobhain McDonagh: I agree, and I hope to deal with that point in my speech.

To be fair, we already knew that these things were happening. However, the ICG goes further than previous studies and convincingly argues that there are

"reasonable grounds to believe the Sri Lankan security forces committed war crimes with top government and military leaders potentially responsible."

Of course, the report also accuses the LTTE and its leaders of war crimes, but it says that

"most of them were killed and will never face justice."

It adds:

"While some of the LTTE may go on trial in Sri Lanka, it is virtually impossible that any domestic investigation...would be impartial given the entrenched culture of impunity."

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that it is an absolute priority now for the Government of Sri Lanka to release the people who are still in the camps, who have been there for so long; to ensure the freedom of journalists; and to begin constitutional change in earnest to bring about a political settlement?

Siobhain McDonagh: I agree, but we know from experience that expressing pious desires does not work with the Sri Lankan Government; we have to be tough and do something about it.

As a result of the evidence that the ICG has found, it argues:

"An international inquiry into alleged crimes is essential given the absence of political will or capacity for genuine domestic investigations, the need for an accounting to address the grievances that drive conflict in Sri Lanka, and the potential of other governments adopting the Sri Lankan model of counter-insurgency in their own internal conflicts."

That is serious stuff. The report goes on to say that there is

"credible evidence that is sufficient to warrant an independent...investigation".

That includes the intentional shelling of civilians, the intentional shelling of hospitals, such as those at Ponnambalam and Putumattalan, and the intentional shelling of humanitarian operations, notably operations from the UN's PTK—Puthukkudiyiruppu—hub.

The report adds:

"The consequences of the security forces' shelling were made substantially worse by the government's obstruction of food and medical treatment for the civilian population, including by knowingly claiming the civilian population was less than one third its actual size and denying adequate supplies."

The evidence cited by the group is substantial, including

"numerous eyewitness statements...hundreds of photographs, video, satellite images, electronic communications and documents from multiple credible sources."

The ICG complains that the Sri Lankan Government

"declined to respond to Crisis Group's request for comment on these allegations."

The House has already looked into many other allegations. A variety of news outlets and broadcasters have described terrible actions in the last days of the civil war. Few could not have been moved by the terrible pictures on Channel 4 of imprisoned Tamil soldiers being shot in cold blood. The ICG admits that it has looked at only a small number of the alleged violations. It has not looked into, for example,

"the recruitment of children by the LTTE and the execution by the security forces of those who had laid down their arms and were trying to surrender."

Despite that, the ICG states:

"The gravity of alleged crimes and evidence gathered...is not a case of marginal violations of international humanitarian law...There is evidence...both sides condoned gross and repeated violations that strike at the heart of the laws of war."

It is therefore hard not to agree that the allegations should be looked at independently by an international inquiry.

I praised the previous British Government for taking action against human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, but the ICG is much more critical of the wider international community. It concludes:

"Much of the international community turned a blind eye to the violations when they were happening. Some issued statements calling for restraint but took no action as the government continually denied any wrongdoing. Many countries had declared the LTTE terrorists and welcomed their defeat. They encouraged the government's tough response while failing to press for political reforms to address Tamil grievances or for any improvement in human rights."

The report therefore places the onus on the international community to make up for its past and to conduct a full investigation into the last year of hostilities.

Many of my constituents had family members who were caught up in the hostilities. Some of their friends and families are dead, or spent many months in temporary camps for internally displaced people that were little more than concentration camps. Many Members still get Tamils coming to their surgeries with their stories. I do not believe that any of us can have been unmoved by the testimony of our constituents.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I agree with the powerful case that my hon. Friend is making. One of my constituents who returned to Sri Lanka was detained on arrival in Colombo, and I have written to the Foreign Secretary this week to ask for the Government's intervention in the matter. Does my hon. Friend agree that that case illustrates how the Government in Sri Lanka are continuing to persecute Tamils in every way that they can, and that there is no possibility of the diaspora being able to return while such detentions and interrogations continue?

Siobhain McDonagh: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I associate myself with my hon. Friend's comments. Will she also ask the Minister to explain the Government's policy on its relationship with India and China in respect of an independent investigation into the alleged war crimes? If there is to be sufficient international pressure to get such an investigation, they clearly have a key role to play. What will the Minister do to raise the issue with those key neighbours of Sri Lanka?

Siobhain McDonagh: I thank my hon. Friend for all the work that he did while in government, particularly his work with the EU to get suspension of GSP plus. I hope that the Minister will take his questions on board.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I give testament to the substantial amount of work that my hon. Friend has done, not only in securing this debate but in her work with the Tamil community in London. I certainly have benefited from it working with the Tamil community in Walthamstow.

Does my hon. Friend agree with the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) about the continuing persecution of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka and use of camps for displaced persons, and that it is vital that we keep up the pressure on the Sri Lankan Government over how they are acting now, as well as seeking an international inquiry, if we are to gain any kind of redress for the Tamil community and ensure that their human rights are protected? Does she also agree that it is vital that the Government commit to continuing not only the suspension of GSP plus but the aid that was being given to help those who were displaced and put into the camps? The previous Government committed to such aid to help people not only to go home but to build lives full of prosperity and peace, which we want for everyone in Sri Lanka.

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): I draw to Members' attention that interventions are to be short.

Siobhain McDonagh: Thank you, Dr McCrea, but may I say how absolutely right my hon. Friend's comments are? I may not get through all my speech, because we do want the Minister to be able to address all of our concerns. There are so many Members here because they are concerned about their Tamil communities and their extended families in Sri Lanka.

Children are being separated from their parents, people in hospitals are being bombed and soldiers are shooting indiscriminately. On previous occasions, Conservative Members argued that it would not be constructive for Britain to threaten to take action against Sri Lanka. They said that economic action would not help. However, in the past few weeks, the Sri Lankan Government have been acting in ever more paranoid ways.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the Defence Secretary, recently appeared on the BBC threatening to execute Sarath Fonseka, the army commander who delivered victory over the Tamil Tigers, because he had suggested that top Government officials may have ordered war crimes during the final hours of the Tamil war. That is not the approach of a reasonable Government whose priority is peace and reconciliation. That was not the first time that we have seen compelling evidence of atrocious behaviour by the Sri Lankan Government.

In October, the European Commission published a report on human rights in Sri Lanka since the war. It stated:

> "During the period covered by the investigation, there has been a high rate of unlawful killings in Sri Lanka, including killings carried out by the security forces, persons for whom the State is responsible and the police...extra-judicial killings were widespread and included political killings designed to suppress and deter the exercise of civil and political rights...Unlawful killings perpetrated by soldiers, police and paramilitary groups with ties to the Government, have been a persistent problem."

In other words, there is enough evidence to conclude that war crimes could have taken place in Sri Lanka, and therefore they should be investigated.

Last year, when the Conservative party was in opposition, its spokesman, the hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), criticised Britain for seeking action against Sri Lanka for abuses. He complained that Britain

> "voted against the $2.5 billion International Monetary Fund package in July and are now considering ending the EU's special trade privileges"[1].

He asked:

> "Is that really the most constructive way to persuade the Sri Lankan Government to promote a long-term reconciliation?"—[Official Report, 21 October 2009; Vol. 497, c. 895.]

I am sorry that the Conservative position at that time was that reconciliation required inaction. I hope that that is not the case now.

I believe that a boycott of Sri Lankan goods by British citizens will help Sri Lanka to resolve its past, in the same way that the boycott of South Africa helped that country to bring about peace and reconciliation. In my view, doing nothing will only make matters worse. As the ICG said,

> "Now a number of other countries are considering 'the Sri Lankan option'—unrestrained military action, refusal to negotiate, disregard for humanitarian issues—as a way to deal with insurgencies and other violent groups."

It argues:

> "To recover from this damage, there must be a concerted effort to investigate alleged war crimes by both sides and prosecute those responsible."

Although Sri Lanka is not a member state of the International Criminal Court and it is therefore unlikely that the UN Security Council would refer the matter to it in the short term, the ICG's conclusion is that:

> "A UN-mandated international inquiry should be the priority, and those countries that have jurisdiction over alleged crimes...should vigorously pursue investigations."

If countries such as ours do not take that action, disreputable Governments around the world may look at the Sri Lankan option and ask, "What's to lose?" We must not let that happen.

11.17 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Alistair Burt): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr McCrea. I congratulate the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing this debate and on the number of colleagues who have attended it. I appreciate that the issue raises a great deal of concern among Members and our constituents.

I appreciated the brevity of colleagues' interventions and would be grateful if those who are already on the record listened to the bulk of my remarks before intervening. I am not sure whether I can compete with the hon. Lady's speed and clarity, but I will do my best. This is the first occasion on which I have spoken on Sri Lanka as Minister, and I know how much interest the debate will generate in the community.

The United Kingdom has long-standing historical connections with Sri Lanka. Our two peoples are united by many ties of family and culture, as well as business, tourism and education. Our primary objective, therefore, is to support the development of a peaceful and prosperous Sri Lanka.

[Alistair Burt]

Let me turn immediately to the first of the concerns raised by the hon. Lady: the war crimes. Sri Lanka is now emerging from a prolonged and painful period of bloody internal conflict. We have seen immense suffering across all the communities in Sri Lanka, and the country's development has been blighted by terrorism. Sri Lanka can now blossom and grow, and we want to work with the Sri Lankan Government and all their people to achieve that.

For any country emerging from conflict, there must be a balance between looking forward to new opportunities and development, and dealing with the past with honesty and compassion. The decades-long conflict in Sri Lanka has seen the country's Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities riven by mistrust and suspicion. There are serious allegations of the most atrocious violence and abuses having been committed by all sides over the past 30 years. Most recently, serious allegations have been made of war crimes by both Government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in the final stages of the conflict in early 2009. Our view is that the allegations will haunt the country for many years to come and will hinder much-needed reconciliation between the communities unless there is an honest process of accountability for the past.

President Rajapaksa made a commitment to the UN Secretary-General last year that he would take measures to address possible violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. He has now announced the establishment of a lessons learned and reconciliation commission. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has written to the President to encourage him to ensure that the commission produces recommendations that address the past allegations and allow all communities in Sri Lanka to live and work together in peace and security. I have today spoken to Foreign Minister Peiris to emphasise the need for a credible and independent process of accountability.

Siobhain McDonagh: We wish the Minister well and want him to make progress with his speech but, for us, the position seems incredible. Do the British Government actually believe that the current Sri Lankan Government have the wherewithal to carry out such a reconciliation inquiry, given that Sri Lanka is the most dangerous country in the world for journalists?

Alistair Burt: We take the view that the Government of Sri Lanka are committed to a process, understanding the extraordinary degree of international concern and recognising the need for credibility in what happens. The responsibility of an inquiry and an investigation is primarily with the Sri Lanka Government—something that we understand, as did the previous Government, and we are proceeding accordingly.

Barry Gardiner: In taking the matter forward, I ask the Minister to pay heed to the establishment in the diaspora of the transnational Government elections that took place recently? Will he give a commitment that the British Government will work with those who were elected from the diaspora in the United Kingdom to ensure precisely that all the views of the wider Tamil community are taken into account in the Government's thinking?

Alistair Burt: We shall continue to listen to everyone in such circumstances. It is not for us to dictate how an inquiry should work or what voices it should listen to, but this Government will continue the policy followed by the previous Government and be open to the views of all those in the community.

Keith Vaz: I congratulate the Minister on his appointment; I am sure that his work will be a very valued addition to the Foreign Office. When he next speaks to the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, will he raise with him the newspaper reports that a Chinese firm has been contracted to go into Sri Lanka to remove the evidence of those who have been buried there? It is a very serious matter, and it will obviously affect any investigation that takes place. Will he ask the Foreign Minister whether such reports are true? Has a Chinese firm been instructed to remove the evidence?

Alistair Burt: I shall make sure that an inquiry looks into the issue the right hon. Gentleman has raised.

The establishment of a lessons learned and reconciliation commission is a step in the right direction, but to be credible it needs to show itself to be a strong, independent voice. We urge the Sri Lankan Government to draw on the experience of other countries that have set up successful post-conflict commissions. I said very clearly to the Foreign Minister today that, no matter how painful they are, experiences in South Africa, Rwanda and, indeed, in our country have shown that the only way to deal properly with reconciliation is to be honest and open and to get absolutely to the heart of the matter. There must be proper public consultation, sufficient time to examine evidence and a clear and realistic mandate.

In particular, we hope that the commission can investigate fully the recent allegations of war crimes. We also encourage the Government to address urgently the issue of witness protection in Sri Lanka, mentioned by the hon. Lady. That will be essential if the commission is to get to the truth in its investigations. We recognise that it is for the Government of Sri Lanka to take the lead in addressing allegations of war crimes, but we also support the UN Secretary-General's proposal for a panel of experts to advise on accountability issues. We trust that the Government of Sri Lanka will co-operate fully with the Secretary-General's panel to help their own domestic process.

We believe that lasting peace will come about only when Sri Lanka addresses the underlying causes of the conflict and ensures that all communities are treated with fairness and respect. Following elections earlier this year, the President and Government of Sri Lanka have a renewed political mandate. We urge them to use the mandate to take meaningful steps towards long-term, inclusive political action. We welcome the commitment of the President in his joint declaration with the Indian Prime Minister on 9 June to develop a political settlement that is acceptable to all communities, in which the people of Sri Lanka can

"lead their lives in an atmosphere of peace, justice and dignity, consistent with democracy, pluralism, equal opportunity and respect for human rights."

The United Kingdom stands ready to support Sri Lanka to make good on those commitments, and to take decisive steps to establish a long-term political solution to the island's divisions.

I hope that the Sri Lankan diaspora in the UK can also play a role. The diaspora's support following the humanitarian crisis undoubtedly helped to alleviate the hardship of many individuals and their families, and we thank them for their contribution. I hope the diaspora will find meaningful ways to engage with communities across Sri Lanka in pursuit of a lasting and agreed political solution.

Mr Love: I thank the Minister for his contribution, which is coming across very well. However, all the evidence emerging from Sri Lanka is that those wise words are unlikely to persuade the Government. That therefore leads me to GSP plus. Can he give us an assurance today that the British Government will continue to look critically at GSP plus in the light of what is happening in Sri Lanka?

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman anticipates my next but one paragraph. Let me deal first with the humanitarian situation touched on by my hon. Friends the Members for Ilford North (Mr Scott) and for Harlow (Robert Halfon). A focus of much international attention in the past year has rightly been the humanitarian needs of nearly one third of a million Sri Lankan citizens who are displaced due to the conflict. We continue to support the humanitarian response in Sri Lanka as people strive to re-establish their lives. We have been concerned at the long delay in returning internally displaced persons from the camps to their homes, and the restrictions placed on their freedom of movement. We note the progress the Government of Sri Lanka have made in releasing IDPs from their camps to the home areas, but urge that this progress continue.

United Nations figures from 3 June show that some 60,000 displaced persons remain in the camps, compared with an immediate post-conflict figure of 280,000. However, many humanitarian agencies do not enjoy full humanitarian access to them once they return to their home areas. This limits the effectiveness of the assistance we and other donors are able to provide. Concerns remain about the situation of some 8,000 ex-combatants of the LTTE held in detention. Despite repeated calls by the international community, the International Committee of the Red Cross has not been allowed access to this population. We therefore urge the Government of Sri Lanka to establish clearly the legal status of these people and to allow the ICRC access in line with international norms.

As for the GSP scheme, in a meeting with the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister recently, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence called upon the Government of Sri Lanka to make progress on human rights and reconciliation. We remain concerned about the human rights situation in Sri Lanka. There have been widespread and persistent allegations of human rights abuses by both state and non-state actors. There have been attacks on the media, including the murder and disappearance of prominent journalists. We support the EU statement made at the UN Human Rights Council last week, expressing concern about the situation of journalists and human rights defenders and the lack of adequate investigations of alleged violations of human rights. We urge the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure that human rights for all communities receive full protection.

Strengthening the mechanisms for the protection of human rights in Sri Lanka will be an essential part of building strong and durable peace and stability. We hope to see these translate into evidence on the ground that the Government are following through with those commitments, and building confidence in the rule of law and good governance. The UK supports the EU's decision of 15 February to remove GSP plus trade preferences from Sri Lanka from August 2010. The European Commission report of 19 October 2009 on Sri Lanka's failure to implement core human rights conventions, which are a requirement of the scheme, made this a clear decision.

We also support the moving of the Commonwealth conference, which the hon. Lady mentioned. We know that the Government of Sri Lanka are taking steps to address the Commission's concerns. We encourage constructive engagement between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Commission, so that the concerns in the Commission report can be properly addressed. The GSP scheme brings significant benefits to all in Sri Lanka; we recognise that it plays a role in the ongoing development of Sri Lanka's economy and that economic development has a role in the reconstruction process. We sincerely hope that Sri Lanka will therefore take all the necessary steps to ensure GSP plus is retained.

On the point made by the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr Love), Des Browne did a very good job for us. We have not come to any decision on special envoys yet, but I know him very well and will certainly talk to him. It was disappointing that he was not well received by the Government of Sri Lanka, which might limit his effectiveness. We believe that this is an historic moment for Sri Lanka, but it will only get somewhere if it moves forward. Listening to the concerns expressed by Members and by the international community will be a welcome sign for the reconstruction and reconciliation that we all wish to see among all communities led by the Government in Sri Lanka.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Tax Avoidance

[DR WILLIAM MCCREA *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Dr John Pugh (Southport) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr McCrea, and I welcome the Front-Bench speakers to the debate. I have a high degree of respect for them both and I hope that between us, in this relatively informal environment, we can start the ball rolling on what is a serious topic for this Parliament: tax avoidance.

Let me put the Minister at ease by saying that I am not going to discuss the capital gains tax proposal or any of the media coverage of it. It is a key aspect of the coalition agreement. All I will say is that the thrust for change comes from the desire to close a loophole that allows for tax avoidance, where people receive economic rewards as capital rather than income so as to avoid higher rates of taxation. Obviously, that is a move for the privileged few that potentially costs the Exchequer millions. Recently, there have been both decent and some dodgy arguments in the media about the mooted capital gains tax proposals. I am prepared to acknowledge that a number of sensible points have been made apropos the need to encourage long-term investment rather than short-term gain, and the need to privilege savers above speculators. There has been much learned discussion about tapers, capital relief and so on. I remain fairly sanguine about the matter and will leave the Minister to his pre-Budget deliberations—provided that, within the coalition, we do not lose the essential goal of successfully attacking tax-avoiding abuse.

Tackling tax avoidance is important to the coalition, particularly in the present circumstances. If the central problem of this Parliament is reducing the structural deficit, there are essentially not two but three ways to help to do that: we can cut spending, which none of us wants to do unless necessary; we can increase taxation, which none of us wants to do unless necessary; or we can ensure that tax revenues are more often and more efficiently collected and not avoided, which all of us would be perfectly happy to do were it the panacea for all our ills. Unfortunately, in the present circumstances, it is not.

If the coalition is not ruthless in its pursuit of avoidance and evasion, now more than ever, we will stand accused of harming or at least being indifferent to the industrious and needy, to the advantage of the devious and the privileged few. That is scarcely fair or in line with the themes announced by the coalition of fair taxation and fair reward. So far in the history of this Parliament, little has been said by the Government about tax avoidance. I understand that the Minister has answered a few questions, both oral and written, but by and large he has given answers that I would describe as holding answers that refresh the position that we understand to be in place—that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs does not take lightly the matter of tax avoidance and there is a big gap to be plugged. There is a big gap, because potentially large sums are to be obtained by a clampdown. The Treasury estimates the tax gap of tax avoided or evaded to be about £40 billion. The Tax Justice Network—not uninformed people—gives a figure of £120 billion. The truth is probably that we do not know the precise figure, and perhaps we should split the difference.

The reality is that we have made some progress in getting large sums back to the Exchequer as a result of a serious attack on tax avoidance. That is to the credit of Ministers in the previous Government, who recognised that a serious attack was necessary. The figures for 2008-09 provided by the Treasury suggest that about £12 billion of extra revenue was collected because of the forthright approach taken to tax avoidance. The figure expected for 2010-11—the Minister will be able to tell us whether we get anywhere near it—is a whopping £16 billion. Those are significant sums.

A distinction is often drawn between avoidance and evasion. I do not want to trespass into the area of evasion, as that is a different issue, although at times it is quite difficult to define the difference. Somebody said that the only real difference or line between evasion and avoidance is the thickness of a prison wall.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Or an accountant.

Dr Pugh: It is a different sort of accounting, let us put it like that. Evasion characteristically involves not only non-compliance, but a breach of tax law and often an element of downright and explicit dishonesty. However, in truth, some forms of avoidance are almost equally morally reprehensible if looked at from an ethical point of view rather than a technical or legal one. We think of past abuses of charity law, which people have explicitly used to make a fast buck with no real benefit to charity, thereby bringing the whole business of charity law into disrepute. We think of a genuine unwillingness on the part of some members of society to pay towards the maintenance of the society that enables them to thrive—the free-rider mentality that is found in certain sections of society and business.

On the other side, we must recognise that we are talking about an industry that does not hang its head in shame. It is staffed by clever and well rewarded people who are dedicated to not what they would call tax avoidance—although it is that in a sense—but, to give it another name, tax planning. As tax law becomes more sophisticated, the economic instruments with which tax planning is arranged become ever more complex and, because of the global reach of the economy these days, ever more global.

The demands for such services are huge and appreciable. There are some well rewarded people in the City whose life is almost entirely dedicated to some form of tax avoidance or tax planning—whatever they want to call it—which they regard as an entirely legitimate enterprise. One should not be too pompous about this. Few people volunteer to pay more tax than is due, or avoid opportunities that come their way to defray their own tax burden. Some people are capable of availing themselves of clever, post hoc rationalisations that run along the lines of: if they spend the money rather than paying it in tax, it will be spent to greater social benefit. That is not a plausible argument, but it is a comforting moral argument if one's conscience bends in that direction. Such people argue that they can spend their money better than the state can for the social benefit of people in their community. That is a bit of sophistry with which we need not detain ourselves.

Who has not had a discussion with a tradesman about paying in cash, while remaining completely oblivious to the consequences that might befall the Inland Revenue? Are we not sometimes encouraged by the state to modify our economic behaviour by being offered tax breaks and incentives?

Mr Gregory Campbell: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. He touches on a matter that I have raised for many years. In areas of high unemployment, there is a tendency for the black economy to thrive. There is a tendency for small to medium-sized employers to employ people on the basis that he has just outlined, giving a cash payment of £100 or £150 per week for several hours per day or whatever. The raising of the income-tax level to £10,000, which the Liberal Democrats and my party have been advocating for some time, will help but not completely eradicate the desire of some to employ people on the side, in the black economy, for a few pounds per week, rather than doing it legitimately, which would raise more income for the state and bring people from the black economy into proper, better paid jobs.

Dr Pugh: The hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that the black economy needs a whole toolkit of approaches. I happen to have with me the report from the Public Accounts Committee entitled "Tackling the hidden economy", which contains a number of rational, sensible and workable proposals, which will enable people to earn a living and at the same time pay taxation legitimately and fairly. Obviously the fairer the system is, the more prone people are to do that.

Tax avoidance properly, though, is the apparent attempt to frustrate the intent of tax law. That is fundamentally what it is. It is normally done by organising economic transactions in a way that ensures that whatever wealth, investment, profits, income or rewards people have or aim for, they escape the charge that the state would ordinarily impose on them. The state does not do that for idle purposes, but for the common good. Tax avoidance is therefore morally reprehensible. MPs flipped their homes and were rightly criticised in the media, but it was not the intention of the expenses scheme—or the capital gains tax regime, for that matter—to ensure that that would happen. People in this place availed themselves of a loophole. That is an almost classic case of tax avoidance, but one could give sundry examples, in various exotic formats.

The previous Government did an appreciable amount of work, endeavouring to ensure that tax avoidance, when spotted, gets dealt with. They fought what I would describe as a long guerrilla war against exactly what we are talking about: loopholes. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for East Ham (Mr Timms), who was a kind of platoon commander, for prosecuting that guerrilla war with some success. He tried to track down the loopholes and closed them where possible. I think that most hon. Members here, while reading through very dull tracts of successive Finance Acts, will have recognised that those provisions are there simply as part of the ongoing skirmishing between the tax planners—tax avoiders—and the Inland Revenue. By and large, however, what we have seen so far have been post hoc reactions to abuses that have been identified in charity law, with repo arrangements, or with controlled foreign companies—we had an awful lot of debate about controlled foreign companies in the last year of the previous Parliament, as well as stamp duty and other matters.

The Inland Revenue has been involved in constructing complex defences against complex devices and schemes. Quite frankly, even though we pretend to understand them properly as we sail through the Finance Act, many of the schemes are not adequately grasped by many Members. It used to amaze me how the right hon. Gentleman had command—or seemed to, at any rate—of some very complex schemes and some very complex remedies for them. The basic strategy, however, is one of shutting the door after the horse has bolted, which normally leads to those people who wish to persist with mechanisms for avoidance simply adjusting the scheme in some marginal way, modifying it and presenting a new scheme that leads to a new ad hoc adjustment, when it is spotted—it is, of course, not immediately spotted and cannot be dealt with retrospectively. Again, I am reminded of guerrilla war. It is rather like the US forces trying to deal with an ever-elusive Viet Cong that springs up around them in the jungle. My analogy slightly breaks down, however, when one recognises that the resources available to the people fighting that guerrilla war far exceeded those of the Government in this case.

The problem is therefore difficult to deal with, and is made immeasurably more complicated by the global reach of modern international capitalism, with the plethora of tax havens and the associated absence of transparency. Again, I pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman for having done a great deal of work on that. In the last few months of the previous Parliament, there was a slew of double taxation treaties that attempted to deal with precisely that problem, devised meticulously and with extraordinary detail by very clever people in the Treasury. Generally speaking, what we were hoping for—and sometimes got—was greater transparency and sharing of information, but again we were involved in the post hoc job of trying to close down complex tax arrangements that seemed to evade many jurisdictions when it came to the pursuit of tax liabilities. Interestingly, PricewaterhouseCoopers recently suggested that it would make it a heck of a lot easier if big international companies were to list in full their assets right across the piece on a global basis, and suggested that as a new standard for accountancy. I agree, but I think it fairly unlikely that many such companies will follow suit. Big organisations that keep their property arm in Liechtenstein or wherever will not be the first candidates for laying all their cards on the table.

It is worth making the point, in passing, that the British Exchequer is not the only loser here. A substantial amount of tax leakage is caused by people not paying tax in developing countries, and it is distressing to see organisations such as the Commonwealth Development Corporation, which was set up for laudable ends and with massive national and public support, putting an awful lot of money into development projects in the developing world, but having the money sourced or put through private equity companies, many of which are in offshore tax havens.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Does the hon. Member, like me, support the moves towards country-by-country reporting, which were pushed by the previous Government but developed by the OECD? International

[Ms Angela Eagle]

corporations are encouraged to report both their profits and their assets on a country basis so that there is that level of transparency. Christian Aid, ActionAid, Oxfam and other development organisations support that, precisely to prevent the tax loss, about which the hon. Gentleman is talking, for countries that are developing.

Dr Pugh: I entirely support that, but I consider it a distant ambition that will take an awful lot of putting together over time, and will involve a large number of international bodies. It is, however, entirely the right direction in which to go, and is the direction in which we will all have to go eventually, if we are going to deal with the problem remotely adequately, even on a national basis. What I hope to do as I conclude is to suggest an improvement to what we are doing nationally. The former Minister in the room might correct me, but we have the anomalous situation in which the Exchequer building itself is owned by a sort of semi-bankrupt offshore company. We can see how the need for getting things right on an international basis is just as important as getting things right nationally.

I hope that I have done enough to demonstrate that there is a sort of futility to what we are doing at the moment, which I think is recognised to some extent within the Treasury. I genuinely do not believe that I am pushing at a closed door—it is at least half open—and in discussions with the right hon. Gentleman prior to this Parliament I sensed that. There is a sense in which continually trying to mop up after the errors have been spotted is perhaps not enough, and there have been two significant moves, which are worth remarking on and praising. The previous Government insisted on pre-disclosure of new tax instruments—a vetting system—which is a commendable step forward.

In recent finance legislation, however—I forget which clause of which Bill—I saw for the first time not just simply, "This scheme is wrong, this is how it runs and this is what we're going to do about it," but "Any scheme of this nature needs to fit in with certain principles and basic parameters." I came across a quote from the right hon. Gentleman. He said that

"we need not just new powers but clearer norms for behaviour too."

We are moving, therefore, to a system in which instead of a case-by-case examination of each scheme, we are laying down principles by which people can judge whether schemes will be acceptable.

I therefore urge upon the coalition Government a final, third step in addition to pre-disclosure and having principles: the introduction into tax law of a general anti-avoidance rule. Some think that that is a distinct probability; I think that it is a possibility. It would parallel moves made in many other countries. Most Commonwealth common-law systems, from Hong Kong to Australia, have something like this. I have argued for it in the past, and I have not been given a dismissive response by the Treasury. Basically, it says, "We have this under consideration, and we may well take it further."

The advantage of a general anti-avoidance rule being embodied in law is that it would throw the burden of demonstrating the legality of new tax planning schemes on those promoting it by obliging them to show that the schemes will ensure a worthy economic benefit other than tax avoidance—the avoidance of tax law. It would have the added spin-off and economic benefit of ensuring that financial ingenuity would always be employed to the general economic benefit and not simply to dodge tax.

I am aware that, in principle, there are all sorts of downsides to having such a general rule written into law. I have no view of how it should be framed, but we can consider the dispensations of other Governments for advice on that aspect. The legislation certainly needs to be purposeful and clear. There need to be good pre-clearance and adjudication arrangements within HMRC should there be any doubts or disputes that seem incapable of immediate reconciliation. Also, just as in other Government arrangements, there needs to be a sensible and clear list of exceptions.

Given all that, we could certainly run with such a basic rule; indeed, it is recommended by charities and organisations such as Tax Justice Network. Not only can it be done, it is done. It does not encourage wholesale capital flight, as some suggest it might. For example, it has not done so in Hong Kong, which has somewhat of a reputation for financial dealings, and where British judges are involved in a relatively rare dispute resolution procedure based on such a principle.

The strong upside for the Exchequer is that, even on City estimates, it will raise significant revenue. It could be introduced here, and I hope that it will be. I would like to see it introduced as early as possible. It would simplify existing tax law. We are all in favour of that—it needs a certain amount of clarification and consultation. If we follow the road taken by Australia, Hong Kong and many other nations, our tax system will be less prone to the byzantine schemes dreamed up at Canary Wharf and less time will be consumed at the Treasury devising equally elaborate defences. However, we need to get on with it.

If our public finances are in the critical situation that we all think they are, and if, as we appear to be able to do, we can argue for immediate cuts, we must also be able to argue for an immediate and effective attack on tax avoidance if we think it is possible. We are probably talking not about the next Budget, but of the autumn when there will another opportunity. However, certain requirements need to be put in place before we can run an effective regime built around the principles-base that I suggest.

In the first place, HMRC needs the right skills base. I am not yet convinced that it has an adequate degree of specialism. In the past, I have tried to interrogate the Treasury, asking the previous Government how many people were employed on the rather more specialised forms of tax avoidance that we are talking about today than on ensuring general tax compliance. The general answer will be somewhere on the record. It was, "In a sense, that is what we all do all the time." However, a definite cadre of specialists deals with the high-business end, where some of the bigger centres of tax avoidance are found. We need them still to be in employment at HMRC rather than being affected by staff cuts and other reductions. Indeed, their number needs to be supplemented, so that we have the right sort of tax officers, and tax offices.

It is suggested that cutting the number of local tax offices is not helping in that respect. The tax office in my town has disappeared; I am told that the net effect is

that all sorts of local knowledge has gone, and that as a result there will be more tax avoidance. I do not know for sure whether that is true; high-ranking people at HMRC tell me a different story. They say that they now have clever software that does the job infinitely better than local knowledge. It enables them to pick out trends in accountancy and such matters, and it is far more sophisticated and far less consuming of manpower and far more effective in bringing in the shekels.

HMRC has nailed its colours to the mast, putting its faith in software rather than in manpower. I hope that it is right. However, we need some of the right people, and I am not convinced that we have enough of them. I would like more of them to help solve the enigma of why some extraordinarily profitable companies pay surprisingly little tax.

All in all, we need to aim for simplicity. We need a general provision of the kind that I have tried to outline, however inadequately, so that we can stop fighting what I believe is a losing battle. We can do better. We can fight the battle differently. We need to move rapidly towards a general anti-avoidance rule. Ultimately, as the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said, we need global agreement built upon such pillars. The purpose of the debate is to ask the Government to take up this suggestion—or give reasons why they should not—and if they wish to do so, to get a move on, because clamping down on tax avoidance must be as important as anything else.

2.57 pm

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Dr McCrea.

Until the election, I was employed by one of the large firms of accountants, although I assure the hon. Member for Southport (Dr Pugh) that I was not involved in tax avoidance. My role was to seek up-front agreements with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, which was generally more than happy to enter into such agreements with my clients. I am not guilty of the things of which he accuses accountants. I have practised as a tax adviser since 1996, so I remember the previous Government's attempt to introduce a general anti-avoidance rule in 1997-98, and I can just about recall why that attempt failed.

I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman said. It is clearly right to tackle tax avoidance and it is important that the new Government continue to do that job. I accept that the previous Government took many effective measures on that front—the move towards targeted anti-avoidance rules and the principles-based approach was the most effective way forward. However, if we are to get the deficit down, we need to increase tax revenue, so we need to attract taxpayers to the UK and encourage them to remain here. A general anti-avoidance rule in principle may not be a brilliant way of doing that.

Dr Pugh: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has any evidence of that. We have enough examples worldwide of such rules being implemented. We ought to be beyond the stage of simply suggesting that it can happen. We should be able to point to empirical data showing that that is exactly what has happened in places such as Hong Kong.

Nigel Mills: I am afraid that I do not have those data in front of me. Having worked with many businesses on where they want to locate head offices or functions, I know that one of the key determinants of their choice is the tax regime—its simplicity, the ease of compliance and the overall rate. The combination of difficulty of compliance, the rate and ease of getting certainty on tax treatment is what makes people choose where to go. The risk of a general anti-avoidance rule in that situation is that it makes certainty hard to get, and it would be bad to combine that with the UK's very complex tax regime and some tax rates that are currently not over-competitive, although I hope that that will change. The combination of those three factors might make the UK an unattractive location for people to come to or stay. I am sure that many bodies can provide those data.

The key to tackling tax avoidance is to make tax law simple and understandable to taxpayers. The hon. Gentleman talked about tax avoidance being a way of frustrating the intent of tax law, but at times, it is important that the intent of the tax law is clear in the drafting and that the drafting achieves that intent. Often, commercial situations grow up that tax law does not specifically address, so the intent of Parliament is not easy to establish. If we get the drafting right, it might take away some of those problems. The hon. Gentleman alluded to the finance and Treasury rules, which are incredibly complex and have produced various loopholes that have been exploited in various ways. That is a case of very complex legislation that no taxpayers I can think of could understand, and that the vast majority of tax advisers—myself included—did not really understand. I suspect that a lot of staff at HMRC could not possibly understand it either. If we get that right, some avoidance opportunities will not come up in the first place.

The hon. Gentleman said that he was not the person to draft a general anti-avoidance rule. Where the previous legislation floundered was in the attempt to find words that achieved what was wanted without unnecessarily stopping or discouraging many things that we want people to do. The examples cited at the time were the various tax-advantaged savings schemes, such as individual savings accounts, which in theory would fall within a general anti-avoidance rule unless a lot of care was taken over the exemptions included. Getting the drafting right is extremely difficult, and a lot of detailed consultation will be needed if the Government want to proceed.

I have experience of dealing with some of the existing anti-avoidance legislation, which generally looks at a transaction's main purpose or one of its main purposes, or at the main benefit or one of its main benefits—one has a choice of which way to go. The difficulty comes in defining "transaction". What is a scheme of transactions? How many are related? Are we tackling individual components? Should the purpose of the individual components or of the scheme as a whole be looked at? Understanding what is being done becomes very complicated. For example, somebody could decide to buy a UK-headquartered multinational business. We would all say that that is a good commercial purpose, but it commonly needs to be done differently in various territories, depending on the tax needs of those territories. As a result, individual elements of the transaction might be created that look as though they are motivated by a tax benefit, whereas, overall, they are part of a main

[Nigel Mills]

commercial transaction. We could create great uncertainty about those transactions, which might then fail because the businesses or individuals involved could not be confident that they would get the commercial benefits they were trying to achieve without being drawn into some huge, long tax dispute.

Ms Angela Eagle: The hon. Gentleman is making a fascinating speech illustrating precisely the problem that everybody has to grapple with, as the Minister will have to in due course. If one goes for a simple, declaratory and principles-based approach, one has to think about what is motivating people, which is difficult. The only other way of approaching it is the extremely complex and byzantine method of looking at what to do in each circumstance, which the hon. Member for Southport (Dr Pugh) was worrying about. The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) is illustrating the fact that we get into difficulties whichever route is taken.

Nigel Mills: The hon. Lady is correct. The previous Government happened on what is probably the right balance, which is to have principles-based rules targeted at commonly exploited rules, so that taxpayers know when they are wandering on to dangerous ground and therefore need to deal with those rules, rather than having a general principle that might apply to every tax in every situation. The hon. Gentleman mentioned that it puts the burden on taxpayers to declare that what they are doing has a mainly economic benefit rather than being an attempt at tax avoidance. That is a huge burden to put on taxpayers. I am not sure that we should put the burden of knowing how to comply with a general rule in complicated and innocent situations on to every payer of every tax in the country. I am not sure if that is what he intends.

Dr Pugh: Some of us laboured long and hard over controlled foreign companies. I remember one difficulty was deciding how different transactions should be linked and/or broken up. Anyone reading the legislation, highly specific as it is, will have to do an enormous amount of work—no less than if they had to apply a general principle to their circumstances.

Nigel Mills: I have some familiarity with the controlled foreign company rules, or at least the previous version—I never had to get too close to the attempt to reformulate them. Yes, they are incredibly complicated and they were complicated before, although there was a purpose exemption in the previous rules that was in some cases helpful. I would not necessarily suggest that the new Government should exactly follow the approach that was taken to reforming those rules, because it was a long drawn out process which is, I think, still incomplete.

If we are to tackle avoidance without going down the general anti-avoidance rule route—if the Minister is minded to go down that way, I suspect that by the time he has gone through the full gamut of consultation, he will be backing off quickly—perhaps we should look at overall solutions for tackling the problem rather than proceeding on that basis alone. Targeted purpose rules in areas of tax that are commonly exploited are the better way to go. As a way forward in tackling tax avoidance, we want simple, clear legislation so that the intention of Parliament is clear and both tax authorities and taxpayers can understand the aim of the law and what the rules are. That will help to support the moral argument: if we all understand the right amount of tax to pay in a situation, everyone should be paying it. The present complexity gives people the veneer of an excuse when they structure transactions in an artificial way.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned tax havens. There is a lot of scope for tax planning using other EU nations that have very different tax regimes or much lower tax rates in some situations. I am sure that the Minister has found in his in-tray a load of pending or ongoing cases at the European Court of taxpayers claiming that they have suffered tax that does not comply with various EU treaties. Roughly how much tax is the Exchequer in danger of losing or having to pay back as a result of those cases? It is important when looking at tax law to make it compliant with systems outside the UK, but it is difficult to do.

My area of expertise was transfer pricing. We were forced to apply transfer pricing rules on transactions within the UK, rather than just cross-border ones, which added a huge compliance burden that, frankly, taxpayers were not desperately excited by and the tax authorities did not have anything at stake on. I hope that we can find better ways of writing tax law that do not add to that burden. Perhaps some tweaks to European treaties would have been a better way of sorting this and creating OECD-compliant tax law, rather than using a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

If we want to tackle tax-avoidance effectively, let us have simple, clear legislation, and where there is abuse, let us have targeted, principles-based anti-avoidance rules that state clearly that the intent of Parliament is to stop one-sided complex financing transactions that have no commercial benefit and get a big tax advantage. In that way, we will make the progress that the hon. Gentleman wants.

3.9 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): It is a pleasure to take part in my first debate in Westminster Hall in the new Parliament and to serve under your chairmanship, Dr McCrea.

This has been a fascinating debate. It is entirely in keeping with the work that the hon. Member for Southport (Dr Pugh) has done on this issue and with the fact that he has sat on many a Finance Bill Committee that he has brought this extremely important issue to the attention of the House, and I congratulate him on initiating the debate. He put his case very well and demonstrated that he has spent many years considering these issues. He could see both sides of the argument and he managed to put both of them in much of his contribution. He also identified the free-rider mentality, which is the key thing we all want to crack down on and minimise.

The hon. Gentleman was generous enough to praise the previous Government's record, and I thank him very much for that; that has not been noticeably present in our debates on the Floor of the House so far in this Parliament, which has diminished our debates in this difficult time for the country. I deplore the rewriting of history and the abuse that the previous Government's record has received, particularly in the economic context, and it is nice that the hon. Gentleman did not sink to that low level.

I particularly thank the hon. Gentleman for praising the record of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr Timms), who would have been winding up the debate under more normal circumstances. I hope that Members will realise that my right hon. Friend is still recovering from the attack on him at his constituency surgery, and I am sure we all join together in wishing him a speedy recovery. He has been seen back around the House and he is well on the mend, but he is still a bit fragile.

I welcome the new Minister to his position. Those who slog away in opposition do not always end up inheriting the positions that they shadowed when their party is lucky enough to be magically translated into government, but the hon. Gentleman has managed to make that transition. Having experienced the Department he now represents, I know he is a very lucky man, and he certainly deserves luck. I therefore welcome him to the debate.

I want to spend a little time putting the previous Government's approach on the record. I then want to ask the new Minister a few questions about his Government's actions and their future intentions on this extremely important issue. I note the self-restraint that the hon. Member for Southport showed in not trespassing on the area of capital gains tax, but I wonder how long the restraint shown by the partners in this Conservative-led Government will last as we get further into this Parliament—I will certainly watch developments with interest. The hon. Gentleman has set a sterling example, although I notice that it was not particularly followed by the right wing of the Conservative party at Prime Minister's questions earlier today—"interesting noises off" is all I will say about that.

We can all agree that the financial crisis of 2008 led to a radical shift, domestically and internationally, in the approach to tax evasion and tax avoidance. Following the crisis, the previous Labour Government made certain that the UK was at the forefront of the drive for radical change. Internationally, there was a rapid realisation that the lack of transparency in the international financial system presented previously unrecognised but severe systemic threats to the entire global financial architecture, that those threats had to be dealt with and that good progress had to be made quite rapidly. In the forum of the G20 and in the aftermath of the credit crunch in 2008-09, good progress was made, but that momentum needs to be maintained, and one theme of the questions I want to ask the Minister to deal with is how he sees its being maintained.

It is only human nature that when people are in the middle of a crisis, they suddenly put at the top of their political and economic priority list things that have been around for years, although they were never really at the top of the list. Suddenly, transparency, the exchange of information and the ability to supervise global institutions cross-border and globally acquire far more importance. Everybody is very exercised by them, and there are a load of international meetings at the OECD and the G20; indeed, that is what happened, as we can see. The crisis then abates, and people turn back to dealing with more domestic things. If we are not careful, the momentum for change—the momentum behind introducing transparency and opening up cross-border supervision—could wilt. It is important that the new Government continue the momentum that the previous Labour Government created in the aftermath of the crisis. I would certainly be interested to hear how the Minister sees the issue and what plans and actions he has in train to ensure that that momentum is maintained.

The hon. Member for Southport touched on the fact that, domestically, the huge bank bail-outs that were necessary to deal with the immediate threats that the crisis caused to our economic well-being have brought two important truths home to us all. If those truths had not been brought home to us before the election, they certainly would have been once we had spent months on doorsteps in our constituencies listening to our constituents' experiences and opinions. The first of those truths is that there is growing hostility among the majority of our hard-working constituents who pay all their taxes towards those who avoid paying their fair share. That phenomenon is growing and is more noticeable than it has been, and it will only continue to grow if it is not addressed by policy and Government action. Secondly, where tax revenues have been hard hit by the downturn and the recession caused by the irresponsible greed of a few, there is an even greater responsibility on the tax authorities to collect the tax that is due. That responsibility can only be reinforced when next week's Budget takes a scythe to the public services that many of our most vulnerable citizens rely on.

The previous Government measured the tax gap and published estimates of it, setting it at £40 billion, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said. He had some other estimates, and the Trades Union Congress has a much larger estimate, as does the Tax Justice Network, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. For the sake of argument, however, let us say that the tax gap is £40 billion. We know that it is impossible to collect such sums and completely to close the tax gap so that it does not exist at all, but we could certainly do with some of the revenue that is due, but which is not being collected. Even if we closed the tax gap by half, we would avert real pain and suffering among those who are often the most vulnerable in our society and who particularly rely on services provided through public expenditure. In that context, it is even more important than it has been that we do all we can to ensure that we close the tax gap.

As the hon. Gentleman again pointed out, and as the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) also described in his speech, that is easier to say than to do: it is easier to speak in principle or theory about tax laws that work and are simple for everyone to understand, and that no one tries to game, than it is to bring them about. But just because it is difficult—some might say very difficult—it does not mean we should not keep striving. With the policies established after the credit crunch by my right hon. Friend, we have made considerable progress towards such an approach. I should be interested to learn how the new Government intend to build on the solid foundations left by the previous Government, and to take things further.

It is not morally acceptable for a small minority to think that they can opt out of their obligations if they can buy the right advice or pay for sophisticated tax avoidance products. It is about time for all political parties to adopt and voice that moral approach more. Like benefit fraud, tax evasion undermines the confidence of ordinary taxpayers in the legitimacy of the system. It should be far less acceptable, socially as well as morally—it should not be thought reasonable and polite—to admit

[Ms Angela Eagle]

in company to earning a living by helping well-off people and companies to avoid their tax liabilities in the jurisdictions where they operate. I do not say that the vast majority of taxpayers or tax accountants do that, but some do, and the practitioners in question probably know who they are. The hon. Member for Amber Valley is nodding, and we can talk to him later—he does not have to say anything on the record. We know the practice when we see it, and it should be far less acceptable morally, and in company, than it has been in the past. We need that switch to happen.

Dr Pugh: I accept entirely what the hon. Lady says, and her reference to the free rider principle. We can identify free riders, but it is rather like identifying people who do not pay their bus fare; it does not mean to say that there is an easy way to do it. I refer her to an interesting discussion at the Public Accounts Committee with the landlord of the Treasury, whose office is based, I think, in Bermuda. All the people we interviewed and all the senior staff enjoy the advantages of London society, and the benefits that that bestows on them, but avoid tax by virtue of having a name plate—well, a little more than that, but not much more—in Bermuda.

Ms Eagle: The hon. Gentleman will be able to discern from the tenor of my remarks that I agree with him.

I hope we all agree that the world has changed and that there will be no hiding place for tax cheats. The previous Labour Government had a record to be proud of and it is important that the momentum we managed to create should be continued, especially internationally. In 2004 we introduced a requirement to disclose tax avoidance products in advance, to a storm of protest. In 2009 we strengthened the regime, and that has transformed the fight against avoidance. As the hon. Gentleman explained, that protects more than £12 billion of revenue.

The March 2010 Budget made the disclosure regime broader, increased the penalties for non-compliance and gave Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs access to more information on those who use the schemes. The package was designed to tackle tax avoidance, non-compliance and offshore evasion and to protect £18 billion of revenue. Last year HMRC identified £12 billion in extra tax due—another point to which the hon. Gentleman referred—seized £57 million in assets and £9 million in cash forfeitures and successfully prosecuted 171 cases. Will the Minister set targets or expectations in HMRC to increase the rate of prosecutions, and perhaps achieve better figures this year? We also legislated to give HMRC more effective powers to ensure that the sanctions it could use would be effective and proportionate. There are to be more onerous reporting restrictions in future for those who are caught evading tax of more than £5,000, and as the amounts evaded get higher the consequences under the current law for those who are discovered doing it get worse, and end up with naming and shaming.

Internationally, and as the hon. Member for Southport also recognised, as president of the G20 we led a global clampdown on tax havens and offshore evasion. That is an important aspect of what we must do if we are to close the tax gap. The hon. Gentleman mentioned in passing the 100 tax information exchange agreements signed by OECD countries in the past year, including those the UK has agreed with Jersey, Guernsey, the Isle of Man and, perhaps more interestingly, Belize. In 2007 the offshore disclosure facility gave the customers of five major banks the opportunity to put their tax affairs right, yielding more than £400 million in tax revenue due. Last year, as part of the Budget process, HMRC served notice on more than 300 other financial institutions to hand over details of those who cheat on their tax by hiding income in offshore accounts.

We also concluded the ground-breaking Liechtenstein disclosure facility, which is expected to bring in nearly £1 billion in lost tax revenue. That agreement goes far beyond the tax information exchange agreements we have been discussing, and could be a model for future agreements. I should be interested to hear what the Minister has to say about that. Under the agreement, UK taxpayers with money in Liechtenstein accounts must demonstrate that their tax affairs are in order, and must have letters to that effect from HMRC; otherwise, their Liechtenstein accounts are closed down. They must then settle with the UK tax authorities. Thanks to progress made by the previous Labour Government, there are fewer places for large amounts of money to be sent if Liechtenstein accounts are closed down, and there are fewer places to hide.

We also persuaded the OECD to develop best practice guidelines on country-by-country reporting, as was also mentioned earlier—an excellent initiative that was put on the agenda by the development community, and in particular Christian Aid, ActionAid and Oxfam. Tax evasion costs developing countries billions of pounds each year in lost revenues, and is a barrier to social and economic development and growth.

Ahead of next week's emergency Budget, I want to ask the Minister a few questions. Will he recognise the excellent work that the previous Government bequeathed him in this important area, and tell us how he intends to build on it? Will he set a target for the tax gap; and what percentage of the fiscal consolidation that we all expect, given the softening-up process of the past few weeks, does he expect closing that gap to represent in the Budget? Will he maintain the hidden economy advisory group to inform that vital work? It was in the middle of extremely important work—particularly on creating routes back to legality for those who might have been in an illegal position, and to allow them to settle their tax.

Does the Minister agree that, in an international setting, maintaining the momentum to clamp down on tax havens and non-compliant jurisdictions is vital, and does he therefore share my disappointment with the perfunctory mention that the entire agenda received in the recent G20 communiqué? Why did it receive such a perfunctory comment at the G20 Finance Ministers' meeting? I hope the Minister can reassure us that that does not mean this important area is to be less of a priority.

Does the Minister intend to pursue new disclosure facilities, similar to the ground-breaking example we have managed to negotiate in Liechtenstein; and what progress has been made between the UK and the authorities in Belize, given the recent signing of the tax information exchange agreement? How much lost tax revenue does he expect to raise as a consequence of that agreement? I look forward to his response.

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, let me say—I do not think that I am out of order here—that we wish the right hon. Member for East Ham (Mr Timms) a speedy and full recovery, and that we look forward to him taking part in many debates in the House.

3.30 pm

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr McCrea. Let me begin by endorsing your words with regard to the right hon. Member for East Ham (Mr Timms). It was a great privilege to shadow him for a number of years, and I look forward to his return. I know that he has a formidable intellect and is a fine parliamentarian, so he will be a very testing person to have as a shadow. He is also a very good man, and I wish him well. I endorse the words of the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle).

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Dr Pugh) on securing this debate and on his excellent contribution. He has the benefit and experience of serving on many Finance Bill Committees. The second excellent contribution was from my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills), who, I suspect, will serve on many Finance Bill Committees. He brought great expertise and considerable practical experience to the debate.

We had a thoughtful debate on some of the matters relating to the general anti-avoidance rule, and I shall say more on that during the course of my remarks. The quality of this debate has been extremely helpful, and I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Southport for highlighting this particular issue, and for giving me the opportunity to say a bit more about tax avoidance and the tax gap.

I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her kind remarks in respect of my position. I had the pleasure of shadowing her to some extent. I did not directly shadow her position, but we served on Finance Bills together. She has demonstrated today that she is as tenacious in her Opposition role as she was as a Minister, and I hope to be able to answer her questions.

The issue of the tax gap, which incorporates tax avoidance but does not consist solely of it, is important for the Government. As earlier speakers have mentioned, it has been brought into even sharper relief by the dreadful state of the public finances, which we have inherited from our predecessors. As the hon. Lady pointed out, there is a public mood for people to do the right thing and to play by the rules, and that includes paying the taxes that are due under the law. Those who do not do that have very little public sympathy. The hon. Lady said that she felt that the previous Government are being traduced and unfairly criticised over their record. Although I would be the first to point out the failings of the previous Government with regard to the public finances, there are elements of both HMRC and the previous Government that I want to address in a fair manner, and their record is not all bad.

We are grateful to HMRC for publishing, for the first time, tax gap figures across all of its regimes in December 2009. It was the right thing to do and we welcome that greater transparency of information. Tax gap figures for VAT have been published for some years, but this was the first time that figures for direct taxes had been published. As we have heard, HMRC estimated the UK tax gap to be around £40 billion in 2007-08. That figure is net of the amounts collected through HMRC's compliance activity.

The tax gap is the result of several different factors, ranging from tax evasion and organised criminal attacks on the tax system through to errors made by customers. One of the largest factors contributing to the tax gap is avoidance. Tax avoidance is estimated to contribute around 17.5%—around £7 billion—of the total tax gap. It is worth making that point at the beginning because, although those contributing to this debate today have not fallen into this trap, there is sometimes a conflation between the tax gap, which is a considerable figure, and tax avoidance, which is still a considerable figure but is only part of the £40 billion figure. None the less, £7 billion is a substantial sum, and this Government are determined to reduce it as far as possible.

As our coalition programme for government says, we will make every effort to tackle tax avoidance, which will include considering the Liberal Democrat proposals. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Southport will forgive me, but with the Budget in six days' time, I do not intend to pre-empt anything that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor may say on that day. My hon. Friend rightly says that my previous responses in this area have been more like holding answers, and perhaps they have, but I hope, given the proximity of the Budget, that he will understand why. For that reason, and that reason alone, I do not intend to wander down the path of capital gains tax, which he gently mentioned. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend will be paying attention to what the Chancellor has to say next Tuesday.

I will say a word or two about the general anti-avoidance rule, which was well debated by both my hon. Friends. They managed to tease out some of the issues as well as outline some of the questions that have to be asked. The hon. Lady talked about the balance between principles and something that is much more targeted. One of the questions that we must consider is whether it enables us to reduce targeted anti-avoidance rules. Do we know the answer to that until we know what the attitude of the courts is? That is clearly something that is worth exploring. Does it require a clearance regime in order to make it work? If it does—in some countries it does and in others it does not—what resources will be necessary? My hon. Friend mentioned HMRC resources in that area. In total, HMRC has something like 17,000 tax professionals. Not all of them work exclusively on tax avoidance matters, but many of them do. There is a question, therefore, over how resources are deployed.

Nigel Mills: If the Minister was minded to proceed down that line, a clearance mechanism would be essential to avoid creating huge uncertainty for taxpayers. Having had much experience of dealing with the clearance system, I can say that it would take huge amounts of resources to deal with the amount of clearances that we would get for a general anti-avoidance rule. Almost everybody would want to get that certainty. In any remotely complicated transaction, there would be some element of doubt in the situation. There is a real risk in the case of a purpose transaction. For example, someone may say, "My intention here is commercial and not to avoid tax." They want HMRC to write back and say,

[Nigel Mills]

"Yes, we agree." However, they would have to give a lot of information to achieve that response. There is a risk that if the transaction changes slightly, the claim becomes invalid, or that a hugely long and detailed inquiry would be needed covering many aspects and many different taxes, and that would take a huge amount of time and a lot of resources to complete, which will discourage the transaction from taking place at all.

Mr Gauke: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. At this point, given that we will have a Budget next week, I will say that there are a number of issues here. The Government are not hostile to exploring these areas. The coalition agreement is very clear in saying that we want to look at the Liberal Democrat proposals, which included a general anti-avoidance rule. However, my hon. Friend is right to raise some of the complexities and difficulties that may exist and that may need to be overcome. That is a debate that I think the Government, across the board, welcome and want to take forward.

Dr Pugh: Again, we have a situation where a proposal is put forward and, as it were, speculative possibilities that could result from that proposal are alluded to. Presumably in any process of investigation, however, one looks at how things actually pan out in the real world in other places. Clearly, if it was the case that, in every regime where a proposal such as this one was introduced, there was this massive clearance backlog, rather like the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority—heaven forbid—one would never implement such a scheme. In fact, there is no obvious reason why a scheme such as the one that IPSA has should be as complex and as poorly managed as it actually is.

Mr Gauke: Again, my hon. Friend makes a fair point. He manages to bring IPSA into the debate—

Dr Pugh: Sorry. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Gauke: That tends to be the way of things now, I understand. There is a need for a sensible debate in this area, and today we have heard two excellent contributions, from my hon. Friends the Members for Southport and for Amber Valley, and I for one am very grateful for those contributions.

The hon. Lady raised a number of points and I hope that, in the course of my remarks, I am able to address those points. As far as building on the previous work undertaken by the previous Government and by HMRC, the underlying point that I want to make is that this Government take tax avoidance very seriously. We want to use HMRC's resources as effectively and as efficiently as possible to ensure that we address this particular matter and so that those who do the right thing and who pay the taxes that are due do not find themselves essentially subsidising those who have not paid their taxes properly. Again, further details will be announced in the Budget.

The hon. Lady raised the specific point about whether one should have a target for the number of prosecutions in this area, and so on. That is perhaps more symptomatic of how the previous Government tended to work, which was on the basis of having targets. However, in the number of meetings that I have had with HMRC officials in the five weeks or so that I have been in my post, I have said that we take tax avoidance seriously. We want to work with HMRC in developing proposals on how we tackle tax avoidance and on how we deploy resources most effectively.

That will continue to be the Government's position, including on tackling matters such as the hidden economy, which the hon. Lady rightly raised as an important area, and on working on the international stage and engaging with other countries in finding ways to exchange information more effectively. The hon. Lady highlighted the Liechtenstein agreement and that is one agreement that we welcomed in opposition and that we continue to support. I am not in a position to say anything more about particular matters today, for reasons that I am sure she will understand, but we continue to encourage HMRC to engage with other tax authorities to ensure that those people who should be paying tax in this country do pay tax in this country.

The hon. Lady raised the issue of greater disclosure. We support that. She referred to the disclosure of tax avoidance schemes. We think that that was a very successful initiative by HMRC and we wish to continue with that initiative and build on it. We will continue to encourage HMRC to engage with other tax authorities on double taxation treaties and tax information exchange agreements. I have shadowed Ministers in Committees on many statutory instruments on this particular matter and frequently asked how much these agreements will actually raise for the Exchequer, so I know that the answer is that it is not possible to provide the answer. Nevertheless, these agreements apply for Belize as much as for any other jurisdiction and we will continue to encourage HMRC to pursue those agreements and to look to progress as many of them as possible as quickly as possible.

Ms Eagle: In general, does the Minister view the Liechtenstein agreement, which is new, as an interesting model, in that it goes further than the tax information exchange agreements? I am not asking him to declare today which country is going to be next. I am just trying to tease out from him what he thinks about that approach, which was quite groundbreaking. We know the history of it, but something extremely effective came out of it. Does he see that general approach as a model that ought to be promoted around the world, to ensure that we begin to clamp down on jurisdictions and tax havens where people can hide money that is illegitimately held and untaxed?

Mr Gauke: I would say that there is something there for us to build on, and I think that that probably answers that question as effectively as I can.

The hon. Lady highlighted the issue of country-by-country reporting. Our view is that we certainly want to do everything we can to help developing countries to improve their ability to collect tax. The OECD informal taskforce on tax and development is currently exploring with non-governmental organisations and with industry whether country-by-country reporting would be effective in improving tax transparency. We shall certainly consider this matter very carefully to see what is the most effective way of doing things.

There is also something that the previous Government achieved, which the hon. Lady did not particularly mention but for which I think they deserve some credit, in ensuring that the tax capacity of developing countries can be improved. Again, we are certainly very interested to see what we can do to explore that issue.

Let me turn to one of the key points, which I think was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley, which is the need to do what we can to improve tax law so as to remove uncertainty. That is a very important point. We are committed to reforming the tax system to make it competitive, simpler, greener and fairer, and to ensuring that the quality of tax law is improved. The most effective way to tackle avoidance is, as far as possible, to stop it at source, rather than tackling it once it has happened. Prevention is better than cure.

A simpler tax system that presents fewer boundaries and complexities to be exploited is clearly preferable. As a Government, we are committed to making sure that, when we consider reforms to tax policy, we take into account from the start the impact on avoidance opportunities. We want a tax system that is noted for fairness and simplicity, and addressing tax avoidance risks is a key part of that.

Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged, including by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, that tax avoidance requires a multifaceted response. There will always be taxpayers who attempt to achieve tax savings that were not intended by Parliament. We intend to be a reforming Government that put in place a better tax framework for business. As we do that, we will take the opportunity to construct a tax framework that reduces the risk of tax avoidance.

Of course, those are the longer-term objectives. In the short term, we will need to introduce specific targeted measures when an avoidance risk is identified. We will take that kind of action when it is justified, but our aim over time is, as far as possible, to move away from the need for short-term measures.

HMRC has published an anti-avoidance strategy that recognises that a range of responses is required. The strategy has three key elements: first, prevention; secondly, detection, and finally counteraction. Prevention focuses on developing robust law. HMRC clearly has a key role in recommending to Ministers changes to strengthen the legislative framework to defeat attempts at tax avoidance.

Another tool in preventing avoidance is deterrence. HMRC publicises details of avoidance schemes that it considers ineffective, to put taxpayers on notice that it will challenge their use of those schemes. For large businesses and the wealthiest individuals, HMRC uses real-time dialogue to obtain early information about transactions under consideration and influence behaviour. To be fair, progress has been made in recent years, and we welcome that. The regime for the disclosure of tax avoidance schemes, in particular, has proved invaluable to obtaining real-time intelligence on avoidance activity, as I acknowledged earlier.

Where HMRC detects avoidance, counteraction involves thorough and expert investigation and, where necessary, litigation. We believe that that range of responses strikes the right balance between providing certainty to taxpayers in their tax affairs and protecting the Exchequer against unacceptable threats to tax revenues. It also maintains flexibility so that the Government can respond quickly and in a targeted way where necessary. We also want to consider longer-term solutions to the problems of tax avoidance, and I hope that I will have all parties' support as we do so.

Dr Pugh: The Minister has mapped out a strategy that we can all understand and appreciate. However, it would be helpful to know whether he has assessed the personnel requirements to fulfil that strategy. Are the staff currently in place in the Treasury, or will he need to acquire more? I ask because we are, obviously, in a time of head count reduction, and we do not want to remove the heads that are most useful in collecting tax revenues.

Mr Gauke: I am grateful for that intervention. My hon. Friend raises a perfectly fair point. Because of the crisis in the public finances, all parts of Government face great pressure to find savings. As we prepare for the spending review in the autumn, I have said to HMRC that I want it to focus resources on reducing the tax gap and achieving yield. I hope that during the months ahead, we can develop a strategy to ensure that HMRC has the resources that it needs in the right places to do so. Guaranteeing a certain yield or making estimates about a particular area of expenditure or the expansion of staff in a certain Department is not easy.

The hon. Lady acknowledged that there will always be a tax gap. To respond to her remarks, one can go only so far in making firm predictions about the tax gap reduction, as we must be sufficiently confident that any predictions will withstand the scrutiny of the Office for Budget Responsibility. However, that is not to say that I as a Minister am not keen to see what we can do to reduce the tax gap.

My hon. Friend mentioned the £120 billion estimate, although he did not necessarily say that he thought it was right. It is mentioned frequently among hon. Members and in the media. That figure was produced by the Tax Justice Network, or Tax Research LLP, which is essentially the same organisation. It is a striking figure, and is often repeated. It is very different from the £40 billion estimated by HMRC. The £120 billion figure has clearly focused attention on the matter, and that is no bad thing, but scepticism about it is widespread; indeed, I expressed some scepticism myself from the Opposition Benches a year or so ago. Given the disparity between the £120 billion and HMRC's numbers, I have asked officials to review it.

It must be accepted that in preparing estimates, organisations external to Government have access to much less data than HMRC. The types of methodology available to them are therefore restricted. It is reasonable to assume that HMRC is clearly in a better position to make an assessment, but there is no reason why outside bodies should not contribute to the debate. However, having considered the methodology used to produce the figure of £120 billion, I must tell the House that even a brief analysis reveals that it is deeply and systematically flawed.

For example, Tax Research LLP estimates total revenue lost due to tax evasion at £70 billion. That figure is obtained by applying the percentage tax gap from VAT to direct taxes. There are two main problems with that. First, different tax regimes have different tax gaps. According to independent research by the OECD, for

[Mr Gauke]

example, the operational experience shows that tax regimes such as pay-as-you-earn that withhold tax at source have far smaller tax gaps than other types. To apply the VAT gap percentage to taxes collected by PAYE or otherwise at source greatly overstates the tax gap, because the VAT tax gap is considerably higher.

Secondly, an element of double counting is involved, although, to be fair, that might not be apparent from the numbers used by Tax Research. The VAT gap already includes amounts due to tax avoidance and tax debt. Applying that percentage to direct taxes and then adding additional amounts for both avoidance and tax debt, as does Tax Research, results in the double counting of losses from the avoidance of direct taxes and non-payment.

The Tax Research estimate of tax debt is £28 billion. That is a snapshot figure of all tax owed to HMRC on 31 March 2009, which does not represent the actual losses to the Exchequer from non-payment. Almost all tax owed to HMRC is eventually paid, sometimes within days of becoming due. A proportion of debts outstanding are in staged repayment plans, such as those covered by the business payment support service. Only the tax debt written off as uncollectable by HMRC is an actual loss to the Exchequer from debt. That is therefore the amount that HMRC uses in its estimate of the tax gap, which in the 2007-08 tax gap figures was not £28 billion but £3 billion. Of course, we must take steps to reduce that figure further, and I am keen to encourage measures to do so, but we should get the number right.

The final and most significant point concerns tax loss due to tax avoidance, which Tax Research estimates at £25 billion. That estimate includes the use of legitimate reliefs promoted by the Government to encourage certain activities, such as capital allowances to encourage investment and research and development tax credits to encourage innovation. Tax avoidance is generally regarded as the use of legal structures and allowances to reduce tax bills in manners not intended by Parliament when enacting the legislation. It is simply nonsense to categorise as tax avoidance the use of allowances for purposes intended by Parliament.

If I have been unfair in setting out those points, I am sure that Tax Research will correct me, but that appears to be the methodology used. Furthermore, the Tax Research estimate does not provide HMRC with any credit for the significant amount of tax that it recovers by challenging avoidance schemes. The figure of £25 billion therefore seems somewhat wide of the mark.

I thank my hon. Friend for this debate. This Government take tax avoidance seriously. We must take every possible step to minimise tax avoidance. We cannot afford to let it undermine our efforts to reduce the deficit, and it is not fair that by deliberately creating schemes that avoid tax, some people pay less while the vast majority of the hard-working public pay their fair share. Action against tax avoidance will be a priority, alongside improving the tax law-making process, introducing robust legislation and targeting HMRC counteraction and investigation.

Bullying (Schools)

3.59 pm

Annette Brooke (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): I start by congratulating the Minister on his appointment. We have had many exchanges in different guises, so this makes a little change today. I am extremely pleased to have secured the debate, so that I can raise further issues relating to the tragic case involving one of my constituents and also by chance—this is very timely—raise further awareness of a recent report from Beatbullying.

The significance and impact of bullying are undeniable. Indeed, it was the most frequently raised issue in calls to ChildLine in 2008-09, with a total of 26,134 calls. I am sure that that remains the case. There were considerably more calls from girls than boys, and it has been pointed out to me that boys possibly wait until they are very desperate before seeking help. Interestingly, the latest research from Beatbullying suggested that there was a higher tendency towards suicide among young girls aged 10 to 14, with 65% of bullying-related suicides committed by girls. Beatbullying concluded that bullying accounted for up to 44% of child suicides and further estimated that the actual number over a nine-year period could be as high as 78 in the 10-to-14 age group. There are undoubtedly many more cases in the 16-to-19 age group.

In the report, Beatbullying notes that in every child suicide case related to bullying, school was cited as the main place of persecution. In four cases, cyber-bullying, in which bullying takes place online by e-mail and on social networking sites, was also named as a factor leading to a child taking their own life.

The Minister will be aware that Beatbullying is campaigning for greater openness about and research on the causes of child suicide, so that our society can better understand why children feel driven to take their own lives. We can reflect on the depth of the issue with the number of tragic suicides, but of course if we add in the acute misery caused by bullying but not resulting in suicide, we are looking at simply enormous numbers. How many people in this room can remember not being able to sleep at night as a child because of cruel verbal bullying? I certainly can.

Parentline Plus, which receives thousands of calls and e-mails from parents concerned that their child is being bullied, points out that not only can bullying be harmful to children in both the long and the short term, but parents whose child is being bullied often also find the situation very traumatic and difficult to manage.

We shall never eliminate bullying, but we can do better. I visit schools and see excellent work with peer mentoring and other schemes. I have been very impressed by the work of CyberMentors. I understand that since its launch in March 2009, more than 600,000 young people have used the site. There is a great deal of excellent work by the voluntary sector—I apologise for mentioning only a few organisations by name today—and I ask the Minister to do all that he can to protect the funding of effective anti-bullying schemes. Indeed, we need to aim to have such schemes in all schools and, of course, to protect funding for services such as ChildLine and Parentline.

Like many other people, I am heartened by the coalition's commitment to help schools to tackle bullying, especially homophobic bullying, but today I am hoping that the

Minister will outline exactly what his plans are. Consistent recording by schools of instances of bullying is very important, but what action should follow on from that recording? Having policies in place is all-important, but what checks are there on their implementation? Should a specific governor have prime responsibility for this area? Is there a lead teacher, well trained in dealing with all aspects of bullying? What checks will there be on outstanding schools, which will not be inspected regularly in the future and could become academies? In the case of academies currently and in the future, who do parents complain to if they feel that the school is not responding to their concerns?

Often, we attribute the reasons for being bullied to some difference from others. Perhaps a child or young person has special educational needs. Autism comes immediately to mind. The behavioural characteristics and social naivety that accompany the autism spectrum disorders—for example, overly formal speech, unusual behaviour and obsessive interests—can make pupils with autism very vulnerable to bullying. Pupils with autism are particularly vulnerable to backhanded bullying, because they take friendship at face value and find it difficult to discern ulterior motives. It is the case that 40% of parents who have a child with autism say that their child has been bullied. The figure is even higher for children with Asperger's syndrome, rising to 59%.

I should like to refer to a few stories from the Parentline website.

Mr Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): For children and young people with autism and related disorders, systematic bullying in schools can often lead to mental health disorder as well. The two conditions often run in a coterminous way. I wonder what the hon. Lady thinks about my view that schools, particularly mainstream schools, may need to develop more awareness of and more policies on autism and related conditions among students and pupils in their establishments.

Annette Brooke: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention; I agree with his sentiments. This is a question of having a well trained work force all the way through. I become concerned when we talk about cutting the length of training courses, because we must allow more time for training in special educational needs across the board.

One parent said:

"My daughter is different—I think she has ADHD"—

attention deficit hyperactivity disorder—

"or autism, she just doesn't seem to be OK around people. She is loving and trusting but the girls at school are tormenting her. She doesn't complain—she goes back for more because she is desperate to make friends."

Another person said:

"My granddaughter has been bullied over the last year at school and it got so bad that she took an overdose and was lucky to be alive...it took a long time for her to be gently integrated into school again but she was just getting on better and there was another incident this week where girls were threatening her. She has not been back since".

The girl is now in a terrible situation: does she stay away from school and have her parents risk prosecution, or is she sent to school for more unhappiness?

I have a case in my constituency in which the parents in the end removed their child from a secondary school because they lost all confidence in the school dealing with the bullying that the child, who had autism, was facing. In sheer desperation, many parents end up home educating because of the bullying that their children experience, so support for home educators, not legislation and regulation necessarily, is all-important.

I have received a representation from the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, which is calling on the Government to do more to raise awareness of type 1 diabetes after a survey revealed that a high proportion of children with diabetes are bullied. There is evidence that young carers are bullied. The list goes on and on with health conditions and disabilities, home situations and homophobic bullying. Homophobic bullying is worryingly prevalent. The issue affects all young people in every type of school. Just like other forms of bullying, it continues beyond the school gates on school transport and into young people's homes through cyber-bullying with mobile phones and the internet.

Recent research by Stonewall with significant numbers of young people and teachers across the country concludes that homophobic bullying is almost endemic in Britain's schools. Almost two thirds of young lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils have experienced direct bullying. Half of secondary school teachers who are aware of homophobic bullying say that it happens outside school premises. Secondary school teachers also say that homophobic bullying is the second most frequent form of bullying, and one in five say that pupils who experience it are subjected to cyber-bullying.

It is a complex subject, but we also have to look at the other side of the coin: the bullies, and the parents of bullying children. The parents of children who are being bullied often feel that too much attention is given to the bullies in schools, but, clearly, we have to tackle such behaviour. Why is it occurring?

As part of a programme of work to tackle bullying in schools in Stevenage, Parentline Plus works with the families of children who display the challenging behaviour of bullying. The project is enormously successful, and the organisation believes that part of the solution to bullying is providing parenting support to the families of children who bully, so that they can help their child change their behaviour.

The constituency case I wish to refer to involves a young man who was extremely good at sports, which was perhaps his difference. I must stress that the incident did not actually take place in my constituency—the parents have moved into my constituency. Ben, aged 11, committed suicide after being persistently bullied on a school bus taking pupils to and from school in a rural area. The bus driver joined in the verbal bullying.

Ben's parents now live in my constituency, and I have been supporting them as they pursue changes so that, hopefully, a case like Ben's will never arise again. They repeatedly raised the problems with the school, the local authority and the bus company before the dreadful tragedy occurred. Ben's father asked what other situation exists in which an adult who is expected to be responsible for 50 or more children receives no training and has nothing more than a Criminal Records Bureau check.

In rural areas, children can be on a school bus for periods of an hour or more. When schools take pupils on educational trips, they are required to carry out risk assessments, provide first-aid cover and ensure the

[Annette Brooke]

appropriate ratio of adults of the appropriate sex to pupils. Local authorities are expected to provide transport for school children, and there is a great deal of difference in provision among the various authorities. There are excellent authorities, yet our experience with what happened to Ben shows that some local authorities expect the bare minimum from their transport providers.

Mr Edward Timpson (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): The incident of bullying on a school bus that the hon. Lady describes is tragic, but, sadly, it is not an isolated one. I had a constituent whose son was the only child on the school bus who, because he was outside the catchment area, had to pay for the travel, so he always had to be last on to the bus. He was bullied as a result, and the parents had to withdraw him from the school. Does she agree that the role that the bus companies play in the strategy for dealing with bullying must be much more prominent when the local authority provides guidelines and contracts for how the bus companies go about their business?

Annette Brooke: I do agree with that, and I shall go on to elaborate on it.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families, as it then was, produced guidance in "Safety from Bullying on Journeys", which highlights good practice. One of the schools mentioned, Purbeck upper school, is in my constituency, so I shall mention it briefly. Over 67% of the students travel to school by bus—it is a rural area. The students themselves did a survey. They worked with absolutely everybody and held a consultation. The issue was taken seriously by the student parliament, which came up with a travel plan. It drew up a student bus conduct code, which is obviously very good practice.

Despite all the work that has gone on and the new guidance, my constituent Mr Vodden continues to be concerned with the bad practice. He asks why we do not name all the authorities with bad practice.

Earlier this year, I carried out a survey in conjunction with 4Children on local authorities and their policies. It is one year on from the publication of Government guidance on tackling bullying on journeys, yet our survey shows that the majority of local authorities still do not have a safer travel policy in place.

The guidance states:

"Local authorities have a key role in co-ordinating the anti-bullying activities of partners in their area to ensure an effective joined up approach."

The document goes on to state that the first key step is for relevant stakeholders to agree a safer travel policy.

However, the figures from the research say it all. Of the 67 local authorities that responded—quite a high number, for a long questionnaire—60% did not have a safer travel policy, and 52% did not have a safer travel team. Of those local authorities that did have a safer travel policy, only 50% said that it covered all forms of bullying, and only 38% said that it covered all forms of journey. The survey revealed what I had long suspected: paperwork and policies may well be in place but implementation of strong anti-bullying policies is not consistently happening, particularly for bullying beyond the school gates.

It is so important that as a society we learn the lesson that bullying must be tackled at all levels, and that appropriate training must be given to everyone involved, including school bus drivers. The implementation of anti-bullying policies outside the school gates has been incredibly slow, with many local agencies still not working together as well as they could. We must drive up efforts to stamp out bullying outside as well as inside schools to protect children from a daily misery that can lead to the tragic outcomes with which I began.

For a start, directors of children's services, head teachers and governing bodies must have greater awareness of all the guidance that exists on bullying outside the school gates. I look forward to the Minister's responding to all my concerns about bullying, both in and out of school. I am sure that he will tell me that we will never eliminate bullying, but I hope he will agree that we can and should do much better on the issue.

4.16 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Annette Brooke) for her kind comments. It is nice, after all these years, to call one another "honourable Friend". I congratulate her on securing this important debate.

Tackling poor behaviour both in and, as my hon. Friend pointed out in her compelling remarks, out of school is one of this Government's top priorities. I know that she has been a tireless advocate on this issue in her constituency and in championing the work of 4Children, Beatbullying—a charity I know very well—and others to improve pupils' behaviour in the wider community.

Our coalition agreement places a sharp focus on robust standards across the education system, the highest quality of teaching and high standards of discipline in the classroom. Poor behaviour is a real concern. Pupils cannot learn if they are late to class or if their lessons are disrupted. Teachers do not want to stay in the profession if they feel intimidated by poor behaviour. Parents need assurance that their child's school provides a secure, happy environment in which their child is focused on their education. However, the fundamental driver for dealing with poor behaviour is the impact on pupils themselves. The disruption and distress caused by bullying can be very damaging, as my hon. Friend said. Education is important, but children's safety is paramount, so we have made an explicit commitment in the coalition agreement to help schools to tackle bullying, especially homophobic bullying.

As my hon. Friend said, the problem is not confined to the classroom. There has been much recent media coverage of extreme cases of poor behaviour, linking bullying to suicide. She cited the statistics and research produced by Beatbullying, and spoke about how bullying has directly affected some of her constituents. I, too, have met Paul Vodden, the father of Ben. The case of his son, who tragically committed suicide as a result of bullying on a school bus, highlights the catastrophic effects that bullying can have and the urgent need for action.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Mr Buckland) pointed out in his intervention, bullying can lead to serious mental health problems, and children with special educational needs can be particularly vulnerable

to it. The Department for Education, through the anti-bullying alliance, is looking at the most effective way to deal with the bullying of children with special educational needs and disabilities. Although guidance on bullying on school transport was produced in April last year, we will look closely at the issue as we review the work on bullying and behaviour more widely. This is a top priority for our Government and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole said, there is much room for improvement.

In a survey last year, 28% of pupils said that they had been bullied in the last year and 59% said that they feel that their schools deal with bullying well, which prompts questions about the other 41%—the four in 10 who feel that their schools should be doing more. Currently, a raft of guidance advises schools on anti-bullying policies, written policies and specific forms of bullying. It is lengthy and confusing, so we have asked officials to sharpen and strengthen it to ensure that it has practical value and, as my hon. Friend points out, is implemented in our schools. We also need to make sure that the law is clear so that teachers feel confident when they use the powers that Parliament has vested in them.

Schools have a duty to prevent and tackle bullying but in tackling bullying they need to address the specific problems that their schools face, based on intelligence about what is driving bullying and where it is taking place. I recently visited a school where pupils were desperate to get home at the end of the day and did not take part in any of the school's extracurricular activities. The reason they were hurrying home was not that they wanted to watch "The Magic Roundabout" or "The Flintstones", but that they were thirsty. Further investigation revealed that the reason they were thirsty was that they were not drinking any water during the day because they did not want to go into the school toilets where the gangs were hanging out. That problem was relatively straightforward to solve once it was known what was happening. Building that awareness and sharing information within the school is very important so that teachers know what is going on in their school.

We also need to be sure that teachers can confidently and effectively deal with poor behaviour. Trainees on initial teacher training routes need to demonstrate that they have met certain standards, including standards relating to discipline, behaviour management and bullying.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): The Minister is talking very eloquently about the need to ensure that proper training is in place and I fully support that, but we also need to ensure that, once teachers have been trained and are in post, the pressures on them from above do not work against dealing with bullying. At present, the exclusion targets, the emphasis on social inclusion and the pressure on teachers within schools in some cases almost to deny that there are any behaviour problems work against the interests of the school and ultimately against the interests of pupils. We have to make sure that teachers feel able to deal with the problems and that means having proper powers in place to ensure discipline.

Mr Gibb: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that important intervention. He is absolutely right. One of the things that I have discovered from visiting schools is the importance of support from the head teacher for teachers, so that when parents come into the school to complain about a teacher, the head supports that teacher—certainly unless there are serious allegations. If teachers do not know that they have the backing of the head teacher, it makes their job twice as hard as it need be.

We have committed in the coalition agreement to

"give heads and teachers the powers they need to ensure discipline in the classroom and promote good behaviour."

We will introduce legislation in the autumn that will give teachers the right to remove disruptive children from the classroom without fear of legal action and give them greater powers to search pupils for particular banned items. The list of banned items will be extended beyond the list that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole and I discussed during the Committee stage of the last couple of education Bills that went through the House. There will also be no-notice inspections for schools where behaviour is a serious problem.

All schools must look at behaviour and not be complacent. It is not always a given that poor behaviour happens in the most challenging areas. Over the past five years, I have visited nearly 300 schools around the country. I have been to schools in very affluent areas where behaviour is a real problem because the processes and policies for dealing within bullying are simply not sufficient. Sometimes, as my hon. Friend said, those policies are not implemented on the ground. It is all very well having them written down, but they have to put into practice. In contrast, a school such as Mossbourne community academy in Hackney—one of the most deprived parts of London—has an immaculate behaviour record.

In its inspection framework, in relation to behaviour, Ofsted draws a clear distinction between good schools and outstanding schools. In good schools, pupils are compliant with the rules, fearing the consequences if they misbehave; but in outstanding schools, pupils do not just comply, but take responsibility for their own behaviour. That is the gold standard that I am sure my hon. Friend and I both want to achieve throughout schools in this country.

I had lunch fairly recently with some pupils in the school canteen at Mossbourne academy, and I asked them about bullying. They told me that bullying does not happen in their school and said, "We're not allowed to engage in verbal bullying." They volunteered that information to me, which showed an acute awareness of what constitutes bullying and its impact on others. When such an approach works well, the effects are often seen in the wider community, too. On becoming an academy last September, a school in my constituency introduced a new blazer and tie uniform and shaped a clear ethos and identity for the school. Pupils' behaviour improved in the school to such an extent that it was noticeable in the town. People have commented to me about the behaviour of young people in the town since the school had adopted that new approach to behaviour.

We must be clear about responsibilities outside schools. Under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, schools have powers to take measures to regulate the conduct of pupils off-site, including journeys to and from school. The best schools take that responsibility very seriously and use those powers when appropriate. A head teacher in Cumbria told me that he felt responsible not just as a

[Mr Gibb]

head, but as a member of the local community. Any poor behaviour that he heard about in, say, the town during the weekend, he took up with pupils first thing on the Monday morning, and because it was a tight-knit community, he could often trace and track the perpetrators of the poor behaviour. Such behaviour creates a bigger challenge if the school is situated in a larger, urban city such as London, but the answer to the problem must be partnership.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): The Minister has set out some excellent actions to take within the school environment and now he is touching on actions to take outside that environment, such as on journeys to and from school, which the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Annette Brooke) spoke about; but does that apply also to social network sites and cyber-bullying, which are not under the direct control of schools or teachers?

Mr Gibb: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising such an important issue. Dealing with cyber-bullying is important, and we are working with industry to make sure that, when offensive material appears on a social network, it is removed instantly. There is good guidance for teachers on how they should tackle incidents of cyber-bullying that are reported to them.

Annette Brooke: When a parent makes a complaint about bullying to the school and that bullying has taken place on the school bus or outside the school, what will definitively trigger the school taking the complaint seriously? Such behaviour is out of sight, so it is easy to ignore it. The essence of Mr. Vodden's argument is that the problems were not taken seriously.

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. My sense is that when schools do not take such matters seriously, that is a symptom of a deeper problem with the management of the school. I suspect that if we undertook a survey of schools' attitudes to reports of poor behaviour from parents, we would see a direct correlation with the standards in those schools generally. We have to raise standards in the way schools are lead throughout the country. That is what we hope to achieve in our general policy of trusting professionals more and giving them more autonomy and more freedom to run their schools as they see fit. I believe that if we can get away from the culture that exists in some areas, we can reach a position where that professionalism means that every aspect of the school is run more professionally and that complaints are taken seriously by head teachers and teachers. It is also important to ensure that teachers understand their own powers and responsibilities, which is what we want to sharpen up and focus on when reviewing the guidance.

We believe strongly that there is a duty not only in schools but in local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. It is a collective responsibility that must be shared by those in the community, including the school, the staff of children's services, the police, transport providers and so on. Sharing the responsibility among services is vital.

This has been an important debate. School and the routes to and from school—indeed, anywhere that pupils congregate—should not be places of dread, but places where children can feel safe, confident and focused on their education. The Government are committed to reducing bullying significantly and to securing for generations to come the progression, knowledge and supportive educational environment that will provide pupils with a platform for future success.

Electoral Administration Reform

4.30 pm

Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to have you in the Chair today, Dr McCrea. I am delighted to have secured an Adjournment debate this afternoon on the reform of electoral administration. Before I start, I wish to congratulate the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) on his new role in the Government and wish him well in his post. I hope he will be able to respond to my concerns and lay out the Government's proposals for the reform of this important part of our democratic system.

Electoral administration sparked much discussion following incidents that arose during the recent general election. In total, many hundreds of people were denied their vote—something we should take seriously and should ensure cannot happen again. In my constituency on election day, a number of people were unable to fulfil their democratic right to vote. At one polling station in Woodseats, people who were queuing to vote in the general and local elections were turned away at 10 pm and the doors were locked, not because they had turned up late or were not on the electoral register, but because of administrative blunders. That polling station was responsible for 2,772 electors, but it had been allocated only one presiding officer and two poll clerks to officiate. The acting returning officer later disclosed that there had been queues throughout the day and that extra assistance had been provided, but obviously not enough. The problem of queues and people being turned away was repeated at three polling stations in the neighbouring constituency of Sheffield, Hallam, as well as in Chester, Hackney, Leeds, Lewisham, Manchester, Newcastle and Islington. Similar problems were seen across the country, which points to a problem in administration greater than that found in just one location.

Both the Electoral Commission and Sheffield city council undertook reviews into what happened on 6 May to find out why those problems were not anticipated. Each review investigated the processes that led to the deplorable challenge to the democratic system, and indicated possible changes for the future. The Electoral Commission review concluded that the substantial queues at a number of polling stations on 6 May came about for a wide variety of reasons. The most common factor was poor planning and an inadequate system, specifically

"unrealistic, inappropriate or unreliable assumptions; inadequate risk management and contingency planning".

In addition, a number of reports suggested that many polling stations were not adequate venues for a continuous flow of voters.

Some polling stations where voters had difficulty were responsible for more than 3,000 people, while others had as many as 4,500 possible voters. That is contrary to the guidance issued, which indicates that numbers should not exceed 2,500. Guidance also recommends that, in addition to the presiding officer, there must be a poll clerk for the first 1,000 electors and one further poll clerk for the next 750, with an extra necessary for the maximum of 2,500 electors. Across constituencies, the Electoral Commission found that there were various levels of staffing. Some provision was effective; other provision, of course, was not.

The Electoral Commission heard that almost all the areas that reported problems with queuing had higher levels of turnout than expected. Some advised that polling staff were simply unable to cope with the demand. A contributing factor, certainly in Sheffield and a number of other areas, was the combination of local and general elections, which of course slowed the whole operation. Even where extra staff were deployed, the problems were not always resolved, even when several hours' notice was given. A common problem was that polling station staff were not always clear regarding when they should contact the acting returning officer to ask for help; and when they did ask for help, it did not always result in prompt, decisive action. The Electoral Commission was made aware that in some areas, after the close of poll at 10 pm, presiding officers continued to issue ballot papers to people who were queuing within the polling stations. Legislation is clear that no ballot papers should be issued after the close of poll.

The Electoral Commission review concluded that there are a number of areas where change is needed. The time allowed for voting is generous—15 hours in general elections—but the rules for close of poll are restrictive and leave no leeway to allow people who have made the effort to vote to do so. The commission found that there would be benefits if the rules were revised, and that those within the polling station at its closing should be able to vote. That, I understand, requires primary legislation, and I urge the Government to ensure that that happens as soon as possible.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I am interested to hear my hon. Friend's account of the problems that arose, and the role of the Electoral Commission in putting right a number of those and wider problems. On the question of the close of poll, does she accept that a one-clause Bill is perhaps required to amend the Representation of the People Act 2000 and thereby put things right? That should not be confused with wider reform of electoral administration, such as constituency management and individual electoral registration. Will she urge the Minister to say whether he will consider the early introduction of a one-clause Bill to put that right—perhaps in this Session—ahead of any wider review of the administration of the Electoral Commission that might take place?

Meg Munn: My understanding is that it is a relatively simple, straightforward matter, but that it does require primary legislation. Perhaps the Minister can give us more information. It seems that it could be resolved relatively easily, so that the problem of people waiting to vote at 10 o'clock should no longer arise.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. The problem in my constituency was not so much voting on the day, but the issuing of polling cards telling people when to apply for a postal vote, which appeared way after the deadline actually printed on the cards. People in my constituency were disfranchised in a different way. I agree with everything the hon. Lady has said, but such legislation should include a provision that polling cards must be sent out before the deadline for postal votes.

Meg Munn: I am very interested to hear that, as I was not aware of that issue. Later, I will address a different way that that issue could be resolved.

Local authorities and acting returning officers should review their planning to ensure adequate numbers of polling stations and adequate staffing, and address the question of their location. Those local reviews should obviously reflect on the individual problems identified during the May elections, including the one just raised by the hon. Gentleman. I understand that the Electoral Commission will give more prescriptive guidance on those issues.

We should take the opportunity to modernise comprehensively this country's electoral administration. We should ensure that we obtain a professional electoral administration that takes into account the recommendations made in the commission's August 2008 review of administration. The Government could consider changes, such as advanced voting in a suitable location—for example, the town hall—for up to five days before election day, and perhaps a trial of weekend voting.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): When I was a councillor in Swindon, I was elected in all-postal elections and in elections involving internet and telephone voting—a form of advanced voting. Those very successful pilots took place over two years, and I would like to see that system introduced, as it would reduce the numbers coming through on the day.

Meg Munn: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. Clearly, we should learn from those processes. I know there have been concerns about fraud, but I think all approaches should be examined. I am suggesting that people could vote perhaps just in one central place in the days before the election, in order to give another option and reduce the number of people turning out on election day.

Compiling the electoral register must be a higher priority, and acting returning officers must receive the resources necessary for that to be done. We know that many people—perhaps as many as 3 million—are missing from the register. It is time for greater effort to be put into producing accurate records. Local councils must use all available data banks to get electoral registers up to date, such as council tax lists and information from other local services—Sure Start, for example—that offer services to people who are otherwise hard to reach.

I also propose that the Electoral Commission be given a power of direction. At the moment, it can advise but cannot direct local authorities. There is no way to intervene if there is poor decision making at the local level, and a power of direction might be able to deal with the issues raised by the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole. The commission could look at what happened, make recommendations and direct so that it did not happen again.

Wider issues need to be addressed. I found on the campaign trail—I am sure this was also true for other Members—that many young people did not know how to vote, where to go, or how to find out about that basic democratic right. We should use advertising much more to reach out and inform people about the basics of voting. A 20-second advert could be sufficient to encourage more first-time and new voters to get out and vote. Too many people are afraid of looking silly by having to ask how to vote at a polling station; a quick advert could resolve that.

The Electoral Commission ran a successful campaign aimed at young people and students, using brands such as *Kiss*, *Heat* and *Closer* magazines, and 4Music. The message was, "Don't be part of the silent generation," and it encouraged young people to register to vote. The campaign resulted in some 540,000 registration forms being downloaded or posted, 2.3 million visits to the About My Vote website and 53,000 calls to the commission's call centre.

We should also look at the design of ballot papers and how candidates are presented on them, an issue I have raised before in the House. In its 2003 report, the Electoral Commission stated that a randomised system for the names of candidates was the most attractive option, rather than an alphabetical system that provides an advantage to candidates with surnames beginning with A or B. I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) agrees with that. When testing that approach, the commission also recommended that grouping party candidates together could assist both the electors and counting clerks.

As a Labour and Co-operative candidate, I faced an entirely unexpected issue during the general election. It became clear, just as nomination papers were due to be filed, that candidates standing for two parties could not use a party symbol. I had to choose whether to use one symbol and describe myself as standing for only one party, or to not use a symbol and use the names of both parties. That has not previously been an issue, and I have never had a problem before in describing myself as a Labour and Co-operative candidate. Indeed, I have been a Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament throughout my time in the House. Legislation needs to be amended to ensure that Labour and Co-operative candidates can present themselves to the electorate in a clear way.

The method of challenging an election result—fortunately, I have never had to follow that path—is complicated, expensive and antiquated. Although I do not want to encourage frivolous attempts to frustrate the democratic process, I want the laws governing the electoral system to be understandable and easy to follow if the need to challenge arises.

We need an election administration system fit for the 21st century. The current system was designed when fewer than 5 million people had the vote; now, we have more than 44 million electors. Being able to vote is a fundamental part of our democracy. I understand—as I am sure the Minister does—the frustration and anger of those who were unable to exercise the most basic democratic right of giving their vote to the candidate of their choice. We cannot rewrite the past, but we can use this opportunity to ensure that the administration of our democratic system is brought up to date, and that we not only enable all our citizens to register and vote, but encourage them to do so.

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): I call the Minister, Mark Harper, who seems to be very popular in Westminster Hall today.

4.44 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr Mark Harper): I am grateful, Dr McCrea, for my third Westminster Hall debate this week and the second under your chairmanship today. It is, however, slightly less popular than this morning's debate, when almost 50 Members of Parliament turned up to talk about something completely different.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Meg Munn) for securing the debate, which gives us the opportunity to discuss some important issues, and for her kind and generous words at the beginning. She raises some important issues, and she will know that the issues in her constituency at the close of poll also affected the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, who has taken a close personal interest in the matter. Indeed, we discussed it when he and I met the chair of the Electoral Commission earlier this month. The hon. Lady can therefore rest assured that close attention will be paid to what we need to do as a result of the commission's recommendations.

It is worth reminding hon. Members of the need to be clear about the role of the Government versus that of returning officers and the Electoral Commission, for a sensible reason. Clearly, the Government have no role in the administration of elections on the ground, which is what independent returning officers are for; we need to remember that there are good reasons for that. The Electoral Commission is also not responsible for running elections on the ground, but as the hon. Lady correctly says, it has a role in providing guidance for the people who run them.

It is worth setting out for clarity what the law says about the end of polling. The law is clear: ballot papers cannot be issued after the close of poll at 10 o'clock. Courts have considered the situation where people have turned up just before the deadline but were not able to cast their vote. It is clear that once someone has been issued with a ballot paper, they are allowed the time to cast it, even after 10 o'clock. After that time, no one should be issued with a ballot paper, even if they are inside the polling station. That is clear; the law has not changed. The guidance was also clear, and apart from a change in the close of poll from 9 pm to 10 pm, the law on when voting ends has not changed since 1949. It is therefore surprising that returning officers were not clear about what to do in those circumstances.

The Electoral Commission has issued an interim report on the matter, and one of its recommendations, which the Government are considering, is to look at whether the law should be changed so that electors in a queue before 10 o'clock should be issued with a ballot paper. That raises a range of issues regarding how the queue is managed and what resources will need to be put in place. There are constituencies, such as my own, where there could be nearly 90 polling stations, so clearly there are some issues with resources if we had to put in place provision for queue management at all the stations. There are a number of concerns, but the Government are considering them carefully, and we will decide whether to include the recommendations in our parliamentary reform Bill, which is scheduled for later this Session.

The hon. Lady mentioned the case of Woodseats library in her constituency. What happened in a range of situations in her constituency, that of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and elsewhere seemed to have been driven largely by poor planning. Returning officers either had too many voters in one polling district or did not staff the districts properly.

The hon. Lady highlighted an issue of the combination of polls for local and general elections, which seemed to take people by surprise, and where there was a underestimate of the turnout.

Mr John Leech (Manchester, Withington) (LD): I welcome the Minister to his position on the Government Bench.

The Electoral Commission's report highlighted one of the causes of the queues, which was that explanations had to be given to a number of people on why they were eligible to vote in the local elections but not in the general election. Early-day motion 1, which stands in my name, suggests a practical step to ensure that queues are kept to an absolute minimum on election day: we can make sure that a general election does not take place on the same day as another election. That would solve many of the problems related to the difficulty of explaining to people who do not realise that they can vote only in one election and not the other.

Mr Harper: The hon. Gentleman makes half a good point in that he puts his finger on what caused some of the delays, but allowing that to drive whether we have combined elections would be letting the tail wag the dog.

Returning officers would need to consider the problem of combined elections, which happen in many parts of the country perfectly successfully. In my constituency, the two previous general elections coincided with county council elections, and there were no problems. It is necessary for acting returning officers to think about these issues. They know from the register those areas where many voters might be entitled to vote in one set of elections but not the other—perhaps a general election but not local or European elections. It will be for them to consider whether there are many people with different franchises in their area, and to estimate how much time that will take and plan accordingly. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that not taking that into account led to some of the issues highlighted by the Electoral Commission. However, saying that we should not have two elections on the same day is not the solution.

Mr Leech: I thank the Minister for giving way a second time. The reality is that in Manchester, Withington the turnout was about 62%. That is still low by some standards, and significantly lower than in the Minister's constituency. If for some reason the turnout had been as high as 70% or 80%, as it was in some constituencies, literally thousands of people would not have been able to vote. That cannot be allowed. One practical way to prevent it from happening again would be to ensure that the general election was held on its own, as a single election.

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): Interventions on the Minister must be short, if they are to be allowed.

Mr Harper: The Minister will try to ensure that his answer is shorter than the intervention.

[Mr Harper]

The hon. Gentleman makes a good point; it should be heard not only by his returning officer but by returning officers across the country. However, most parts of the country have local elections almost every year. Another factor is that splitting up the two sets of elections would hugely increase the cost of holding them. As I said, the better solution is to ensure that returning officers think about such matters and plan accordingly, ensuring that they staff the elections properly and have properly sized polling districts. Those are all matters within their control. That is a more sensible solution.

Justin Tomlinson: On the specific point about evenly sized polling stations, we must also take account of the demographics of polling stations. In my constituency of North Swindon, the problems occurred in areas where there were predominantly younger families and working professionals, who voted in particularly high concentrations between 5 pm and 10 pm.

Mr Harper: My hon. Friend makes a good point. He spoke earlier about internet and phone voting. I am familiar with some of the e-voting processes that took place in Swindon. We shall consider the evidence, to discover the extent to which they drove up turnout.

I pick up on the other points made by the hon. Lady. She highlighted the problem of jointly nominated candidates not being able to use their emblem. That affected my party in Northern Ireland, where we had candidates standing jointly for the Conservatives and the Ulster Unionists, and the hon. Lady and other Labour and Co-operative colleagues. We are considering that; it should be relatively straightforward to correct the problem, and we are looking for an opportunity to do so. That point was drawn to our attention after the election.

Before concluding, I shall touch briefly on a couple of other issues mentioned today. My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) spoke about polling cards. He is right that they should be issued in good time, and returning officers should ensure that that happens. In most cases they do so, but in the case that my hon. Friend highlights that obviously did not happen. Constituents were therefore not adequately warned about some of the key dates in the process. Again, that will be a learning curve for those returning officers.

I was asked about venues, a problem for a number of candidates. The choice of venue is a matter for the local authority and the returning officer. They need to consider the nature of the area, its demographics and the likely voting patterns, and to choose venues that are accessible and able to cope with the throughput of voters. If they need to create extra polling places in those areas because of the size of the ward or polling district, they are empowered to do so. It is also worth saying that for general elections, it is not a problem for local authority funding because the properly incurred and documented costs of a general election are funded from the centre—from central Government—so there is no excuse for returning officers to have any concern about such funding if things are done properly.

Returning to the issue with which we began, which both the hon. Lady and my hon. Friend have mentioned, there clearly were problems, and if nobody is able to cast their vote that should be taken very seriously. It is, however, worth putting that in context. There were problems at 27 polling stations out of 40,000, and the Electoral Commission has estimated that about 1,200 voters out of 29.6 million were affected. Although we take the issue of electors being unable to vote very seriously, given that most of the 40,000 polling stations worked well, we perhaps need to consider solutions for those stations where there were problems and, as my hon. Friend said, for areas where there might well have been problems if circumstances had been different, but without making a wholesale change.

The hon. Lady made a number of wider points about individual voter registration and the extent to which electoral registration officers are getting voters who are entitled to vote on the register. The hon. Lady knows that the coalition Government have made a commitment to speed up individual voter registration and, as my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister set out in the Chamber in his speech on the Loyal Address, we want to ensure not just that the register is accurate and that no one is on it who should not be, but that electoral registration officers do a better job of getting people who are entitled to vote on the register, so that they have the opportunity, come polling day, to cast their vote.

Meg Munn: In that context, I wonder whether the Government would also look at when the registers are compiled. There usually is a considerable time lapse between when they are compiled and when elections take place. They are also compiled at a time when the nights are getting darker and people might not want to answer the door.

Mr Harper: In considering individual voter registration and our commitment to speeding that up, Ministers are looking at exactly some of those issues: how the registers are complied; the other data sources to which local authorities have access to check accuracy; the extent to which rolling registration is used; and how the annual canvass is used. They are looking at all the options, to see which is the most effective way of ensuring that registers are both accurate and as complete as possible. That work is under way.

George Hollingbery (Meon Valley) (Con): Does the Minister agree that there is also a case for ensuring that the data are stored in the same way by different councils? From our experience of compiling registers for mailings on three different district councils, councils very often store data in completely different ways, which make them astonishingly difficult to use effectively.

Mr Harper: My hon. Friend makes a good point, but at the moment the election registration process is very localised and that has a lot of strengths, but also a number of weaknesses. I am somewhat reluctant to suggest that an all-singing national database is the right answer, since Governments of both parties are historically not terribly successful at implementing them. He is quite right, however, that we should look at how the data are stored. Another issue is ensuring that when voters move around the country, between registration areas, the data move with them. There are many issues there, which Ministers are considering.

The hon. Lady also made some wider points about the timing of voting and options for advance voting. Ministers are looking at those matters. The hon. Lady will know that the Government have set out a comprehensive programme of political and constitutional reform, of which electoral administration and the delivery of elections are part. Ministers are considering all those issues as part of our commitment in this area. At this stage, I cannot make any particular commitments. I have listened very carefully to what she and other Members have said, particularly as the events of the last general election are still fresh in our minds. Ministers will have further meetings and receive further advice from the Electoral Commission as we consider how to take matters forward. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for securing this debate; it has been very helpful for the House to consider these matters.

Question put and agreed to.

5 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 17 June 2010

[MR MIKE WEIR *in the Chair*]

Alternatives to Child Detention

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*(Mr Goodwill.)*

2.30 pm

The Minister for Immigration (Damian Green): I am delighted to have the opportunity today to draw attention to the issue of children in immigration detention. The UK's policy of detaining children with families in order to effect their removal from the UK is an area of long-standing concern for many organisations that take an interest in immigration and asylum, and for organisations that work on behalf of children. Those concerns are significant, and the Government have, very early on, set out their commitment to ending the detention of children for immigration purposes. We want to replace the current system with something that ensures that families with no right to be in this country return in a more dignified manner.

To help bring that about, the UK Border Agency is leading a comprehensive review of present practice on the detention of children. It will look at the actual levels and at how to prevent such detention by improving the current voluntary return process. The review will also consider good practice in other countries, and will look at how a new family removals process can be established that protects the welfare of children and ensures the return of those with no right to remain in the UK. It will come as no surprise to you or to the Chamber, Mr Weir, that in the current climate the review will also have to include value for money as part of its remit.

The review has already begun and its phase of collecting views and submissions will run until 1 July. It will take in the views of a wide range of partners, experts and organisations that represent the interests of children to create viable long-term solutions. Earlier this week, I went to Glasgow to discuss the matter with many voluntary groups. They made extremely useful inputs to the review, so we will be repeating those meetings in all regions and in other countries of the UK over the next few weeks.

The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund is helping the review by co-chairing a working group made up of a range of non-governmental organisations, and I am grateful to the fund for agreeing to do that. We are seeking to identify how the UK Border Agency can fulfil its role while taking the right account of children's safety and welfare. We are carrying out the review as fast as humanly possible, so that the detention of children for immigration purposes can end and a practical alternative be put in its place.

I should emphasise that the UK Border Agency is fully determined to replace the current system with something more humane, without compromising on the removal of people who have no right to remain in the UK. We are talking about alternatives to detention and not about ending removals. Until the review is completed, current policies will remain in place, with one exception. As Members will know, the detention of children overnight at Dungavel immigration removal centre in Scotland has been ended as a precursor to such a practice ending across the UK. Currently, a very small number of children—fewer than five—are being held in immigration detention, but before we close Yarl's Wood for the detention of families we need to find effective alternatives.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab) *rose—*

Damian Green: I will of course give way to the newly elected Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs.

Keith Vaz: I thank the Minister very much for letting me intervene. I welcome this review, which is very much in keeping with the report the Select Committee produced last November. One of the recommendations was for the then Government—clearly, it is now for the new Government—to look at the role of local authorities. Will he confirm that local authorities will be consulted? The Committee was concerned that councils were sometimes not aware of children in their jurisdiction, and that that led to some children absconding and councils simply not being aware that they had gone.

Damian Green: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and I take the opportunity formally to congratulate him on his election—his reappointment, rather—as Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee. I can do so with a due degree of objectivity because I was not allowed to vote in the election, so he can neither thank nor blame me. I am sure we will have many constructive exchanges in the coming years.

To address the right hon. Gentleman's point, the simple answer is yes. I mentioned earlier that I had had a meeting in Glasgow at which the city council played a significant, helpful and constructive role. The purpose of the consultation is for it to be as widespread as possible. As he said, local authorities will have statutory responsibilities for such children and will therefore have views about how best we can and should proceed, so I will very much welcome their input into proceedings.

The challenge is to develop a new approach to family removals that remains cost-effective and delivers the return of those who have no right to remain in the UK. I hope I will not be constraining the review if I identify some of the factors involved; indeed, I hope this will help those who wish to contribute. It is already clear from the initial stages of the review that there is not a single, simple remedy: it is not just about ending detention at the stroke of a pen. There may have to be—I think there will have to be—a number of changes at different points in the system, each contributing to the overall aim. Clearly, there is a need to achieve faster and better decision making on family asylum cases; we are already taking forward work on that. We are told there is a need for greater confidence in the initial decision that is made in asylum cases. I take on board that message; indeed, I may even have transmitted that message to Government in the past.

In a recent report, the UK Border Agency's independent chief inspector, John Vine, commented favourably on the commitment to quality, and the UK is felt by many countries to have good systems in this regard. Members

[Damian Green]

may know that in 2007, the provision of early legal advice was piloted in Solihull, in the west midlands, to test whether collaboration between the legal representative and the UK Border Agency decision-maker led to better information at the initial decision-making stage, so that better quality decisions could be reached. The findings were unclear, so we are working with the Legal Services Commission and key asylum partners to test those principles across an entire region of the UK Border Agency. It is called the early legal advice project, and it is an example of collaborative working and trying new things that I hope will characterise this area of alternatives to detention for families.

Another thing to consider is the need for better contact management and more active discussion of a family's options if their claim is rejected and their right to appeal a decision has been exhausted. Discussions with a family might need to be backed up by improved support from NGOs, partners and other workers. The options open to families at present include some very generous assisted return packages, but the take-up rate for families is low compared with that for single asylum seekers. There is, therefore, a need for better marketing of those assisted return offers. Marketing may sound like an odd word in this context, but I use it because we should not be forcing the take-up of such offers. Better explanation and promotion of the offers is clearly needed; they are real offers to provide help and assistance when all the other options have been exhausted. To illustrate one apparently small but important point, the assistance includes help with excess baggage so that families can take with them belongings purchased in the UK. They would not be returning home empty-handed, and would have more to show for their migration journey and for their time in the UK.

I think that everyone involved would also like to see a clearer and more evenly managed process after applications and claims to remain have been turned down. The starting point—and what I hope will become the standard—would be a much more clearly identifiable transition from a voluntary departure to an enforcement approach that is shaped by the family's own approach to their situation. The UK Border Agency would therefore set removal directions while the family is in the community, giving the family time to submit further representations and to apply for a judicial review if they wish to do so, as well as giving them time to make plans for their return. The arrangements would place a greater emphasis on self check-in or escorting to the airport. That approach, which already exists but possibly in a less clear way than it ought to, gives families every chance to comply with the need to return home without enforcement action. Making it much clearer to families—and their helpers—where they stand at this stage of the process seems to me to be necessary.

Other changes to processes may be called for, but inevitably some families who have no justification to remain in the UK will always refuse to leave voluntarily, despite all the encouragement we give them to do so. A changed approach should, and I hope would, minimise the number of those families, but there will remain difficult cases where solutions have to be found and where enforced removals are likely to continue. That approach could involve separating different members of a family and reuniting them before departure, so that some family members stay in the accommodation they are used to. However, I recognise that that approach would be hugely contentious and has its own practical difficulties. Therefore, in some cases we may still have to have recourse to holding families for a short period before removal—where keeping the family together is seen as being in the best interests of the children, which of course must be the paramount concern.

I hope it will not come to that. The Government and the UK Border Agency would much prefer that families who do not require humanitarian protection or refugee protection return to their home countries voluntarily. That is a responsible approach in a world where the number of people who choose to live in another country, for a variety of reasons, is continually expanding. Not everyone's journey will be a success in economic terms; not everyone's journey will be lawful. We believe that the Government should respond in a responsible, fair, dignified and humane way to this reality.

Keith Vaz: I thank the Minister for giving way to me for a second time. Will he comment on the report in *The Guardian* today that the Government are considering a reintegration centre—basically, a detention centre—of some kind in Afghanistan for families who are due to be removed from this country? Is that report correct, or wrong?

Damian Green: I would always hesitate to describe a report in *The Guardian* as being completely accurate. The proposed centre in Afghanistan is not particularly a British Government project; indeed, the previous Government raised this idea with other European Governments and with international agencies. The proposed centre's purpose is, effectively, to have a retraining centre—a re-entry centre—in Afghanistan, which the right hon. Gentleman will know is the source of many unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in this country, so that there is something for those children to go back to that will enable them to lead a better life in Afghanistan. I suspect he agrees with me that it would be much better for those young men to have a decent life and some hope in life in their own country. If they can have those things, that will stop many of them making dangerous—in some cases, sadly, fatal—journeys halfway across the world to try to reach Britain or other European countries.

So the basis of the report in *The Guardian*, for all that I said in my initial response to the right hon. Gentleman's intervention, is true, but it is being presented in a luridly and unfairly hostile light. The centre is an effort to help people. I suspect that the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), the Opposition spokesperson, will agree with that, because she was in government when the then Government originally suggested this process. It is a constructive and creative response to the problem of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and to present it in any other light is straightforwardly unfair. It is a constructive idea and I hope it comes to fruition. The tender for the operation is being examined, and we hope to make an announcement in the next few months about what will happen next.

This is a real, worldwide problem and as I was saying, we believe that the Government should respond in a responsible, fair, dignified and humane way to the reality of what is happening around the world today. The

review into ending the immigration detention of children is an important part of that. Obviously, we will not take any firm decisions until the review has completed its work and we have taken into account the views that are put to us. I hope that during this debate, more ideas will be put forward that the Government can feed into the review, which may therefore give us what we all want to see: a fairer and more humane system that ends the system of detaining children for immigration purposes in this country.

2.45 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) on his appointment as Minister for Immigration. I attended many debates with him in his Opposition capacity, but he has finally made it and now has the opportunity to put into practice all the good proposals for which he argued so strongly as the Opposition spokesperson.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) for all the work that she did as an Immigration Minister in the last Government. She was always very firm in defence of the Government's policy, but she was also very willing to listen to Members of this House when they raised matters of concern with her. I am glad that she has retained her position as the Labour party's spokesperson on immigration in opposition, because of course she knows everything—where all the bodies have been buried, figuratively speaking.

I welcome most warmly the Government's decision to conduct a review of the whole question of the detention of children in the immigration system. It may well be that during the general election campaign, the Minister read the reports of the Home Affairs Committee. If so, he will have seen our report published on 24 November 2009, "The Detention of Children in the Immigration System". In a sense, he has prefaced that report in the comments that he has made today. He has also rehearsed some of the arguments that are used for keeping children in detention, while rejecting those arguments. Of course, one cannot prejudge the outcome of a review, but I would be most surprised if the Government, having begun a review on this very important subject, came to the conclusion that everything was okay as far as the detention of children in the immigration system was concerned.

Nearly 1,000 children a year are detained in the UKBA's immigration detention centres. On average, such children spend more than a fortnight—15.58 days—in detention, but detention for up to 61 days is not uncommon. On 30 June 2009—the last date for which the Home Affairs Committee had information on children in detention—10 of the 35 children in detention at that time had been held for between 29 and 61 days. The Committee noted that the cost of keeping a person in detention was £130 a day; therefore, keeping a family of four in detention for between four and eight weeks costs more than £20,000.

During our very brief inquiry into this area, Members of the Committee visited Yarl's Wood. We felt that there must be an alternative that can be used to deal with the Government's proper function, which is to ensure that those who have lost their immigration cases and who have not been granted leave to remain in this country, either as asylum seekers or in any other context, are removed. I think that all of us, on both sides of the House, accept that there cannot be an indefinite right for people to stay here after all the legal processes have been exhausted. What we must find is a humane way to deal with families, particularly children, who are kept in detention before their removal.

We went to Yarl's Wood after hearing serious allegations about its operation, and what we found was a much more humane regime. Ultimately, of course, Yarl's Wood remains a prison; one cannot walk in and out without being checked through. When the Select Committee arrived, we produced all our identification and were put through those checks. I am not sure whether the Minister has had an opportunity to visit since taking up his office; I am sure that the shadow Minister visited at some stage. Some the reports of conditions in Yarl's Wood were lurid, and it may well have been like that in the past, but certainly nothing like that was obvious to us when we visited. The staff made an effort to accommodate families and children. We saw an impressive nursery school that had been built. It did not deal with anyone over the age of 10; it dealt with young children.

Unfortunately, our visit was somewhat marred by the Home Office officials' terrible anxiety about the Select Committee visit. They tried hard to keep us away from the people being detained there, which was totally unnecessary. The point of Members of Parliament visiting an institution such as Yarl's Wood is to ensure that we speak to the people there about their circumstances. What we found was that people were more anxious about the progress of their immigration case than about any of the ways and means by which they were detained I hope that, even before the review is continued, the Minister will take on board the fact that people in detention need access to proper and appropriate legal and immigration advice. I left the detention centre with about five or six cases, which I immediately passed on to the relevant constituency MPs.

It was depressing to see children being kept in such circumstances. Of course the Serco staff did their best to ensure that they were kept happy—there was a little shop, for example. We talked to a couple of the kids about what it was like being there. Though it is acceptable for a very short period, it is still a prison, it is still detention and their freedom is still restricted. The review is therefore timely and important, and I hope that it will be concluded as quickly as possible. As I missed the first few words of the Minister's opening remarks, I am not sure whether he has a timetable. The Government are undertaking a lot of reviews, and although I do not hold that against them—any new Government want to review everything that happened before—we need timetables. Under the current system, however, it is important that people should be clear where they stand as far as their future is concerned.

I raised with the Minister the question of the local authorities' involvement. We took evidence from the London borough of Hillingdon, because it contains Harmondsworth centre and Heathrow airport—those put into detention after coming off a plane and those about to be removed are held in close proximity to airports. One of the Select Committee's recommendations was that the Government's future building programmes should take proximity to airports into consideration. We were concerned to find that the local authority did

[Keith Vaz]

not seem to know how many children were being detained and that it was not notified when children left detention. That is why we recommended that local authorities should be informed every seven days of how many children are being detained in their area. That would be quite a simple process for UKBA, so it is surprising that those facts and figures are not available. I hope that, in the interim—before the review is published—we will look at what we can do to get that information to local authorities. That must be easy for UKBA to do, so I hope that it will be done.

I do not want to detain the House long, given that the Government seem to be doing everything that the Select Committee asked them to do. My final point is a general one to which I will keep returning as long as I occupy the Chair of the Select Committee. I want to be fair to this Government as I was fair to the last one, and the former Minister will remember that on every occasion when we discussed immigration, I raised the same issue: the state of the backlog in the administration of the Home Office.

I see that the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Gavin Barwell) is here today. I am not suggesting for a moment that we should move the Home Office away from Croydon, as I am sure that a lot of his constituents work there and that Lunar house and all those other fine buildings contribute greatly to Croydon's economy. However, it is not acceptable for us to go on as though the backlog will only be here until next year. The Select Committee is due a letter from Lin Homer setting out the state of the backlog, and of course progress has been made in the past 13 years, but I asked the then Minister for Borders and Immigration, my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Mr Woolas), whether he would like to be the first Immigration Minister in history to leave office having cleared the backlog. For as long as I have been a Member of Parliament—23 years now—there has always been a backlog. When I was first elected, there were sacks of unopened letters in Lunar house, simply because the volume of correspondence was so great.

I know that the Minister has written to right hon. and hon. Members about how we deal with constituency cases. Looking around the Chamber, I think that all of us here have a smattering of immigration cases, some more than others, and the shadow Minister is probably the biggest consumer of her former portfolio than anyone else here. It is all very well to tell Members to write to officials at Croydon and to come to Ministers only as a last resort, but we all get the same letters back, drafted by the same person. Miss Homer, as director general and chief executive, takes ultimate responsibility—this is not a personal issue; it is just business, as they said in "The Godfather"—but the fact is that all the letters are the same. We do not expect the Minister to draft his own letters, but we get the same information whether we write to Miss Homer or to him. UKBA keeps telling us that we must wait until next year for the backlog to be cleared.

That is the problem for children in detention. If only the system actually worked and gave us quicker results, even if those results did not please people and the cases still went through judicial review. I declare an interest: my wife is an immigration lawyer and I worked in a law centre before I was elected, and the process does, of course, make work for lawyers. People apply for judicial review only if they have no other option, but at present, they apply for judicial review at the end of a three-year process. If we had dealt with their cases more quickly, some asylum seekers would not have had their children. Some of the children in detention are there because their parents' cases have taken so long to be concluded.

In the spirit of a new Government with a fresh approach, I say that eliminating the backlog and dealing with immigration cases quickly is the best way to solve the problems of needing to build more detention centres and to keep children in detention. I know what the Minister will say: "You were in office for 13 years. Why hasn't this been solved?" Believe me, I and others have been asking Governments for the past 20 years to do something about it.

Administrative delays have become an essential part of immigration policy, which means that people in this country are working illegally because they are waiting for their cases to be concluded. People come to me every week—tomorrow I will see another 50, and on average I deal with 60 immigration cases a week—who are desperate to work but cannot because they are waiting for UKBA to deal with their cases. Some cases take between six and seven years to be concluded. Dealing with those issues must go hand in hand with the Government review.

The Minister's biggest battle will be against the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and ultimately the Chancellor, but the Home Affairs Committee will be on his side arguing, as it has done in the past, his case for more resources for UKBA and to clear the backlog. UKBA is full of good and decent people, but the system needs changing. We have constantly asked for greater expenditure but, obviously, no Minister for Immigration has ever said in a debate, whether in Westminster Hall or the main Chamber, "Please can we have more money?" That would breach the convention of Government. The Select Committee will say that for him.

Even in the current climate, providing resources will save the Government millions and millions of pounds spent every year on detaining people, including families and children, and forcibly removing those who have been here for seven or eight years. Let us not get into that situation. Let us deal with cases as quickly and efficiently as possible so that we do not have to detain or lock up children any more. We can allow people their chance of a fair hearing before the courts and eventually before the Minister, and then the results that the Government put forward must be accepted.

3.1 pm

Gavin Barwell (Croydon Central) (Con): Like the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on his appointment. I have known him for some time and, given the values that I know he has, I think that he will balance the need to reform our asylum system, to ensure that people who do not have a right to be in the country return home, with compassion for those who come here seeking sanctuary. It is a great privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Leicester East. He referred to his work in the previous Parliament as Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs and its report on the issue before us today.

Immigration and asylum, which are too often conjoined, are important in my constituency. The right hon. Gentleman referred to the UK Border Agency in Croydon Central; its significant presence has a number of effects on my constituency. First, a large number of people are going through either the immigration or the asylum process, which has been the dominant issue in my casework in the four or five weeks I have been an MP. Secondly, as the right hon. Gentleman implied, a significant number of UKBA employees are my constituents, so there are some interesting letters from people about their experience of working in the system and how it might be improved. On another occasion, I might share some of those views with my hon. Friend the Minister.

Thirdly, there is a significant impact on our local authority, and the right hon. Gentleman talked about the issues. The London borough of Croydon, as a social services authority, has responsibility for more than 700 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. That compares with about 300 children from Croydon, so its social services role is very different from that of many other local authorities. Finally, immigration and asylum is a big issue with residents. Croydon has seen significant demographic change over the past 10 or 20 years. I am pleased to say that in most parts of my constituency, and most parts of the town, relations between different communities are good. However, in a few areas there has been significant activity from the British National party. I am pleased that it did not make the predicted breakthrough at the recent local elections.

Immigration and asylum was also a significant issue in the general election campaign. I suspect that other right hon. and hon. Members here today were contacted by Citizens for Sanctuary during the general election and asked to sign the sanctuary pledge. It gave me far and away my most uncomfortable moment during the campaign because I strongly feel that it is inappropriate to detain children, but, given that the party manifesto did not contain a specific commitment to end the practice, I felt that it was inappropriate for me to make a pledge without confidence that it could be delivered. The issue is important to me personally and to my constituency. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister has visited Yarl's Wood on several occasions and has spoken publicly about how distressing he found seeing children who are effectively behind bars.

The evidence in favour of changing the approach of the previous Government has been mounting for some time. The first UK study of its kind on the subject was published on 15 October last year in "Child Abuse & Neglect: the International Journal". A team of doctors examined 24 children detained at Yarl's Wood immigration removal centre. They found that the majority were experiencing mental and physical health difficulties related to being in detention. The Royal Colleges of Paediatrics and Child Health, of General Practitioners and of Psychiatrists, and the UK Faculty of Public Health produced a long and detailed report. Dr Philip Collins, a forensic adolescent psychiatrist representing the Royal College of Psychiatrists, said:

> "The harsh reality about this country's immigration policy is that we are significantly damaging the mental health of many of the children and young people who end up—through no fault of their own—being detained in a prison-like environment by the UK Border Agency. The evidence is clear: this policy directly harms the mental health of children and young people. That is why the Royal College of Psychiatrists calls on the UK Government to end this practice without delay."

On 17 February this year, we had the report of Sir Al Aynsley-Green, the former Children's Commissioner for England:

> "Children continue to report that they find the process of arrest and transportation distressing. Increasingly, children are separated from parents when transported to the centre. Most are not told what will happen to their belongings and pets left behind and many have difficulty contacting friends."

While acknowledging that health care standards improved, the report states that significant areas require attention, saying that

> "a mother informed the nurse at 11.20 pm that her five year old child had fallen earlier in the playground. The child could not lift her arm and was not seen by the GP until 2.05pm the next day and went to A&E at 7.02 pm."

the next evening, and was found to have a fracture.

There is also the report of Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons, which, to be fair to the previous Government, noted that conditions, services and support for children, including a new school and better health care, have improved:

> "However, given that the fact of detention adversely affected children's welfare, inspectors were concerned that their detention did not appear to be exceptional or necessary, given that half the families detained were later released under temporary admission."

As I say, the evidence that the policy the previous Government pursued was wrong has been mounting for some time. It must surely be possible to balance the need to remove those with no right to be in this country with the need to protect the welfare of children. I was glad to see in the coalition agreement a commitment to end the detention of children, which takes on the Home Affairs Committee's recommendations and, arguably, goes a little further. My hon. Friend the Minister has announced that the review is under way. I hope that the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) will confirm that the official Opposition will reconsider their approach.

I have a few questions for my hon. Friend before I close. The right hon. Member for Leicester East touched on the first: how long will the review take? I understand that while it is being carried out, some detention will continue but a time scale would be helpful. In his opening remarks, my hon. Friend ran through the options that will be considered as part of the review; one was potentially separating families so some family members could remain in their home. I was pleased to hear that he recognised that that would be contentious. If we move from detaining children to breaking up families, it could be a case of out of the frying pan, into the fire. Will the Minister tell us more about the pilot scheme looking at possibilities away from detention that UKBA has been running in Glasgow? The initial results showed that there had been some success, with people voluntarily choosing to return to their country of origin.

Will my hon. Friend tell us a little about the case management approach that a number of other countries have adopted in recent years to end the practice of detention? He talked a little about that in his opening remarks, but I understand that the policy that has been pursued in Sweden, for example, has reached the point where more than three quarters of families now voluntarily agree to return to their place of origin.

In conclusion, I thank you, Mr Weir, for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I was extremely gratified to see that the commitment to act on this issue was in the

[Gavin Barwell]

coalition agreement. I am also gratified to see that the Minister has already acted to set up a review, and I look forward to hearing how he intends to take it forward.

3.10 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak in this important debate. The issue is important not only because of the numbers of children who are detained, but, sadly, because it symbolises how far the Labour Government had gone, in some aspects, from the ideals that motivate many millions of the party's supporters.

When I raised the issue on the Floor of the House about two years ago, I was one of the first people to do so. I have visited Oakington detention centre and Yarl's Wood, and I have had two debates on the Floor of the House about children in detention. As hon. Members will have heard earlier, and as they will certainly have read in the documentation, no reputable organisation defends this practice, which almost certainly puts us in breach of the European convention on human rights. All reputable organisations—whether it is United Nations organisations in this country, Save the Children, the Refugee Council or Liberty—are united in opposition to this practice.

The practice of detaining children is wrong in principle. What are we doing detaining children in custody when they have committed no crime? Hon. Members might be surprised to know that when I discuss the issue with friends and colleagues in foreign legislatures—even those in third-world countries—they are surprised that Britain, of all countries, detains children indefinitely. When looking at these issues, we must always remember that the history of empire means that people look to Britain to set an example, but we are not setting one on this matter.

Detention was wrong in principle, and it was almost certainly in breach of a number of human rights conventions, but it was also wrong in practice. I know that because I have visited the detention centres. Ministers will tell us about the improvements, and they will tell us that everything is the parents' fault because they should have left when they were supposed to. However, when we go to the detention centres to meet the families and the children, particularly if we have children ourselves, it is brought home to us on a level that we cannot put down on paper—even in excellent reports such as those by the Home Affairs Committee—what it means to children to be detained and deprived of their liberty. However wonderful the facilities, the children cannot run outside as far as the eye can see. As far as they are concerned, they are behind four walls. They have almost certainly been brought into detention in traumatic circumstances, such as after a morning raid, and they find themselves locked up for reasons they can scarcely comprehend—and locked up, in their view, is what they are. Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), who will speak for the Opposition, I have actually visited the detention centres and the children. Detention is a restriction of children's liberty, and they face the trauma that that entails.

There are also issues about the conditions, some of which were dealt with by the Labour party when it was in government, but some of which were not. At Yarl's Wood, in particular, there is an inflammable atmosphere. We have just had riots, and there have been all sorts of problems. Most recently—earlier this year—women were on hunger strike. Part of that inflammable atmosphere has to do with the underlying tension about the fact that children are detained at Yarl's Wood.

Party colleagues will say that the parents chose not to go home at the first time of asking, so they are responsible for their children's being in custody. Whenever I raise the issue on the Floor of the House, I hear that it is not the Government's fault and that the parents are responsible, but where in the practice of justice and in the way in which this country is run are we in the business of punishing children for what their parents have done?

Keith Vaz: There is another issue, which I raised in my speech. Why do people have to wait so long for their cases to be dealt with? Does my hon. Friend agree that dealing with cases in a more timely fashion and clearing the Home Office backlog would help to make the system more humane? She is absolutely right about the detention of children, but the reason why we have so many cases is that they are not being dealt with quickly enough.

Ms Abbott: My right hon. Friend has great experience as a constituency MP. He probably does more immigration casework than any constituency MP, and he has been doing it for 23 years. Added to that is his experience as the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee. He makes an excellent point: the delays help to create an intolerable situation for people trapped in the system.

I am one of the longest-serving Members of the House present today, and I remember when detention centres were introduced. The House was told that they would be used only for short periods while we fast-tracked cases and deported people. Had the House been told that children, in particular, would be in these centres for months—there have even been cases of children being in them for nearly a year—it might have taken a very different attitude. A system that was meant to be used for short periods of detention while people's cases were fast-tracked has turned into one—I have visited the detention centres myself—in which people and their children are held in limbo. That is one of the things that make this practice so unacceptable.

As I said, the detention of children is wrong in principle; it is wrong because it is an infringement of their liberty. It is also wrong because, in a way, we are making children and families suffer for the issues in our system, and the delays are very much part of that. We set a very poor example to other countries and other jurisdictions if we cannot construct a system in which it is not necessary to detain children.

The purpose of the detention centres, apart from expediting removals, was to act as a deterrent. There has been a strong feeling over the past 13 years that the grimmer and more exacting we made the regime for asylum seekers and immigrants, the less likely they were to come here. However, people must recognise that, for better or worse, the push-factors behind people migrating and seeking asylum are very great, and the idea that turning the screw one more time will see numbers drop has proved false.

We need to focus as never before on having an efficient and speedy system, because my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) and I have spent

23 years struggling with the delays. In the long run, we also have to deal with the circumstances in people's countries of origin that make them think, in their desperation, that they will chance their arm by coming to this country.

After 23 years of immigration and asylum casework, I would add that we also need to deal with some of the so-called immigration and legal advisers who prey on our constituents and give them false advice and false hope. Often, it is not the would-be immigrants or asylum seekers who put themselves on the path of collision with the authorities, but the advice they get from people who are feeding off them and making money out of them, even though they have little money to spend.

In the immediate term, we need to deal with the ongoing inefficiencies in the system and bear down on some of the lawyers and so-called immigration advisers. Although we are obviously very constrained, we also need, in the very long term, to create the right conditions in people's regions of origin so that it is not necessary for them to flee here. That is the way to deal with the system.

Successive bodies and individuals have tried to get past Governments to deal with this issue. It was a particular preoccupation of a previous Children's Commissioner and it is a preoccupation of the chief inspector of prisons, Anne Owers, who did a comprehensive report on the issue two or three years ago. As I said, every reputable organisation that has looked at this has said that the detention of children is wrong in principle and detrimental to children in practice. Medical work has been done on the consequences of the stressful situation for children, and it is very alarming. I have said before, including to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch, when she was a Minister: how can we, the politicians, agree to keep children in circumstances that would horrify us if they were proposed for our own children?

It must be wrong to punish children for the alleged infractions of their parents. There must be a better way than that. The way, of course, as the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Gavin Barwell) said, is not to split families but to bear down on the aspects of the system—whether the advice that is given or the speed with which cases are dealt with—that lead to people being in such a plight. What has been happening is wrong. There must be a way forward that does not involve splitting up families.

I have raised the issue time and again in the House and in questions, and I have visited detention centres, not because there are votes in worrying about the children in those centres but because I felt that what was happening was wrong, and that there must be a better way. It gives me no pleasure to say that it has taken a new Government to take a fresh look at the question. I hope they will not let the tribulations of office and its practical difficulties deflect them from ending what has been this country's shame: the detention of innocent children in detention centres.

3.21 pm

Dr Julian Huppert (Cambridge) (LD): Thank you, Mr Weir, for calling me to speak for the first time in Westminster Hall. It is a great honour to follow the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who spoke as powerfully as ever on the issue in question. It was a great pleasure to hear her speak at the Liberty annual general meeting on Saturday; she spoke movingly about many issues, and I wish her the best of luck with her forthcoming selection process. I shall not say that I support her, as that might do her more damage than anything else.

I am delighted that the debate has been obtained, because the issue is very important. I have always felt that a good test of the underlying morals and values of a country is the way it treats people who cannot defend or look after themselves, and the most vulnerable people in society. That description applies to all sorts of groups, and child detainees are one of them. We fail the test incredibly badly in relation to them; we can talk another time about how well we do in other respects. It is a matter of great shame to this country that we treat people so badly.

The topic of the debate is alternatives to child detention. The main alternative that I can think of to detaining 1,000 children a year is not to detain them. That, above all, is what I want to say. We simply should not detain them. The suggestion that we should detain the family but not the children is at least as bad. We should not even consider something that tears families apart at what is often a difficult time for them. That leaves the question of what we can do with the children in the case in question, and before I discuss that I want to explain why I am concerned about the issue.

Cambridge has a great history as somewhere that is very multicultural and tolerant, with people from various backgrounds, and a number of people there have been involved in various ways with detainees. I might mention, in relation to the remarks of the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Gavin Barwell), that the Conservative candidate in Cambridge was one of the Conservatives who signed the sanctuary pledge; ours was one of very few constituencies where every candidate did so. I am delighted that we did, and I wish it had happened elsewhere.

We are also very near the Oakington detention centre, which has a sad and sorry history. Children are not the main focus there, but recently it hit the news because of the death of one gentleman in detention in April. I am currently dealing with a case of serious assault there. The hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington has been there to look around. I spoke to her earlier about my request to do so too: that visit was scheduled, but has now been delayed. I fear that my speaking here today means that it will be delayed further, but I look forward to the chance to see it.

Keith Vaz: On that point—I know the hon. Gentleman was not here for some of the earlier speeches— when the Select Committee asked to make a visit it took a long time to get that sorted out. When we got there, I think 10 Home Office officials attended, and only about three from Serco. There was a total of about 15; the room was full. Is it the hon. Gentleman's wish, as it is my hope, that the new Government will perhaps let us in more often, if we ask?

Dr Huppert: It is indeed a problem getting in; my predecessor, David Howarth, tried to get in and was told that it was not possible for him to do that. It is somewhat worrying if there are institutions in this country in a state such that MPs cannot be allowed in to have a look.

Ms Abbott: I urge the hon. Gentleman to be persistent. I had to be, but we cannot have MPs in effect being barred from going to such institutions. Otherwise, we are left to wonder what they are trying to hide.

Dr Huppert: Indeed; I plan to be persistent. I accept the fact that unexpected circumstances sometimes mean that things must be cancelled. One deferral is fine, but if the arrangement keeps being deferred I shall be more concerned, and shall certainly raise the matter here.

To move on to the issue of children, we heard earlier from the hon. Member for Croydon Central about the effects of detention on mental health; we have heard about its effects on physical health and overall well-being, and about the future that we are providing for the children in question. It is hard to see how any of that fits with the UK Border Agency's statutory duty under section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 and the way in which it is supposed to treat children, or with article 37 of the UN convention on the rights of the child, which states that detention should be used only as a last resort and for the shortest possible time. It would be hard to say that that is being carried out.

Another issue is the advice and help that the children and their parents get. I had planned to speak for longer and to discuss legal aid for Refugee and Migrant Justice, but early-day motion 191 on that topic was discussed on the Floor of the House today, so I shall not take up time with it now; nevertheless, it is essential that we provide the right support to people.

The way in which we deal with age-disputed children is also a real issue. With very young children things are clear for all concerned. They are children, and there is no doubt. They should not be detained. We need to provide much more family-friendly and child-friendly solutions. There is a concern about children who claim to be, say, 17; it is hard to tell whether such a claim is honest. We need a clear, fair process to try to establish the age of those people. In many cases it will not be hard. We need a clear routine that appears fair and does not seem—as in so many cases that I have been made aware of—like arbitrary justice, with decisions being made semi-arbitrarily, based on various factors, about whether the truth is being told. It is hard on teenagers who are already in very difficult circumstances to tell them that there is no way for them to interact sensibly with the process.

The question was raised earlier whether we should punish children for the sins of their parents. I do not see seeking sanctuary in this country as a sin or something worthy of punishment. It is worthy of rapid decisions about whether people are genuine sanctuary seekers, who should be coming to this country—and we should open ourselves as we would hope other countries would, to support people in need—or whether there is something false about the story, in which case things are different. In any event, punishment is not the route. Trying to control the people coming to this country by being as nasty as possible to them while they are here is not worthy of this country. There are other issues that must be dealt with, and international development is clearly the right process for that, as has been mentioned.

The UK Border Agency needs to work faster. I am constantly coming across cases that have taken years to process, and that gives rise to questions about how fairly and rapidly the system works. The aim must be to reach a decision quickly and fairly about whether people are genuine sanctuary seekers, so that if they are not they go, and if they are they can stay. At the moment, it takes far too long. Competence is a serious issue in relation to the UKBA in several wider respects, which have even affected people who came to work for me in my former profession, from such places as the USA. There is something fundamentally wrong, in my experience, with the way the agency operates.

We need to end child detention as quickly as possible. I am delighted that that is in the coalition agreement. It is a fantastic aspect of the coalition that we can finally end such an awful thing. We owe the people of this country better than child detention, and I look forward to our fulfilling our aim in that respect.

3.29 pm

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir.

I have some questions for the Minister, and to help him respond fully it may help him if I go through them before I make any other comments, and pick up on hon. Members' points. As to Dungavel, what, currently, will happen if a family in Scotland are required to leave the country—to be deported? Where are they sent, and how is that dealt with?

The Minister spoke about local authorities, and working more closely with them. I wonder whether the Government are planning to work with all local authorities equally, or whether they will build on the existing model that applies to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. It is a slightly different model, and involves specialist local authorities that are particularly adept at dealing with these challenging issues.

What discussions has the Minister had with local authorities to make them aware of the situation regarding children liable to be removed, and of how the process will work? I know that it is early days, but I wonder whether he could give some guidance, because I am sure that the Local Government Association and individual authorities will be keen to know how it will work practically.

I am also interested to know how the Government propose to work with community organisations. We hear a lot about the big society. Like many people, I am keen to know what it actually means. I shall touch on some of the work with community organisations that was under way while my party was in government, but I am keen to hear a bit about the Government's plans. Perhaps, if the Minister is unable to answer here and now, he could provide some information in writing in due course.

This debate is about alternatives to child detention. I have had the opportunity to speak to those who are responsible for the project in Glasgow. I do not know whether the Minister managed that on his visit to Glasgow this week, but I am pleased that he is going around the different nations of the UK to discuss the matter. What progress has there been on the Glasgow project? To date, has any family actually left voluntarily as a result of that very intense intervention, which I believe involves two social workers working with around

four families at a time? I wonder whether there has yet been a success story, because, sadly, there had not been one as I left office, but I have great hopes that the project can deliver some results. It is still early days, but I would be keen to hear an update on it.

The Minister mentioned the assisted voluntary returns package but did not absolutely pledge that it will continue, although I did not hear him say that it would not. I would be keen to hear some clarification on the future of the package, particularly in the current financial situation. It is a reasonably generous package of up to £5,000 per individual, and I wonder whether the Government plan to keep it at that level, and whether the Minister has a hotline to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who is his right hon. Friend these days, to ensure that that money will be there to enable the alternatives to progress. I welcome the fact that the Minister is cautious about the separation of families, and I shall touch on that in a moment.

An interesting issue in this area is the impact on human trafficking. Clearly, children are trafficked. If they are never detained, there is a risk that that could become a pull factor for those who have mal-intent towards children. In constructing the review and taking account of views, is there any particular oversight of that threat, so that as the review progresses and proposals come forward, it is considered, and there are not perverse outcomes which none of us in the House would want?

On that, would the Minister pledge to monitor the impact on children in what we might call private fostering? As the previous Minister, I was responsible for this area. There were occasions when adults were detained but the children would be elsewhere, and it could take some time to locate the children when the parents and family themselves had decided to separate. That lays open terrible potential risks to children in terms of child protection and safety. Again, if the review is well done and well constructed, the matter could possibly be dealt with, but there is a potential perverse outcome which the Government need to be aware of and plan against.

Has the Minister had any recent legal advice about section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 on the duty of care for children, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert), and its impact on the review? There has been previous legal advice, but I wonder whether the Minister is seeking legal advice about the impact of that legislation.

There has been some discussion of the importance of legal advice, with which I certainly agree. I wonder whether any further action has been proposed, either as part of the review or separately, on improving legal advice, which has dogged all of us as constituency Members who deal with casework but also anyone in government who has to deal with these challenges. Does the Minister have any thoughts on that?

The current proposal is to continue some detention, but, according to the coalition agreement—I stand to be corrected if I have misunderstood it—there is an intent to hold a family with children for between 24 and 72 hours only. What would happen in the current situation if a family with children who are already in detention launch a judicial review at the 11th hour? Will the Minister ever continue to detain the family? Does he rule that out, or do the Government not currently have a definite position? I hope that because I have given him notice of questions, he will be able to answer them fully.

We heard some useful contributions from Members. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) has spoken many times on this subject. I should point out that the backlog has been a bugbear for us all as constituency MPs, and for anyone in the House who has any interest in the matter, but it has reduced. As a constituency MP and in my previous role, I have seen that and can testify to it.

I do, however, share a concern with my right hon. Friend about resources. Will progress go backwards now, given that there will be tight controls on and reductions in Government spending? Let us be honest: we are interested in this issue, but many people up and down the country would not see it as a priority. I wonder whether it is a priority of the current Government to make resources available to ensure that the backlog continues to go down, and that there is support for those going through the system so that they can get the right advice.

My right hon. Friend rightly highlighted the fact that the backlog does not help the situation regarding detention. Families who see other families staying for a long time because they have been caught up in the backlog are led to believe that there is not a real prospect of their leaving.

Keith Vaz: I do not want to prejudge my hon. Friend's memoirs detailing her period in government before they eventually come out, but is it the case that the Home Office did not ask for more resources, or was it just not given more resources? Was there a plea to the Treasury that if there were more resources, more could be done about the issue?

Meg Hillier: I worked with two Home Secretaries who were robust in defending the Home Office's need for resources for several areas, but, as the Minister will find out in his new role, resources are always challenging in a Department such as the Home Office. There are many priorities, and every time resources are put into one area, there is a risk that another area will bubble up, as I believe he with his greater experience dealing with these matters in Parliament will know.

Resources were always an issue, but it was not as simple as that. Often, local authorities did not want cases decided as quickly as they could have been because of the challenge of then housing and providing for families. There had to be some negotiation so that families who were able to stay were properly provided for in local authorities.

Ms Abbott: Would my hon. Friend agree that delays, which bear on child detention, are part of a process that feeds on itself? The more delays there are, the more people have shoddy legal advisers who tell them, basically, to play for time. If at some point we could bear down on the delays, it would save us money in the medium term.

Meg Hillier: I believe that my hon. Friend would agree that, as constituency MPs, we have seen reductions in the delays. I certainly am seeing that, and the figures that the Government can provide will show that they have reduced. Yes, as she rightly says, there is a self-propelling, negative cycle.

[Meg Hillier]

The hon. Member for Croydon Central (Gavin Barwell) raised some questions about the Opposition's position, and I shall make that clear. Actually, the approach of the Government is very much the approach that was under way as the previous Government left office.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) said that she has visited detention centres and seen what goes on there. I, too, have visited them, and that was one reason I was keen, as the Minister then responsible, to have a review and to work with organisations that had an interest in the matter. As I communicated to her and, in particular, to the hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), who is now the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and who was very interested in the matter, I was frustrated that a great deal of energy was being spent on argument and disagreement, not solutions. Any solution would not have solved the problem overnight. Do Members not think that in the past 13 years the Government would have stopped detention overnight if it were that easy? It is not that easy, and that is the reality of government.

Ms Abbott: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Meg Hillier: Could I make some progress, please? Let us be clear that Yarl's Wood also houses foreign national prisoners, not just families with children. We should get it into the debate that families with children are not the only people housed there.

I worry that my hon. Friend has forgotten our conversations in which I explained my plans to revisit some of the issues surrounding children in detention. Some work was done by previous Ministers responsible for immigration to improve support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, create expert local authorities that were able to deal better with those children, and create a children's champion within the UK Border Agency.

At the end of last year, my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Mr Woolas), who in the past had focused more widely on the issue of children in the immigration system, spoke to me about his desire to see a particular ministerial focus on the issue of children in detention. He asked me to take on that responsibility. As I have said, I wanted to look at the whole picture, and I began that process by meeting a number of organisations involved, and the hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire and the former Member for Bedford, because of their particular interest in this matter. Out of that meeting, held under the Chatham House rule—I will not name those who were there, although hon. Members would not be worried about that—we came up with the view that early legal advice was important, and that the early legal advice project already under way needed to be boosted. I subsequently met the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund and ensured that we worked closely with it, because of its desire to see a difference in that area. That was a helpful partnership and I also worked with local groups.

Ms Abbott: I remember our conversations with great clarity. My hon. Friend is a good friend and colleague, but we took diametrically opposed views on the issue of children in detention. I thought that it was wrong, and I have always thought that. One argument is that there is a problem because this is not an easy matter, but the real Home Office position was revealed in many statements, which claimed that ultimately, children in detention were not the responsibility of the Government but that it was the fault of their parents. Behind that lies a narrative on immigration that suggests that the more punitive the system is made, the less likely people are to abuse it.

Meg Hillier: I disagree with my hon. Friend. Perhaps I could remind her that we both agreed that we should not let the better be the enemy of the good. I was attempting to improve the system, and I am pleased that we are now seeing further steps along those lines. A better take-up of assisted voluntary return was a particular issue, and I pushed hard for third parties to do that. The Government felt that it was not always appropriate if such matters were dealt with by the person who was deciding on the immigration claim, and I hope that that will be a major part of the review. Excess baggage is not a new issue, but it is an equally important one to help people settle back. We need a clearer process in which people know from the beginning what the options are, and work on that with community groups has been important. Removal directions should be provided in the community. Those things are all part of the plan and the intense work that the UK Border Agency was beginning to undertake, prior to the election.

The previous Government were learning from the best models from abroad, and the new Government are continuing with that. However, we must recognise that even those models from abroad—in Australia and Sweden, for example—allow for children to be detained under difficult circumstances. I refer the House to an Adjournment debate from 10 February 2010, in which I flagged up some of those issues, although at that point I had not met a number of the groups.

I wish this approach well, as it is the way in which the previous Government attempted to deal with the situation. However, it was not easy, and I am a little puzzled. Today the Minister reiterates an announcement of the end of children being detained, and he re-announces a welcome review that was already under way. In his opening speech, he clearly highlighted the likelihood of detention immediately prior to a flight. I refer back to my point about what would happen in the case of a late legal challenge; that is an issue that needs to be tackled and supported by the whole legal process. The Minister also mentioned the Afghanistan centre for Afghan teenagers, and I wonder whether that marks a division in the coalition, especially given the remarks made by the hon. Member for Cambridge.

3.44 pm

Damian Green: I am grateful for the unanimous support for this policy from all sides of the Chamber.

Ms Abbott: First and last time.

Damian Green: Absolutely. This is the second time this week that something has happened to me that I suspect will never happen again. I attended the Citizens for Sanctuary summer party where, as the new Minister for Immigration, one expects to get brickbats, but instead

I was given a bouquet. I suspect that that will be the last time, so I thought that I would enjoy it while it lasted. This debate is a metaphorical conclusion of that experience.

I am grateful to hon. Members from all parties for their contributions. The only comment that verged on the slightly churlish was the conclusion reached by the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), who was attempting desperately to find splits in the coalition. I am extremely pleased and proud to be advocating our policy, which was in the Liberal Democrat manifesto. The hon. Lady will toil in vain if she seeks to find splits in that area.

A number of important practical points were raised and questions asked in the debate, and I will now deal with those. First, let me say that I was remiss in not thanking the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch for all the expertise and personal kindness that she showed when she was in government and I was in opposition.

The right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) rightly mentioned the review by the Home Affairs Committee. As he said, he recognises many of the ideas that the Government have put forward, as many were mentioned in past reviews by that Committee. I look forward to further expert contributions from the Committee. He also went through some of the statistics for children in detention, which I think bear greater examination. He mentioned the figure of just over 1,000 for the number of children in detention in 2009. If that annual figure is broken down, one finds the slightly depressing fact that the numbers go up as we go through the year: the figure for the third quarter is higher than that for the second or first quarters.

As the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch said, the central difficulty is about what should be done at the end of the process if a family simply refuses to go. Detention under the system that we are getting rid of was not necessarily effective. Of the 1,068 children who departed from detention in 2008-09, only 539 were removed and 629 were released back. There are clearly difficulties with the efficacy of removal and with taking away detention as an option—something that we are doing for all the reasons that have been advanced during the debate—but even with detention, more children were released back into the community than were removed. The old system was not particularly effective, and I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Leicester East for stating the actual figures, as they illustrate that fact tellingly.

Meg Hillier: Will the Minister confirm that those who were taken out of detention were never brought back into detention so as to be removed from the country again, or indeed removed from the country by another route?

Damian Green: I am not entirely sure that I understood that question. Is the hon. Lady saying that those who were eventually removed had never been detained and then released, and then detained again and later removed? Is that what she is saying? The honest answer is that I do not know. I was not the Minister at that time. She was. If she says that that is the case, I am grateful for the information.

Many hon. Members have mentioned Yarl's Wood and other detention centres. I have visited Yarl's Wood on several occasions, and in my experience the regime got markedly better over the years. Last time I visited, a functioning school was in operation and so on, and it was a much more humane place than it had been in previous years. I pay tribute to the Ministers who were involved in supervising that, as well as to the staff of the UK Border Agency who made sure that it happened. I suspect that we have all had the same experience. However, even when that place was in its most humane phase, it was still disturbing to see children locked up behind bars. That is one of the things that impels our policy.

There was mention of children at Harmondsworth. I may have misunderstood the right hon. Member for Leicester East, because it is my understanding that there are and were no children held at Harmondsworth. If I have misunderstood, I apologise, but I thought that he had said that there were.

Keith Vaz: When we visited, there were no children there. I was just visiting Harmondsworth.

Damian Green: I am grateful for that clarification. The position was not entirely clear.

The point was rightly made about access to local authority services. Local authority social services are embedded at Yarl's Wood; they are there permanently.

My final point about the statistics is that the figure was more than 1,000 and it is now five, so we are doing our best, even in the interim phase while the review is going on, to keep the numbers to an absolute minimum.

Various Members on both sides of the Chamber brought up the issue of delays, which lead to problems in the system. I think that I was being invited by the right hon. Gentleman to give a new time scale for the end of the legacy. Given all his experience, he will excuse me from making such commitments in my second outing at the Dispatch Box, but he will know, from having sat through many of these debates with me in the past four years, that like him, I have been very exercised by the problem of delay.

I dare say that those who were Ministers in the previous Government would not dissent from the basic proposition that the long delays embedded in the system lead to many of the associated problems that we see. Bearing down on those delays and getting rid of the old legacy, as it has been called, as fast as possible is clearly a high priority. That will have beneficial spin-offs throughout the asylum system and, indeed, the wider immigration system.

At various stages, the debate drifted into a general immigration debate, and it is perfectly reasonable that the same points apply in that context. The fewer delays we have, the more likely we are to avoid the problems that we have seen, although it is a fair point—it was made by Ministers in the previous Government and will be made by me—that not every delay in the system is caused by the system. Not every delay is caused by the border agency. Some delay is caused by the legal processes that people have the right to go through and do go through.

Ms Abbott: On the question of delays, one thing that successive Ministers in the previous Administration never understood is that if we, in a panic—usually occasioned by the tabloid press—bear down on one aspect of the system, all that does is displace pressure to

[Ms Abbott]

another aspect. That is why we were never successful in dealing with delays overall. We bore down on one thing—Romanian ladies in headscarves—and then got a bulge of children who claimed to be 18 but were not. So I beg, in a non-party political way, for a strategic, all-embracing approach. That in the end will produce the desired result.

Damian Green: I agree with that point and will seek to take the friendly advice that the hon. Lady offers across the Chamber in that regard.

Gavin Barwell: Does the Minister agree that one of the other reasons for delay and one that causes great frustration to UKBA staff is the difficulty of returning people to certain countries? Will he work with colleagues at the Foreign Office to see whether we can secure improved arrangements in that regard?

Damian Green: Absolutely so. The whole Government are working very hard to ensure that those who have no right to remain here are returned to their countries of origin. My hon. Friend, who has huge expertise already in this matter, representing Croydon Central, will have noticed that when the Government and the UK Border Agency have some successes in that regard, it is not universally popular. We are being criticised this week for resuming returns to Iraq, but that has to be part of the process; otherwise, the process will silt up.

Let me make some progress, as I am conscious of the time and there are many questions to answer. A point made by various hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Gavin Barwell) and the right hon. Member for Leicester East, was about resources. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware of the state of the public finances left by the Government he supported for 13 years. As a result, there will be difficulties. All I can sensibly say is that the management of resources is as important as the quantum of resources. That is one of the things that the new Government are most eager to get to grips with as fast as possible, and we shall be doing so as part of the general spending review.

Various hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch, asked about the Glasgow pilot. She will know that it encourages refused asylum seeker families to return voluntarily by providing intensive support, which is focused on helping families to confront issues that delay a return and building up skills to prepare for a voluntary return. Thirty-two families have been referred to the Glasgow pilot; 11 have been accommodated there. I am afraid that nothing has changed in that regard since the hon. Lady left office. No families have elected to return voluntarily to their home countries, and enforced departure has taken place of three families who were initially accepted into the project. However, she and I need not despair at this point, because one of the things that I learned when I was in Glasgow earlier this week was that the fact of that project has spread awareness of assisted voluntary return much more widely among the various communities—she will be aware that there are large numbers of such families there—which in itself has led to a significant surge in applications for voluntary return. The availability of that process and the information on it is quite heartening in terms of the wider review that I am conducting. The more aware we can make families of the existence of voluntary return, the more they seem to be interested in it. It is a difficult set of options before the Government, but that is one of the heartening points that should be made.

I will attempt to answer all the questions the hon. Lady asked. On Dungavel, in the one or two cases that occur now, the families are moved to Yarl's Wood, so that is the only place where they are being held. The problem is lessening slightly as I progress through this speech. I have now learned that only three children are in detention at the moment at Yarl's Wood. She asked, as others did, about local authorities. Clearly, the local authorities with the most expertise, whether we are talking about Croydon, Kent or Hillingdon—the ones that people would expect to be involved—will play a significant role in the review, but I take her point that other local authorities will need to be informed.

The hon. Lady asked about community organisations. One reason for trying to get out as much as possible is to engage not only the national end of the various organisations that are most concerned with either the welfare of children or, specifically, families in the position that we are discussing, but the organisations on the ground around the country, so that they can contribute their considerable expertise to the review.

On assisted voluntary return, the hon. Lady makes the point that we are living in a time of spending stringency. All I can sensibly say at this point is that, as she knows, in the long run nothing is as expensive as detention. Building and maintaining detention centres is more expensive than providing people with packages to return voluntarily, so if all goes well, the net effect on the public purse will also be beneficial.

The hon. Lady asked about the legal advice that I am receiving. All I can say gently is that I do not remember her ever sharing the legal advice that she received from Home Office lawyers when she was standing at the Dispatch Box. That was a very good habit of hers, which I intend to take up.

I am grateful to all hon. Members who contributed to the debate. It has been extremely constructive. This is not necessarily an easy problem to solve, but we all agree that it must be solved. We cannot go on with the system that we had in the past. The final big question was when we shall finish the review. The report will be on my desk in the early weeks of July, and I shall proceed with all possible speed after that to come to a full conclusion.

Question put and agreed to.

3.59 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 7 June 2010

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Telecoms Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Mr Edward Vaizey): I am pleased to be able to report back on the topics discussed and the views put forward at this Council under the auspices of the Spanish presidency, which took place during the morning (and lunch) on Monday 31 May in Brussels. I represented the United Kingdom.

The main (and sole discussion) point on the agenda was the Commission communication on the European digital agenda and Council conclusions on that, along with the presidency paper on a European code of rights. The presidency insisted on a single table round of discussion on all three of these topics. This was initiated by Commissioner Kroes who spoke about the importance of the EU digital agenda to the economic performance of the European Union both in terms of GDP growth and productivity. She recognised that the agenda was ambitious (a multitude of proposals and initiatives) but noted that the EU needed to be bold if we were to match the US and other countries in our leverage of ICT for economic benefit. She was particularly critical on broadband deployment and use across the community and urged member states to set more ambitious targets.

There was then a table round where nearly all member states spoke. There was overwhelming endorsement for the European digital agenda with many Ministers concentrating on the importance of the digital single market (for example, with respect to copyright) but also on broadband deployment and usage. There were, though, differing views on the importance of the code of rights. While the majority of us could see benefit in the codification of existing rights in such an instrument, there was considerable opposition to an extension of rights in such a code (something the Commission were contemplating). No one spoke in opposition to the Council conclusions themselves, which were formally adopted.

In my intervention, I thanked Commissioner Kroes for the ambitious scope of the European digital agenda, agreed with her on the importance of leveraging the economic importance of ICT (especially in the current economic circumstances) and agreed on the need for us all to work together in promoting the deployment and use of broadband on a competitive basis. I also noted the importance to the UK of issues such as digital piracy and updating copyright legislation, where the Commission should set out a clear roadmap. On the code of rights I noted the utility for both business and consumers in having a single point where existing rights were brought together but said the UK were not currently minded in adding new rights to such a code.

The next item, though not formally on the Council agenda, was a discussion over lunch and then a formal meeting between member states on the seat of the BEREC (Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications) secretariat. BEREC was established under the telecoms package agreed in autumn 2009. The meeting formally endorsed the Latvian offer (the only one on the table) to host the secretariat in Riga.

Finally, the presidency introduced a number of items under "Any Other Business". Commissioner Kroes gave an update on the results of the consultation the Commission had initiated on universal service, which they will summarise in a Communication after the autumn. She indicated there were divergent roles on the wisdom of introducing an obligation on the supply of broadband (though it was clear majority of respondents were not in favour). The Commission was also asked to present their "Progress Report on the Single European Electronic Communications Market 2009" and the "Europe's Digital Competitiveness Report". Commissioner Kroes emphasised how the former, while noting the progress being made on broadband deployment in all member states, noted divergence of regulatory approaches (which she did not welcome) and the clear need for a rigorous and correct implementation of the telecoms package. On the latter, she welcomed the clear evidence base of the impact of ICT to the wider economy and noted how here proposals under the EDA included an annual benchmarking exercise of member states. The presidency also briefly informed Ministers of the outcome of the ministerial meeting EU-Latin America and Caribbean Countries: "Digital Content for a Digital Society" in March 2010.

Just before the meeting concluded, Belgium, as the incoming presidency, confirmed their programme for the next six months, which will include discussion on a decision on a new spectrum programme, an agreement on the future mandate for ENISA (the European Information Security Agency), Council conclusions on the EU broadband strategy and on the roaming report and a discussion on e-Government.

TREASURY

Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): The United Kingdom signed an amending protocol to the joint Council of Europe/OECD Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters on 27 May 2010. The text of the convention and of the protocol is published on the websites of both organisations. A copy of the amending protocol has also been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Draft legislation incorporating the provisions of the protocol into domestic law will be laid before the House of Commons for approval in due course.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

EU Energy Council

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Charles Hendry): I represented the UK at the Energy Council in Brussels on 31 May.

The first item on the agenda was a report by the presidency on the progress of negotiations with the European Parliament on the proposal for a regulation on security of gas supply. The presidency noted the likelihood of a first reading deal with the European Parliament by the end of June and there was a short discussion.

The Commission then reported on their dialogue with member states on targets under the Europe 2020 growth strategy, in particular achieving the objective of moving towards an increase of 20% in energy efficiency across the EU. The Commission stressed that, if the EU was to meet the target, then a clear definition of the task and who does what would be necessary. In discussion, a number of member states raised questions about the methodology of calculating targets and the importance of national targets taking account of national circumstances. The Commission will now launch a study on how best to set targets to secure improvements in energy efficiency and will look to member states to provide information on their national energy efficiency targets/programmes in due course. The presidency will report on discussions of the target to the General Affairs Council in preparation for the June European Council.

The main debate at this Council focused on the EU's future energy policy, with most member states intervening. During the discussions, I noted the importance of implementing existing legislation, creating the markets and networks necessary for a low-carbon future, supporting and developing new technologies, making progress on energy efficiency and diversifying supply routes and sources. In his intervention, Commissioner Oettinger focused on implementation of the internal market package and the questions confronting the development of energy infrastructure in the EU, as well as the need to maintain a focus on research into new energy technologies despite the economic climate. He confirmed that the Commission would publish an "Energy Strategy for Europe 2011-2020" in time for the December Energy Council. The Commission would also produce a roadmap to 2050 and a package of measures to promote infrastructure development. In addition, there would be a focus on energy policy at the European Council early in 2011. Belgium indicated that as the next presidency it would take forward work on the strategy and Ministers agreed high-level Council conclusions setting out high-level principles for the new energy strategy.

Finally, the Commission and presidency gave presentations on a number of international items, on amending the regulation on the European energy programme for recovery to use non-allocated funds, and on the Commission response to the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 8 June 2010

TREASURY

Office for Budget Responsibility

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): Sir Alan Budd and I have agreed the terms of reference for the interim Office for Budget Responsibility.

Copies of the document are available in the Vote Office and have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Media and Technology

The Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (Mr Jeremy Hunt): The coalition's programme for Government set out the Government's belief that a vibrant media sector is crucial for our well-being and quality of life. The Government's intention is to create the conditions that will allow enterprise to flourish in a way that avoids over-regulation or over-subsidy. I am therefore today announcing:

Rapid roll-out of superfast broadband: we need to put the digital infrastructure in place that will allow this country to increase growth rapidly in the digital economy as we come out of recession. The Government propose to take this forward in two areas: (i) backing the commitment to make a service level of 2Mbps available to those parts of the country still without a basic level of access; (ii) announcing three rural market testing projects that will bring superfast broadband to rural areas.

Access to infrastructure: to support the Government's commitments to the roll-out of superfast broadband by ensuring that BT and other infrastructure providers allow the use of their assets to deliver such broadband, we will: (i) back Ofcom's proposals for opening up access to BT's ducts and telegraph poles to promote further investment; (ii) in line with the Queen's Speech, offer clarity that if legislation is necessary then the Government are ready to bring it to the House; and (iii) to encourage further debate on the issue, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport will publish a paper setting out our latest thinking on this in July, coinciding with an industry day to be organised by Broadband Delivery UK.

Local media: as part of the Government's wider commitment to localisation, we aim to provide the right incentives and conditions for sustainable commercial growth in local TV and online services. The Government therefore proposes: (i) that it will not go ahead with the previous Administration's Independently Funded News Consortia (IFNC) pilots; we recognise the high degree of innovation and level of partnerships which emerged through the pilot procurement process; however, we do not agree that subsidising regional news is the right approach; (ii) instead, funding identified for the IFNC pilots will be used to support our plans for the roll-out of superfast broadband around the country; (iii) that we will accept Ofcom's recommendations on reforming local cross-media ownership rules meaning they will be significantly relaxed. I will bring forward secondary legislation to the House to enact these changes as soon as possible; (iv) to support local television, we will be conducting a full assessment of the regulatory and commercial context for local TV with strong independent input in order to identify the interventions which can best secure sustainable local television in this country. Based on those findings, I will publish a full local media action plan in the autumn.

A full copy of my speech will also be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Sea Fish Industry Authority

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mrs Caroline Spelman): The Sea Fish Industry Authority (Seafish), is a UK-wide, levy-funded non-departmental public body established by the Fisheries Act 1981. It has a statutory duty to promote the efficiency of the sea fish industry as a whole. It is jointly sponsored by the four fisheries administrations in the UK.

On 18 March, the Court of Appeal ruled that the Fisheries Act 1981 does not permit Seafish to raise a levy on imported sea fish and sea fish products, only that which is first landed in the UK. The result was to significantly reduce its levy income.

The Court of Appeal handed down an order on 20 April requiring Seafish to repay to the claimants six years of unlawfully collected levy plus interest and costs. The Court of Appeal agreed to stay the execution of the payments pending determination of an appeal to the Supreme Court.

On 18 May, Defra, with the support of Seafish, petitioned the Supreme Court for leave to appeal against the judgment.

The reduction in Seafish's income has led Seafish to scale back their activities and to ask the sponsoring administrations for financial support. With the agreement of HM Treasury, Ministers have agreed to make a short-term, commercial loan of £200,000 available to Seafish to enable Seafish to continue to operate within its reduced income.

Officials are continuing to work with Seafish to explore the longer-term options and further statements will be made as appropriate.

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Ministerial Appointments

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): The right hon. Lord Patten of Barnes will lead Government arrangements for the papal visit as my personal representative. Pope Benedict XVI will be visiting the UK as both Head of State and the leader of a major denomination. Lord Patten will, on my behalf, oversee and manage Government preparations for the visit alongside the arrangements being made by the Catholic bishop conferences. Lord Patten will oversee the coordination of all elements for which the Government are responsible.

The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) will lead a review on poverty and life chances. This will examine the case for reforms to poverty measures and look at what the Government can do to improve the lives of the least advantaged people in our society and will report to the Government by the end of the year.

TRANSPORT

Motorcycle Test

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Penning): I am announcing today a review of motorcycle tests in Great Britain. The new two-part motorcycle test that was introduced in April 2009 has clearly led to some concern among motorcycle groups, particularly about the safety of the off-road module 1 part of the test and about the difficulty of accessing the limited number of off-road test centres. The new test was introduced in order to meet the requirements of the second EU directive on driving licences. While most elements in the module 1 test are required by the directive, there may be scope for us to make some changes to the way in which the test is carried out.

We will be working with the motorcycle community and road safety groups to look again at the current form of the motorcycle test. This review will look at the manoeuvres carried out in both modules 1 (off-road) and 2 (on-road) and whether these manoeuvres could safely be conducted in the on-road test.

The review will also look at other related motorcycle testing and training issues, including the options for training and testing for progressive access under the third driving licence directive and how any changes relate to wider proposals to improve motorcycle training and testing.

We are inviting views from members of the public, motorcycle riders, trainers, road safety groups and others on what aspects of the motorcycle test they want us to look at, including how and where they think motorcycle testing might best and most safely be carried out. Views should be submitted to the Department for Transport (RUSD4consultation@dft.gsi.gov.uk) by 31 July. We aim to conclude the review by the autumn.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 9 June 2010

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Previously Developed Land (Density)

The Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): I am today implementing the commitments made in the coalition agreement to decentralise the planning system by giving local authorities the freedom to prevent overdevelopment of neighbourhoods and "garden grabbing".

The impact of the old policy approach, set out in planning policy statement 3, is that the combination of a national target for brownfield land, alongside the definition of gardens as brownfield land, has meant local authorities feeling forced into granting planning permission for unwanted development on garden land—simply to maintain the brownfield target.

To bring an end to these detrimental effects, we are today therefore removing gardens from the definition of previously developed land in planning policy statement 3.

We are also removing the requirement upon local authorities to have regard to the national minimum density for housing set out in paragraph 47 of PPS3. This policy has resulted in local authorities not having enough flexibility to set density ranges that suit the local needs in their areas—particularly for family houses.

I am today re-issuing planning policy statement 3: Housing (PPS3) with the following changes:

the definition of previously developed land in annex B now excludes private residential gardens; and

the national indicative minimum density of 30 dwellings per hectare is deleted from paragraph 47.

Together these changes put power back in the hands of local authorities and communities to take the decisions that are best for them, and decide for themselves the best locations and types of development in their areas.

This reissued policy document sets out the Secretary of State's policy on previously developed land and housing density. Local planning authorities and the planning inspectorate are expected to have regard to the policy in preparing development plans and, where relevant, to take it into account as a material consideration when determining planning applications.

Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

United Kingdom Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague): I have decided to appoint Sir Andrew Burns as the "United Kingdom envoy for post-Holocaust issues".

As a signatory to the declaration of the Stockholm international forum on the Holocaust the UK is committed to promoting Holocaust education, remembrance and research, both at home and abroad. Sir Andrew will lead the UK's efforts in this field, drawing together activity from across Government and provide a clearer UK international profile, presence and influence. Sir Andrew's work will include driving forward implementation of the Terezin Declaration on Holocaust era assets, resolving outstanding issues related to property and art restitution and ensuring the UK remains at the forefront of discussions on the vital work of the Task Force for International Co-operation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research and of the International Tracing Service.

Over the last few years the UK has taken an increasingly active approach to preserving the memory of the Holocaust. For the Foreign and Commonwealth Office this work has included leading the UK delegations to meetings of the Task Force for International Co-operation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research and of the International Tracing Service. Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials have also represented the Government in discussions on property restitution and Holocaust era assets, frequently with support from other Government Departments.

This has worked well to date. But I am concerned that the UK is not taking the leading role it should in these international discussions or best representing the interests of the many Holocaust victims and their families in the UK affected by these issues. For this reason, and in order to drive a more coherent and strategic approach to our work, I have appointed Sir Andrew. He will add a new impetus to the Government's post-Holocaust work, drawing on his considerable experience as chair of the executive committee of the Anglo-Israel Association and previously Her Majesty's ambassador to Israel.

HOME DEPARTMENT

G6 Meeting

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The informal G6 group of Ministers of the Interior from France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Poland and the UK held their most recent meeting in Varese, Italy on 28 to 29 May. Italy currently holds the presidency of the G6 group and the meeting was chaired by the Italian Minister for the Interior, Roberto Maroni.

The meeting was divided into three working sessions over two days, all of which were attended by G6 Ministers of the Interior, with the additional guest attendance of the US Attorney General, Eric Holder, the US Assistant Secretary for Policy at the Department of Homeland Security, David Heyman, the French Immigration Minister, Eric Besson, and the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Cecilia Malmström.

The first working session considered Europe's approach to the management of migration from outside the EEA. Ministers also considered factors driving illegal immigration and the importance of international co-operation in combating criminal groups involved in illegal immigration and human trafficking. There was a discussion around

ensuring that an increased focus on tackling illegal immigration should not come at the expense of vulnerable groups' human rights, and of the importance of raising awareness of the positive contribution of legal immigration to society. The Home Secretary underlined the importance of evidence-based practical co-operation between EU member states and of work with source and transit countries upstream, rather than a reliance on new EU legislation.

The second session focused on the issue of organised crime. Ministers considered the increasing flexibility and diversification of organised criminals who take advantage of global trends and opportunities. The Italian Minister for the Interior gave a presentation on Italian methods for targeting illegal assets. Ministers discussed the promotion of a more joined-up approach between European States, EU Agencies and third countries in order to tackle this trans-national threat. In addition, Ministers considered methods of tackling money laundering and ensuring online child protection.

At the third session Ministers considered counter-terrorism. The importance of strengthening international co-operation was discussed, with particular focus on the relationship between Europe and the US. Discussion also centred upon the value of dialogue with third countries and the benefit of engaging and supporting countries in tackling violent extremism. At an operational level, discussion focused on the strengthening of aviation security, including the sharing of air passenger information, and on work into the threat posed by radicalisation.

In addition to the three plenary sessions, Italy gave a video presentation of its arrangements for handling serious road traffic accidents. The Home Secretary also held separate bilateral meetings with all of the other heads of delegation.

The next meeting of the G6 is expected to be held in Poland in the second half of this year.

English Language Requirement

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): I wish to inform the House that I am today announcing the introduction of a new English language requirement for migrants applying to come to or stay in the UK as a spouse. Changes to the immigration rules will be laid before Parliament to bring this policy into effect in the autumn.

Non-European migrants joining a British citizen or non-European national settled in the UK will have to demonstrate a basic command of English in order to be considered for a visa. The rules will apply to spouses, civil partners, unmarried partners, same sex partners, fiancés and proposed civil partners, and will be compulsory for people applying from within the UK, as well as visa applicants overseas.

The Government believe that speaking English should be a pre-requisite for those wishing to settle here. This new English requirement for spouses will help promote the economic well-being of the UK, for example by encouraging integration and protecting public services. It will assist in removing cultural barriers, broaden opportunities for migrants and help to ensure that they are equipped to play a full part in British life.

This is only the first step. We are reviewing English language requirements across the immigration system with a view to tightening the rules further in the future. We will inform the House of our conclusions in due course.

Today's announcement is one of a range of new measures the Government will be taking to ensure that immigration is properly controlled for the benefit of the UK. These include an annual limit on non-EEA migrants coming to the UK to live and work and measures to minimise abuse of the immigration system, for example via student routes.

TRANSPORT

Equality Act 2010 (Seafarers)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Penning): On 30 November 2009, the previous Government published draft affirmative regulations showing how they proposed to apply part 5 of the Equality Act 2010 to seafarers. The draft regulations were silent on the practice of differential pay for seafarers recruited abroad and therefore, if they had been approved by Parliament in their published form, the practice of differential pay for seafarers recruited abroad would have ended.

Those who are likely to be affected by the final regulations were invited to submit evidence-based financial estimates of the likely impact of either:

(a) outlawing the practice of differential pay altogether; or,

(b) continuing to allow the payment of differential rates of pay to seafarers but only where such differentiation would not operate to the disadvantage of nationals from an EU, EEA state (or any other state whose nationals are entitled to corresponding rights under EU law) nor that of seafarers recruited in Great Britain, and the difference in rates would correspond to a difference in the cost of living in the places where the seafarers respectively habitually reside.

The then Government subsequently announced that a review of the evidence submitted would be commissioned.

Today I am publishing the findings of the review commissioned by the previous Government, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and are available on the DFT website (www.dft.gov.uk).

The issues raised by those who submitted evidence are important and the Government wish to provide interested parties with the opportunity to comment on this review of evidence before reaching conclusions on how to proceed. I am therefore inviting comments on this review over the next two weeks. I am especially keen to hear from those parties who previously submitted evidence.

Once I have considered the matter further, I will report back to Parliament.

HEALTH

Time for Training (Medical Education England Report)

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Andrew Lansley): "Time for Training", the independent review of the impact of the European working time directive on the quality of medical training is being launched today by

Medical Education England. A copy has been placed in the Library and copies are available to hon. Members from the Vote office.

In response to concerns about the impact of the directive on the training of junior doctors working in the national health service, the then Secretary of State asked Medical Education England last year to commission an independent review. I want to thank Professor Sir John Temple for his report and Medical Education England for their advice in helping to bring together complementary perspectives to issues affecting the quality of patient services and training.

The objective of post-graduate medical training is to produce fully qualified specialists who are able to provide high quality and safe patient care. Experience in delivering service is an integral part of training for a junior doctor but the provision of service is not the primary purpose of post-graduate medical training. Sir John's review challenges the service and medical profession to think afresh about the approach to training the next generation of hospital specialists in ways that will provide better patient care and well-trained professionals.

The findings in this report underline the importance of the coalition agreement commitment to limit the impact of the directive in the context of United Kingdom health services. "Time for Training" identifies ways in which safe care and high-quality training are capable of being achieved in the service. It also highlights the immediate difficulties created for trainees and for the service, especially in providing out-of-hours and weekend emergency patient care, in places where there is not yet the structure, support or flexibility of working practices needed to comply with the directive and the restrictive interpretations of the directive by the European Court of Justice.

I will support my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills in taking a robust approach to future negotiations on the revision of the directive, including maintenance of the opt-out. We will not go back to the past with tired doctors working excessive hours, but the way the directive now applies is clearly unsatisfactory and is causing great problems for health services across Europe. These difficulties are clearly reflected in the evidence from junior doctors that the implementation of the 48-hour week EWTD has impacted adversely on training and has been accompanied by unwelcome imposition of shift practices. Sir John's report reinforces my determination to support efforts to resolve these difficulties and be ready to work constructively with the European Commission and other member states on radical, creative approaches to gain additional flexibilities.

Professor Sir John Temple's findings demonstrate that far more can be done now by the service and the medical profession to improve medical training by changing working practices and taking greater advantage of the big increase in the number of consultants working in the national health service. I welcome his recommendations that the New Deal contract for junior doctors should be better aligned with the structures under the directive and that the consultant contract and job planning should incentivise consultants to support trainees and continuity of training. Continuity of patient care, of course, rests with the consultant who is responsible for the patient.

I have asked Medical Education England to consider with the profession, the service and medical Royal Colleges, how best to implement training practices that will support these aspirations. This will include reviewing the appropriate service component for medical specialty training with individual colleges and specialty associations, and advising NHS employers in their discussions on ways to realign and simplify New Deal working arrangements. I will continue to seek advice from Medical Education England on other matters to improve training, including development of a strategy for technology-enhanced learning and take-up of simulation training, and on the future structure of post-graduate medical education.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 10 June 2010

TREASURY

Financial Services Authority (Annual Report)

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Mark Hoban): The Annual Report 2009-10 of the Financial Services Authority (FSA) has today been laid before Parliament. Copies have also been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

The report forms a key part of the accountability mechanism for the Financial Services Authority under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (FSMA), and assesses the performance of the Financial Services Authority over the past 12 months against its statutory objectives.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government Savings Package

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles): The Government have made clear that deficit reduction is their most urgent priority. On 24 May, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Chief Secretary to the Treasury announced therefore that the Government would save over £6 billion from spending during this financial year. Included in that savings package were £1.166 billion reductions in grants to local government. I have today placed in the library of the House information on the revenue and capital grants that will be reduced.

The Government are clear that deficit reduction, and continuing to ensure economic recovery, is the most pressing issue facing Britain. This will restore confidence in the economy and support the recovery. Advice from the Treasury and Bank of England is that it is better to start to make the reductions in the current financial year. Not to do so will simply delay the need for savings in future years, thereby compounding the impact on public services, including those delivered by local authorities, in the future. It is fair that local authorities make a contribution to the savings to enable Government to take immediate action to tackle the UK's unprecedented deficit in this financial year.

It is time for a fundamental shift of power from Westminster to individuals and their communities. We want to end the era of top-down government by providing a radical devolution of power and greater financial autonomy to local authorities.

So we will reduce the performance management burden on local government through abolishing the comprehensive area assessment and reducing ring-fencing of central government grants, freeing up resources to concentrate on local priorities and the delivery of essential front-line services. We are committed to a full review of local government finance, to giving councils a general power of competence, and to working with local authorities to freeze council tax in England for at least one year as outlined in the coalition agreement and seek to freeze it for a further year, in partnership with local authorities. All of this will help to create the shift of power from the centre to local people that we are determined to deliver.

I am absolutely clear about the importance of the services that local government provides. So we have been determined to ensure local authorities can shield their key front-line services.

The Government have looked at whether it is possible to focus the reductions on grants which have not yet been committed through grant determinations or other statutory restrictions. This has been possible to some extent. Some of the reductions occur in grants where there are underspends, where the money has yet to be allocated or where a grant determination has not yet been made. However, because of the scale of the contribution from local government, it has not been possible to achieve the necessary levels of reduction without reducing some allocations included in grant determinations. Local government, along with the rest of society, is being asked to play its part in helping to reduce the deficit. Where we have reduced revenue grants, no local authority will face a reduction of more than 2%. This compares to the cut in running costs for my Department and its quangos of 10% in 2010-11.

We have ensured that councils have the flexibility to take decisions locally on how to deliver the savings needed. I am pleased that we have been able to keep formula grant at the level approved by Parliament of £29 billion. We have also announced further removal from ring-fencing of central government revenue and capital grants. This gives councils extra flexibility to make decisions about where savings are found, although this is subject to the usual rules which ensure that capital funding is used on capital expenditure. A list of grants that have been removed from ring-fencing is included in the information made available in the House.

There are good reasons for the changes we have made. For example, we believe that the housing and planning delivery grant has proved to be an ineffective and excessively complex incentive. The coalition agreement set out that we will provide incentives for local authorities to deliver sustainable development, including for new homes and businesses.

The Government believe that there is significant scope for local authorities to find efficiencies in the way in which they deliver services. We believe there are further opportunities for an increased role for joint working between local authorities and between different types of public authorities across local areas. Our focus on providing councils with the flexibility to manage budgets effectively will ensure that councils can deliver those services that local people wish to see.

I recognise that making savings in-year will be challenging for local authorities, as it will be for other parts of the public sector. The information that my Department is sending today to every local authority provides the detail councils need to make the necessary decisions as quickly as possible on how they will deliver the necessary changes. I have also made available in the Library of the

House a copy of the information that we have sent to each local authority which sets out the revised allocations.

I know that councils want this information as a matter of urgency and we have worked hard to deliver this. The Government therefore wish to provide as much clarity and flexibility to local authorities and other public bodies as quickly as possible so that they can best handle the changes proposed without an impact on key front-line services.

I am satisfied that we have adopted a fair approach to making the necessary reductions in the different grants and funding streams. We are therefore simply asking councils to check quickly to make sure that there are no errors in the calculation of the reductions.

The detailed spending decisions we are outlining today show a clear determination to help tackle the immense public deficit the new Government have inherited.

EDUCATION

Munro Review (Child Protection)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Tim Loughton): I informed the House on Monday 7 June 2010 that the Government had decided to commission Professor Eileen Munro of the London School of Economics to carry out an independent review to improve child protection. The Secretary of State for Education has written to Professor Munro today to set out the remit of this review and I would like to take this opportunity to provide the House with further details.

The reforms led by the previous Administration were well intentioned. The immense dedication and hard work of front-line professionals is an inspiration. But the child protection system in our country is not working as well as it should. It is the Government's view that we need a fundamental review of the system and to ask ourselves what will help professionals to make the best judgments they can to protect vulnerable children.

I firmly believe we need reform to frontline social work practice. I want to strengthen the profession so that social workers are in a better position to make sound judgments, based on first hand evidence, in the best interests of children, free from unnecessary bureaucracy and regulation. I want social workers to be clear about their responsibilities and to be accountable in the way they protect children. I particularly want social workers to have the confidence they need to challenge parents when they have concerns about the circumstances in which children are growing up, and to know they will be supported by the system in doing so.

The Secretary of State for Education and I have therefore asked Professor Munro to set out the obstacles preventing improvements and the steps required to bring about improved social work practice. This will include considering how effectively children's social workers and professionals in other agencies work together. As part of the review, we have asked Professor Munro to take account of emerging thinking from parallel reviews such as the Family Justice Review. We also want any review to be informed by the strongest systems of child protection in other countries.

This is complex territory and necessarily wide-ranging. We have given Professor Munro a broad remit, so that she is able to consider a wide range of issues. Three principles will underpin the Government's approach to reform of child protection: early intervention; trusting professionals and removing bureaucracy so they can spend more of their time on the front-line; and greater transparency and accountability. We have asked Professor Munro to produce her final report by April 2011 with an interim report in January 2011 and a first report in September 2010.

The Government are committed to implementing the recommendations of the social work taskforce, which provide a strong starting point for Professor Munro's review. We look to the social work reform board to take forward those recommendations while the review is in progress.

To support further improvement on the front line, the DfE is confirming today that the £23 million local social work improvement fund will be available to local authority children's services in 2010-11.

The successful CWDC programmes to support recruitment and retention of social workers will also continue, subject to some efficiencies, which have been achieved by reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and marketing and overlap with the work of the social work reform board.

We are also confirming the funding that will support the establishment of an independent college for social work and that pilots of social work practices will continue. This confirmation relates to funding, which has been protected in 2010-11. Funding for future years will need to be confirmed as part of the forthcoming comprehensive spending review.

I would also like to take this opportunity to confirm to the House the Government's commitment to ensuring that serious case reviews, with identifying details removed, are published.

The key purpose of undertaking serious case reviews is to enable lessons to be learned from cases where a child dies or is seriously harmed and abuse or neglect is known, or suspected, to be a factor. In order for these lessons to be learned as widely and thoroughly as possible, professionals need to be able to understand fully what happened in each case, and most importantly, what needs to change in order to reduce the risk of such tragedies happening in the future. Only by publishing serious case reviews will this greater level of transparency and accountability be achieved. The Government's aim in publishing SCR overview reports is to restore public confidence and improve transparency in the child protection system, and to ensure that the context in which the events occurred is properly understood so relevant lessons are learned and applied as widely as possible.

That is why Ministers have today written to all local safeguarding children board chairs and directors of children's services to confirm that, with immediate effect, the overview report and the executive summary of all new serious case reviews initiated from today should be published. Overview reports should be published together with the executive summaries unless there are compelling reasons relating to the welfare of any children directly concerned in the case for this not to happen. Both the overview report and the executive summary should be anonymised and should not contain identifying details.

This means preparing SCR overview reports in a form suitable for publication, or redacting them appropriately before publication.

The publication of serious case reviews is a sensitive and complex matter. Serious case review overview reports contain personal information and it is vitally important that published serious case reviews are appropriately redacted and anonymised to protect the privacy and welfare of vulnerable children and their families. There is an important balance to be struck between transparency and openness so that lessons can be learned, and the protection and welfare of individuals. We believe that publication to the extent that we are proposing is reasonable and in the greater public interest.

The tragic case of Peter Connelly, and other recent high profile cases such as those in Edlington, Birmingham and Kirklees, shocked the nation. They also prompted public concern that vital information needed to be made available so that agencies could be properly held to account and all the lessons properly learned. The Government are therefore confirming today their intention that the overview reports (together with the executive summary) of all these serious case reviews will be published, appropriately redacted and anonymised, starting with the two serious case review overview reports on the case of Peter Connelly.

As part of her review, Professor Munro has also been asked to consider how serious case reviews could be strengthened and whether there are alternative learning models that could be more effective and efficient.

Finally, I want to inform the House that the cross-Government National Safeguarding Delivery Unit will be disbanded with immediate effect and staff resource allocated to new priorities, including supporting the Munro review. The safeguarding group within the Department for Education will retain lead responsibility for the Government's child protection policy and will continue to work closely with other Government Departments, in particular the Department of Health, the Home Office, and the Ministry of Justice.

I have placed a copy of the letters sent today to Professor Munro, and to all chairs of local safeguarding children boards and directors of children's services, in the House Library.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Environment Council

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Chris Huhne): Lord Henley, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and I will represent the UK at the Environment Council in Luxembourg on 11 June.

The Council will consider progress reports on the proposal for a regulation on the placing on the market and use of biocidal products; the proposal for a directive on the restriction of the use of certain hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment (RoHS) (recast); the proposal for a directive on waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) (recast); and the proposal for a regulation concerning the setting emission performance standards for new light commercial vehicles as part of the Community's integrated approach to reduce CO_2 emissions from light-duty vehicles.

The Commission will present to Council its communication on the options to move beyond 20% greenhouse gas emission reductions and assessing the risk of carbon leakage. This will be followed by a policy debate and the adoption of some procedural Council conclusions.

The Council will also seek the adoption of Council conclusions on water scarcity, drought and adaptation to climate change, on preparing forests for climate change, and the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP/MOP 5) serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (Nagoya, Japan, 11 to 15 October 2010). There will also be an exchange of views and adoption of Council conclusions, on the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development ("Rio+20") (New York, 17-19 May 2010).

The following topics will be covered under "any other business":

Information from the presidency and the Commission on the challenges for a good environmental status of the marine environment;

Information from the presidency on the 18th session of the UN Commission on sustainable development (CSD 18) (New York, 3-14 May 2010);

Information from the Greek delegation on the signing of a memorandum of understanding in the field of forestry between the Government of the Hellenic Republic and the Government of the Republic of Turkey, and of a joint declaration between the Minister for Environment, Energy and Climate Change of the Hellenic Republic and the Minister for Environment and Forestry of the Republic of Turkey;

A request from the French delegation on genetically modified organisms;

Presentation from the Commission on future steps in bio-waste management in the European Union (9955/10 ENV 308 AGRI 178 ENER 158);

Information from the Belgian delegation on the work programme of the incoming presidency; and

A request from the UK on the 62nd meeting of the International Whaling Commission, Agadir, Morocco, 21-25 June.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

General Affairs Council and Foreign Affairs Council

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): The General Affairs Council and Foreign Affairs Council will be held on 14 June in Luxembourg. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will represent the UK with the Secretary of State for International Development at the respective sessions of Foreign and Development Ministers. I will also attend.

The agenda items are as follows:

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL (FAC): FOREIGN MINISTERS

Iran

Ministers will discuss EU sanctions as part of the dual-track strategy of engagement and pressure, in light of the likely passage of a UN Security Council resolution

in week of 7 June. Ministers may also discuss developments in Iran following the anniversary of last year's June elections.

Western Balkans

Foreign Ministers will discuss the western Balkans, in the light of the Sarajevo high-level meeting on June 2 between EU and western Balkan Foreign Ministers, which the Foreign Secretary attended. International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) Chief Prosecutor Brammertz is expected to brief Ministers ahead of his six-monthly report to the UN Security Council. Ministers are likely to review the issue of ratification of Serbia's stabilisation and association agreement with the European Union.

Somalia / Piracy

Ministers will receive an update from the High Representative on her visit to Kenya, Tanzania and Seychelles of 18 to 21 May. Ministers' discussions are likely to focus on support to regional counter-piracy efforts and strengthening capability for prosecuting pirates.

Middle East Peace Process

Ministers will discuss recent developments on the middle east peace process, the Gaza flotilla incident and international efforts to improve the situation in Gaza. This may include discussions of an independent investigation of events and how restrictions on access might be lifted. Ministers will also discuss the wider peace process, including the American-led proximity talks and their progress.

Sudan

Ministers will discuss the situation in Sudan, particularly with a view to the January 2011 referendum on self-determination for south Sudan as part of the 2005 comprehensive peace agreement (CPA). The Council will also discuss the conflict in Darfur. Ministers will focus on the EU's engagement on Sudan going forward to support peaceful completion of the CPA, whatever the decision of south Sudan in the referendum. The Council is also likely to stress that efforts must continue to find a political solution to the Darfur conflict and the importance of improving security and humanitarian access in Darfur.

Child labour

Ministers will discuss Council conclusions on the Commission staff working document on combating child labour. The conclusions set out a number of measures the EU should take to combat child labour, including through political dialogue and multilateral affairs; corporate social responsibility; public procurement; and trade incentives.

Corfu Process

The OSCE-led initiative on European security might be discussed in the light of the joint Merkel-Medvedev proposals on strengthening the EU-Russia security policy relationship.

Cuba

Ministers will discuss the annual evaluation of the EU common position on Cuba, and assess progress made in the EU-Cuba political dialogue. Ministers will also agree Council conclusions on Cuba which will centre on the continuing relevance of the common position, and may call on the Cuban Government to do more to improve the human rights situation in Cuba.

Haiti - Disaster response lessons learned

Ministers will discuss the EU's response to Haiti. The meeting may also generate further debate on EU disaster response structures and resources.

Any Other Business: Georgia

Georgia is on the agenda at the request of Lithuania. Ministers may discuss the recent local elections (30 May), which the OSCE/ODIHR observation mission noted marked "evident progress towards meeting OSCE and Council of Europe commitments". There may also be discussion of Georgia's relations with the EU: a visa facilitation agreement will be signed this month; negotiations on an association agreement are due to start in July; a review of the Georgian action plan for engagement with Abkhazia and South Ossetia; and the European Union monitoring mission's (EUMM) mandate is due for renewal in the autumn.

FAC: Development Ministers

EU Development Ministers will discuss the following agenda items:

Somalia / Piracy

As with Foreign Ministers, Baroness Ashton will brief on her visit to the region of 18 to 21 May. The discussion is likely to focus on taking a comprehensive approach to all of Somalia's political, security and development challenges and enhancing co-ordination with the wider international community.

Millennium Development Goals

Ministers will be asked to agree conclusions on a common EU position on the millennium development goals (MDGs) ahead of the UN high-level review meeting on the MDGs in New York in September 2010. Ministers are likely to discuss some of the key issues in the conclusions, most notably levels of official development assistance (ODA) commitments. The UK is committed to supporting an action-orientated and ambitious outcome at the UN Summit.

Gender Equality and Development

This is likely to be a general discussion, focused on the "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development, EU Plan of Action 2010-2015" which will be attached as an annex to the Council conclusions on the MDGs. The UK has been involved in the drafting of the action plan, which seeks to establish a practical framework to accelerate the achievement of the MDGs, especially MDG 3 (gender) and MDG 5 (maternal health).

General Affairs Council (GAC)

The GAC will present and discuss the draft Council conclusions for the June European Council (JEC) on 17 June which will focus on the European economy, financial regulation in advance of the G20 Toronto summit, millennium development goals and climate change. Economic issues are likely to dominate the European Council: the presidency will be seeking to finalise the Europe 2020 strategy and leaders will want to discuss reforms to economic governance in the wake of recent turbulence.

The Council is expected to endorse conclusions of the 3 to 4 June JHA Council by welcoming progress in implementing the European pact on immigration and asylum. The GAC will also consider potential external

items for discussion at the JEC including possible EU sanctions on Iran, following a new UN Security Council resolution.

Strategic Report on the Implementation of Cohesion Policy Programmes

The Commissioners for Regional Policy and Employment and Social Affairs will present the strategic report on the implementation of cohesion policy programmes, published on 31 March 2010. As this is a new requirement for the 2007-13 period, the presidency initiated Council conclusions on the report which are to be adopted. The conclusions invite the Commission to explore possibilities for a better co-ordinated and simplified policy and note that cohesion policy will need to support the Europe 2020 strategy and should continue to foster competitiveness, innovation, employment and economic, social and territorial cohesion in the European Union.

European Citizens' Initiative

There will be a discussion of the Commission's dossier on the European citizens' initiative. The Government remain concerned that no impact assessment has been carried out with which to better inform the proposed regulation.

2010 Forum for Outermost Europe

The Commissioner for regional policy will present the results of the 2010 forum for outermost Europe to the GAC. Following an initiative of the Spanish presidency, Council conclusions on the outermost regions are likely to be adopted. The conclusions encourage a renewal of the strategy for the outermost regions and a consideration of the role of the outermost regions in EU policies, in particular Europe 2020.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Stop-and-Search Authorisation

The Minister for Police (Nick Herbert): My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Security, Baroness Neville-Jones, has today made the following written ministerial statement:

I wish to inform the House of errors relating to those periods in the past which have recently been identified following an internal review of the authorisation process for the stop-and-search powers under section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has undertaken work in relation to a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act concerning authorisations for the section 44 stop-and-search powers. In the course of reviewing their section 44 records, the MPS identified an authorisation from April 2004 which had not been confirmed by a Home Office Minister within the statutory 48 hour deadline for confirmation. Subsequent investigations revealed that approximately 840 were stopped and searched in the relevant area during the period of the invalid authorisation. The MPS are urgently considering what steps can reasonably be taken to contact those individuals involved.

As a result of this discovery, the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism (OSCT) in the Home Office undertook a review in May 2010 of all section 44 authorisations since the Terrorism Act came into force on 19 February 2001, in the course of which a number of other errors came to light. I have to inform the House that it appears that stop-and-search powers have been used unlawfully by a number of police forces on a number of occasions. The Home Office has written to each of the police forces concerned to alert them to these errors and those forces are now in the process of assessing how many individuals were stopped and searched in the periods of invalid authorisations. They will do their best to contact those involved. To summarise these errors, on 33 occasions authorisations were specified to be for 29 days, and two occasions when the authorisations were specified to be for 30 days, whereas the statutory maximum period is 28 days. In addition, there was one further case (as well as the MPS incident in April 2004) where ministerial confirmation for the authorisation was not provided within the statutory 48 hour deadline. All of these cases appear to have been as a result of administrative errors which were not identified at the time by either the police or the Home Office. A full breakdown is included in the attached table.

Lord Carlile, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, has been informed.

Three episodes of errors taking place in the section 44 authorisation process have previously been brought to the attention of the House. For completeness, these are also included in the attached table bringing the total number of such cases to 40. Home Office officials are working closely with the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) with the aim of ensuring there are no incidents in future. Officials will keep Lord Carlile and me informed and I will report back to the House as necessary.

I am aware that there is considerable concern about the operation of section 44 stop-and-search powers going beyond these authorisation errors. The Government are committed to a wider review of counter-terrorism legislation, including the operation of the section 44 stop-and-search provisions. While I take some re-assurance from the fact that no errors have occurred since December 2008 when the authorisation process was tightened, I want to assure the House that there will be utmost vigilance in future. It is with the need for this in mind that I have instructed Home Office officials unconnected with the administrative process to conduct the internal review of procedures.

Table of Erroneous Authorisations

Authorisations Over the Statutory 28 Day Period

Authorisation Date	*Authorisation Time*	*Statutory End Date*	*Actual End Date*
Kent Constabulary			
19 February 2001	08.00 hrs	18 March 2001	19 March 2001
11 April 2001	08.35 hrs	08 May 2001	09 May 2001
Sussex Police			
05 March 2001	11.50 hrs	01 April 2001	02 April 2001
07 September 2001	12.00 hrs	04 October 2001	05 October 2001
19 December 2001	15.30 hrs	15 January 2001	16 January 2001
15 January 2007*	09.15 hrs	11 February 2007	12 February 2007
12 March 2007*	14.21 hrs	08 April 2007	9 April 2007

Authorisations Over the Statutory 28 Day Period

Authorisation Date	*Authorisation Time*	*Statutory End Date*	*Actual End Date*
Durham Constabulary			
03 April 2001	09.30 hrs	30 April 2001	01 May 2001
Cleveland Police			
02 April 2001	10.30 hrs	29 April 2001	30 April 2001
City of London Police			
29 April 2001	12.00 hrs	26 May 2001	27 May 2001
21 June 2001	12.00 hrs	18 July 2001	19 July 2001
20 July 2001	11.20 hrs	16 August 2001	17 August 2001
17 August 2001	12.00 hrs	13 September 2001	14 September 2001
Thames Valley Police			
29 April 2001	12.00 hrs	26 May 2001	27 May 2001
25 May 2001	12.00 hrs	21 June 2001	22 June 2001
22 June 2001	08.05 hrs	19 July 2001	20 July 2001
20 July 2001	08.04 hrs	16 August 2001	17 August 2001
17 August 2001	08.01 hrs	13 September 2001	14 September 2001
24 June 2002	11.33 hrs	21 July 2002	22 July 2002
Metropolitan Police Service			
29 April 2001	12.00 hrs	26 May 2001	27 May 2001
25 May 2001	12.00 hrs	21 June 2001	22 June 2001
22 June 2001	12.00 hrs	19 July 2001	20 July 2001
20 July 2001	13.00 hrs	16 August 2001	17 August 2001
17 August 2001	12.00 hrs	13 September 2001	14 September 2001
North Yorkshire Police			
21 September 2001	12.00 hrs	18 October 2001	19 October 2001
19 October 2001	11. 45 hrs	15 November 2001	16 November 2001
16 November 2001	12.00 hrs	13 December 2001	14 December 2001
Hampshire			
02 September 2002	10.25 hrs	29 September 2002	30 September 2002
Bedfordshire Police			
15 November 2002	10.00 hrs	12 December 2002	13 December 2002
Essex Police			
20 October 2003	08.05 hrs	16 November 2003	17 November 2003
Greater Manchester Police			
19 January 2004	09.30 hrs	15 February 2004	16 February 2004
16 August 2007*	15.20 hrs	12 September 2007	14 September 2007
13 September 2007*	12.00 hrs	10 October 2007	11 October 2007
Fife Constabulary			
31 March 2008	16.43 hrs	27 April 2008	28 April 2008
South Wales Police			
6 February 2007*	13.50 hrs	05 March 2007	7 March 2007

*The two occasions in January and March 2007 were addressed by Lord Carlile in his report for that year

*The two occasions in August and September 2007 were addressed by Lord Carlile in his report for that year.

*The occasion in February 2007 was addressed by Lord Carlile in his report for that year and the Government Response to his report. The Government Response also highlighted an incident in 2005 where South Wales did not have an authorisation in place between midnight on 21 June 2005 and 09.25 hrs on 24 June 2005.

Authorisations not Confirmed Within the 48 Hour Statutory Deadline

Authorisation Date	*Authorisation Time*	*Ministerial Confirmation Date/Time*	*Actual time taken for Ministerial Confirmation*
Metropolitan Police Service			
2 April 2004	07.30 hrs	4 April 2004 -11.10hrs	51 hours & 40 minutes
Thames Valley Police			
29 November 2006	15.00 hrs	1 December 2006 -15.15hrs	48 hours & 15 minutes

Use of Section 44 Powers Where a Valid Authorisation Was not in Place—as Previously Advised to Parliament

Authorisation Date[1]	*Authorisation Expiry Date*	*Number of days where power could have been used*	
Sussex Police			
June 2003	June 2003	-	
3 September 2007	25 September 2007	23	

Authorisation Date[2]	*Authorisation Expiry Date*	*Number of days where power could have been used*	
South Wales			
22 June 2005	24 June 2005	2	

Total Forces: 14
Total Incidents: 40

(1) The dates indicated here (for both Sussex Police and South Wales Police) are the dates from which the authorisations would commence if they had been submitted.
(2) The dates indicated here (for both Sussex Police and South Wales Police) are the dates from which the authorisations would commence if they had been submitted.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Justice and Home Affairs Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (James Brokenshire): The Justice and Home Affairs Council was held on 3 and 4 June in Luxembourg. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Justice and I, attended on behalf of the United Kingdom. The following issues were discussed at the Council:

The Council began with the Mixed Committee (including Norway, Iceland, Lichtenstein and Switzerland). The Commission reported on implementation of the second generation Schengen Information System (SIS II), presenting comprehensive global schedule for the entry into operation of SIS II in 2013.

The Council adopted conclusions encouraging member states to make more extensive use of automated border-control systems at their external borders. The UK will not participate in these automated systems, or the EU passport regulation on which the automated systems will be based, as they build on elements of the Schengen acquis in which we do not participate.

The Council received an update on the progress of the visa liberalisation road maps for the western Balkan countries agreed by the EU in 2009. The UK does not participate in EU common visa policy, as it builds on an area of the Schengen acquis in which the UK does not participate.

After the Mixed Committee, the presidency presented the first main assessment description report for internal debate (MADRID) on internal security in the EU. The report is based on a combination of threat assessments from Europol, Eurojust and Frontex on which the Council was invited to debate and consider priorities for future action. The UK intervened to outline that the UK Government wanted to play a strong and positive role in the EU. While recognising the importance of the Stockholm programme in setting strategic guidelines for our work there were some aspects of the programme which caused the UK Government concern. The UK gave as examples the idea of a European public prosecutor and a common asylum policy. The UK confirmed that it would consider whether or not to opt in to new legislative proposals resulting from the Stockholm programme on a case-by-case basis with the objective of preserving security, civil liberties and the integrity of the UK's criminal justice system. On the MADRID report the UK noted that Europol's OCTA threat assessment was important and should inform our work. There was a need to focus on non-legislative solutions: practical co-operation and sharing of best practices between member states.

Next there was a discussion on the most recent report from the EU counter-terrorism co-ordinator (CTC), Gilles de Kerchove, on the implementation of the EU strategy and action plan to combat terrorism. The report examined the nature of the threat, transportation security (especially in the field of land transport), monitoring of terrorist travel, and the connecting of internal and external security. Delegations intervened to support the report and the UK used the opportunity to outline the UK's new national security arrangements, including the creation of the new National Security Council. The incoming Belgian presidency said that they would focus work on the prevention of radicalisation and the threat from chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) material.

The Council then adopted the EU-US counter-terrorism declaration where the presidency noted the importance of the relationship between the EU and US.

The Council welcomed agreement to the "European Pact to combat international drug trafficking", which is designed to enhance operational co-operation of EU countries in the fight against drug trafficking. The pact focuses on three broad areas of activity: disrupting cocaine routes; disrupting heroin routes; and tackling the money flows.

The presidency then provided an update on the EU-Russia JHA Permanent Partnership Council meeting of 25 and 26 May, which was held in Kazan. Discussion focused on possible EU-Russia visa liberalisation and migration dialogue.

Over lunch Interior Ministers received an update on the progress of negotiations with the US on the agreement between the European Union and the United States of America on the terrorist finance tracking programme (TFTP). The Council agreed in May a negotiating mandate for the Commission to undertake negotiations with the US. The Commission hoped to present the text of an agreement later in June.

After lunch the Council adopted conclusions on unaccompanied minors, which outline proposals for handling the large numbers of unaccompanied children who enter the EU annually.

The Council then debated the follow-up to the EU pact on immigration and asylum, agreeing accompanying Council conclusions which will be presented to the June European Council. The UK said we had to increase public confidence by getting the right balance between immigration control, integration and protection. Resources should be prioritised on tackling migration challenges at source (overseas), making quick and fair asylum decisions, and enforcing the return of failed asylum seekers. Practical co-operation between member states was more important than harmonised legislation.

Under AOB, Malta said that a report by the European Parliament Civil Liberties Committee supported their calls for further physical burden sharing. The Commission provided a progress report on negotiations of the EU readmission agreement with Turkey. The Czech Republic asked the Commission to update the Council on their negotiations with Canada to lift the current visa requirement on Czech citizens. Italy gave a short presentation on the meeting of the G6 Interior Ministers which it had hosted in Varese in May.

There was also under any other business, an item about the International Anti-Corruption Academy, at the request of the Austrians. The academy will be set up in Austria and a conference will be held in Vienna on 2 and 3 September 2010 on this.

On the justice day, a general approach was reached on the Commission proposal for a directive on combating human trafficking as the basis for the next stage of negotiations with the European Parliament. The Government are broadly content with this approach, although they have not yet decided whether to opt in and the proposal remains subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

The Commission presented a state-of-play report on the directive to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse and child pornography. The Commission emphasised the importance of this directive, in particular that it would criminalise "grooming" and enable prosecution without testimony from child victims.

There was a state-of-play report by the presidency on the proposed directive on interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings. The presidency informed Ministers that the current text is the outcome of negotiations with the European Parliament.

There was also a discussion about the directive on the European protection order. Some member states raised their concerns about the legal base of the current text. The UK set out its reservations about the legal base but reiterated its support of the proposal's objectives. The presidency has stated that it reached a general approach at this Council meeting. However, we and other member states dispute this given that there were enough member states who could not support the text to make up a blocking minority. There could be further discussions about this directive at the JHA Council in autumn.

The Council agreed, without a vote, to a proposal to authorise enhanced co-operation in the area of the law applicable to divorce and legal separation (also known as Rome III). The UK reminded the Council that it had decided not to participate in the original proposal, and, while it was highly unlikely that this position would change, it had no desire to prevent others who wished to proceed. Work on the draft regulation implementing enhanced co-operation in this area will continue under the Belgian presidency.

The presidency outlined the approach towards future work on a proposed regulation on succession and wills. These were agreed without discussion. The UK has not opted in to this proposal.

The Council adopted a negotiating mandate for discussions with the Council of Europe on the EU accession to the European convention of human rights. Those discussions are expected to start later in the year and will lead, in due course, to a proposed accession agreement which will have to be unanimously agreed by all member states.

The presidency then presented a state-of-play report on e-Justice work and the Commission confirmed that the e-Justice portal would be launched on 16 July.

The presidency updated the Council on the EU-Russia JHA Permanent Partnership Council meeting that took place 25 and 26 May 2010. The presidency considered this a good basis for the EU-Russia summit that took place 31 May and 1 June 2010.

Belgium listed their priorities for their upcoming presidency. This included continuing work on matters such as the European protection order, the protection of victims, succession and wills, as well as new work on the European investigation order.

Police Authorities (Revised Grant Allocations)

The Minister for Police (Nick Herbert): As indicated by my statement of 27 May I have today laid before the House our proposals for the revised allocation of core police funding for England and Wales in 2010-11 in the form of the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) Amending Report 2010-11. I intend to implement the proposals subject to consideration of any representations and the approval of the House.

The Government's priority is to cut the budget deficit and get the economy moving again. That means the police will have to bear a fair share of the burden, helped by £100 million of savings already identified for this year on areas including procurement and IT. I am quite clear that this saving can be achieved by driving

out wasteful spending, reducing bureaucracy and increasing efficiency in key functions, while leaving the front line of policing strong and secure.

Total Home Office cuts will be £367 million and in order to minimise the impact on the police service the Home Office will cut a greater than proportionate share of its central budget. In summary, the Government intend to reduce police funding by a total of £135 million this year. This will be achieved by a proposed £115 million reduction in rule 2 grant, a £10 million reduction in capital grant and a £10 million reduction in counter-terrorism specific grants. Even after these reductions Government funding to the police service will remain at £9.61 billion in 2010-11. This is still £124 million more than last year.

Proposed changes to Home Office 2010-11 Core Settlement

	Allocation as at February 2010 £m	*Proposed Allocations* £m
Home Office principal formula grant (including MPS Special Payment)	4,600	4,600
Rule 2 grants	209	94
Total Home Office core settlement	4,809	4,694

Core Settlement

I am proposing to deduct £115 million from the rule 2 element of each force's core Home Office grant settlement. No other element of the police grant report will be amended. Rule 2 grants are former specific grants from which conditions for how they must be spent have been removed.

Specific Grants

Specific grants for neighbourhood policing, basic command units and crime fighting will remain at planned levels for 2010-11. Counter-terrorism policing grants will be reduced by £10 million. Senior counter-terrorism police officers have provided advice on the most appropriate way to find these savings while ensuring that the police service retains the necessary capabilities to counter terrorist activity and support our national security

The Government will none the less still be providing £569 million to forces through police counter-terrorism specific grants this year, maintaining 09-10 funding levels.

Capital Grant

There will be a reduction of £10 million to the capital grant in 2010-11. This still provides a total capital provision of £210 million to police authorities to develop their local infrastructure investment to support their operational activity.

Revised force allocations were set out in my statement of 27 May 2010.

JUSTICE

Azelle Rodney Inquiry

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Kenneth Clarke): I am announcing today the establishment by the Ministry of Justice of an inquiry, under the Inquiries Act 2005, to investigate the death of Azelle Rodney in April 2005.

The inquiry will be chaired by Sir Christopher Holland, a retired High Court judge. I have agreed with Sir Christopher that the inquiry will determine the matters which an article 2-compliant inquest would have determined had it been able to take place.

The inquiry's terms of reference are therefore:

"To ascertain by inquiring how, where, and in what circumstances Azelle Rodney came by his death on 30 April 2005 and then to make any such recommendations as may seem appropriate".

The arrangements for the inquiry will now be a matter for Sir Christopher. The Ministry of Justice will provide support to him.

I am very grateful to Sir Christopher for assuming this important role. It is more than five years since Mr Rodney's death, and I very much hope that this inquiry will be able to satisfy the public need for deaths of this kind to be explained and to resolve matters for Mr Rodney's mother, Ms Susan Alexander.

PRIME MINISTER

Special Advisers

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): Listed below are the names of the special advisers in post at 10 June 2010, including each special adviser's pay band, and actual salary where this is £58,200 or higher, together with details of the special advisers' pay ranges for 2010-2011, and the total pay bill cost of special advisers for 2009-10.

Also being published today are revised versions of the Model Contract and Code of Conduct for Special Advisers. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Appointing Minister	*Special Adviser in Post*	*Payband*	*Salary if £58,200 or higher (£)*
The Prime Minister	Andy Coulson	Within scheme ceiling	140,000
	Edward Llewellyn	Within scheme ceiling	125,000
	Kate Fall	PB4	100,000
	Jonny Oates	PB4	98,500
	Gabby Bertin	PB3	80,000
	Tim Chatwin	PB3	70,000
	Steve Hilton	PB3	90,000
	Polly Mackenzie	PB3	80,000
	Henry Macrory	PB3	70,000
	James O'Shaughnessy	PB3	87,000
	Liz Sugg	PB3	80,000
	Peter Campbell	PB2	60,000
	Sean Kemp	PB2	60,000
	Gavin Lockhart	PB2	
	Michael Salter	PB2	65,000
	Rohan Silva	PB2	60,000
	Sean Worth	PB2	
	James McGrory	PB1	

Appointing Minister	*Special Adviser in Post*	*Payband*	*Salary if £58,200 or higher (£)*
Deputy Prime Minister	Lena Pietsch	PB3	80,000
	Richard Reeves[1]	PB3	85,000
	Alison Suttie	PB3	80,000
	Chris Saunders	PB2	60,000
First Secretary of State, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	Arminka Helic	PB3	70,000
	Denzil Davidson	PB2	
Chancellor of the Exchequer[2]	Ramesh Chhabra	PB2	60,000
	Poppy Mitchell-Rose	PB1	
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice	David Hass	PB2	69,266
	Kathryn Laing	PB1	
Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister for Women and Equality	Fiona Cunningham	PB2	65,000
	Nick Timothy	PB2	65,000
Secretary of State for Defence	Luke Coffey	PB2	60,740
	Oliver Waghorn	PB2	60,740
Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills	Katie Waring	PB1	
	Giles Wilkes	PB1	
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions	Susie Squire	PB2	69,250
	Philippa Stroud	PB2	
Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change	Duncan Brack	PB2	67,000
	Joel Kenrick	PB2	
Secretary of State for Health	Jenny Parsons	PB2	
	Vacancy		
Secretary of State for Education	Henry de Zoete	PB2	
	Elena Narozanski	PB1	
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government	Giles Kenningham	PB2	
	Sheridan Westlake	PB2	
Secretary of State for Transport	Sian Jones	PB2	
	Paul Stephenson	PB2	
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Simon Cawte	PB2	
	Will Littlejohn	PB1	
Secretary of State for International Development	Philippa Buckley	PB1	
	Richard Parr	PB1	
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	Jonathan Caine	PB2	*69,266*
Secretary of State for Scotland	Willie Rennie (unpaid)		
Secretary of State for Wales	Vacancy		
Secretary of State for Culture, Media, the Olympics and Sport	Sue Beeby	PB1	
	Adam Smith	PB1	
Chief Secretary	Will de Peyer	PB2	*63,000*
	Vacancy		
Minister without Portfolio	Vacancy		
Leader of the House of Lords, and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster	Flo Coleman	PB0	
	Vacancy		
Minister for the Cabinet Office, Paymaster General	Laura Trott	PB2	
Minister of State, Cabinet Office	Martha Varney	PB1	
Minister of State (Universities and Science), BIS	Nick Hillman	PB2	
Leader of the House of Commons and Lord Privy Seal	Robert Riddell	PB2	
Chief Whip (Commons)	Chris White	PB2	*68,000*
	Ben Williams	PB2	

[1]Takes up post with effect from 5 July.
[2]In addition, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has appointed Rupert Harrison (PB3, £80,000) and Eleanor Shawcross (PB2) to the Council of Economic Advisers.

The pay bands and pay ranges for special advisers for 2010-11 are as follows:

Special Adviser Pay Bands for 2010-11

Scheme Ceiling	*£142,668*
Pay Band 4	£88,966 - £106,864
Pay Band 3 and Premium	£66,512 - £103,263
Pay Band 2	£52,215 - £69,266
Pay Band1	£40,352 - £54,121
Pay Band 0	Up to £40,352

Pay bill costs

The pay bill for special advisers in 2009-10 was £6.8 million.

TRANSPORT

Transport (Local Authority Major Schemes)

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Philip Hammond): The Government have made clear their most urgent priority is to tackle the UK's record budget deficit, in order to restore confidence in the economy and support the recovery. The Department for Transport will play a full part in the spending review which will be reporting in the autumn. Only once the Government's spending review has been concluded will the Department for Transport be in a position to identify those major investments that can be supported.

The Government have also made a commitment—as set out in the Coalition Agreement—to reform the way decisions are made on which transport projects are prioritised.

Given the uncertainties which both of these factors create, and in view of the likely budgetary constraints, and the consequent likelihood that not all schemes will be able to proceed on their planned timetable, it would be inappropriate for the Department to continue to invest time and resources on development of schemes at the same rate as before. Local authorities will also wish to consider carefully whether investing further time and resources in developing such schemes ahead of the spending review is justified. They should not assume that schemes prioritised under the previous Government's regional funding allocations (RFA) process will be funded to the previous published levels.

I am therefore today taking steps to help avoid unnecessary expenditure, while the Government consider their transport priorities:

The previous Major Schemes Guidance for Local Authorities and associated approval processes are being suspended until further notice.

All schemes that were granted conditional approval or programme entry by the previous Government will be reviewed as part of the spending review. Until then, the Government can give no assurances on funding support for any of these schemes.

Ministers will postpone decisions on scheme orders for schemes requiring DfT funding, but consideration will be given if there are alternative funding sources. Similarly, public inquiries on schemes requiring DfT funding will generally be postponed and no further inquiries will be scheduled, but inquiries will be allowed to proceed if there are alternative funding sources.

The previous Major Schemes Guidance for Local Authorities is today being replaced with new interim Guidance to Local Authorities, which has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and will be available on the Department for Transport website (www.dft.gov.uk) today. Officials will also be writing to affected local authorities.

The Government will aim to provide a firm indication on the way forward later this year once the spending review is complete.

Marine Aids to Navigation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Penning): I wish to inform the House that following the publication of the consultants' report entitled "Assessment of the provision of marine aids to navigation around the United Kingdom and Ireland" in March 2010 (*Official Report*, 10 Mar 2010 Column 19WS), I am inviting interested parties to provide me with their views on the recommendations.

The report has over fifty recommendations which would require action by the Governments of the United Kingdom and Ireland or by the general lighthouse authorities (GLAs) of both countries. Some of them are self-evidently sensible and straightforward to implement. The GLAs are already doing so in a number of cases. Others would be more challenging and take longer.

I intend to give everyone with an interest a further opportunity to make their views known and I will take account of any opinions that are expressed before reaching conclusions on how the recommendations should be implemented.

Key recommendations in the report include:

Creating a GLA joint strategic board to drive efficiencies;

Using an annual target reduction calculator (RPI - x%) for GLA running costs;

Developing a "roadmap" with the Irish Government on the financing of the Commissioners of Irish Lights, setting out an incentivised financial model which retains the all-Ireland body while allowing its costs within the Republic of Ireland to be covered wholly from Irish sources; and

Changing the structure and scope of light dues.

I should like to invite comments on these and any other findings of the report by 15 July 2010 before coming to any conclusions. I then intend to publish decisions on what action needs to be taken and, if necessary, to consult further on specific proposals.

The report has been posted on the Department's website (www.dft.gov.uk) and copies are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Chris Grayling): The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council was held on 7 June 2010 in Luxembourg. I represented the United Kingdom.

The main item of the agenda was a policy debate on the employment and social inclusion aspects of Europe 2020, the new European agenda for the next ten years; and in particular, the employment guidelines and social inclusion target. The general approach on employment guidelines was agreed, but I abstained for the UK, explaining that a final Government position had not yet been reached. The poverty target and three indicators of material deprivation, jobless households and relative income were also agreed. I intervened to state that the UK was content for the poverty target to be forwarded to the June European Council but emphasised that a final view on EU2020 as a whole had not yet been taken, and tabled a minute statement to this effect.

Political agreement was reached on a proposal for a Council regulation extending the provisions of Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 and Regulation (EC) No [...] to nationals of third countries who are not already covered by these provisions solely on the ground of their nationality. The UK is not opted in to this regulation.

The Council also reached political agreement on a proposal for a Council decision on the position to be taken by the Community within the Association Councils established by the agreements with Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Israel. The UK is not opted in to these agreements. I intervened to state that the text of the decisions went beyond what had originally been agreed, and stressed that social security is principally a national competence rather than an EU competence.

Four sets of Council conclusions (on adequate pensions and social inclusion; new skills for new jobs; advancing Roma inclusion; and active ageing) and a Council resolution on a new European disability framework were adopted.

There was a progress report on the proposal for a Council directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment (anti-discrimination) between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Under any other business, there was information from the presidency on the equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity. The Italians also raised, as an information point, their ideas on simplifying the delivery rules of the European social fund (ESF), to be discussed fully at a conference later this month. Finally, there was information on conferences held under Spanish presidency and a presentation from the incoming Belgian presidency.

Work Programme

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Chris Grayling): The Government have previously announced their plans for radical reforms of the welfare to work system and the implementation of the Work Programme. The Work Programme will be a single integrated package of support providing personalised help for everyone who finds themselves out of work regardless of the benefit they claim.

This will give providers longer to work with individuals and greater freedom to decide the appropriate support for them. We will also offer stronger incentives for providers to work with the harder to help, paying providers out of the additional benefits they realise as a result of placing people into work.

We are determined to move quickly and are aiming to have the Work Programme in place nationally by the summer of 2011.

Until the Work Programme is implemented, we will ensure support is in place. Where necessary, we will seek to extend current arrangements to ensure that there is no gap in provision and people can continue to receive help and support to get back into work.

Once the Work Programme is implemented it will supersede much of the complicated raft of national programmes currently on offer and these will be phased out. The support currently provided by programmes such as the Flexible New Deal will be folded into the Work Programme as soon as possible.

We are committed to supporting severely disabled people and are currently reviewing the best way of doing this.

The Government have today written to relevant providers and will be beginning one to one discussions with them to discuss what this means for them. We believe that the Work Programme will offer significant new opportunities for contractors from the private and voluntary sectors to deliver truly flexible and personalised support, building appropriate partnerships to do so. We recognise the crucial role that the voluntary sector in particular has to play in tackling worklessness, and our plans reflect this.

We will be publishing further details as the design and implementation of the Work Programme progresses.

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 14 June 2010

TREASURY

Office for Budget Responsibility (Pre-Budget Forecast)

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): The interim Office for Budget Responsibility has published its pre-Budget forecasts for the economy and the public finances.

Copies of the publication are available in the Vote Office and have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

DEFENCE

Operational Allowance

The Secretary of State for Defence (Dr Liam Fox): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has announced recently during his visit to Afghanistan the doubling of the operational allowance which we pay to our armed forces engaged in the most demanding areas of conflict. In doing so, we are fulfilling a key commitment to our armed forces in our Programme for Government.

The tax-free operational allowance will increase from £14.51 per day to £29.02 with effect from 6 May 2010. This will mean a typical six-month tour payment increasing from £2,640 to £5,281. Payment is in the form of a single lump sum paid on completion of operational service.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague): The House may welcome a report on the outcome of the review conference of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) held in New York from 3 to 28 May and Government action and policy in this regard.

It is the view of the Government that we are facing the risk of a new age of nuclear insecurity. In recent years, the NPT has come under unprecedented pressure from a combination of factors: the nuclear ambitions of Iran and North Korea; the risks of terrorist groups acquiring nuclear materials; the expected global renaissance in civil nuclear energy potentially leading to the dissemination of sensitive technology; and a fraying of the international consensus that has underpinned the treaty due to a perception that the nuclear weapon states have not done enough to meet their nuclear disarmament commitments under the NPT.

But all states benefit substantially from the NPT, in terms of both enhanced security and co-operation on civil nuclear energy. It is too important to be allowed to be undermined.

As I said in the Foreign Affairs debate on 26 May 2010, *Official Report*, column 181:

"stemming an uncontrolled spread of nuclear know-how and equipment, deterring any country that might be tempted to try to acquire nuclear weapons from doing so and keeping nuclear material out of the hands of terrorists must be a top foreign policy priority of any British Government.... In opposition, my party promised decisive UK leadership in this effort if elected, and the coalition agreement pledged an immediate and strong UK role at the conference."

I am delighted therefore that the conference successfully reached agreement to revitalise the treaty as the cornerstone of global efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, to promote the safe and secure use of civil nuclear energy and to pursue the goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

I warmly congratulate the president of the conference, Ambassador Cabactulan of the Philippines, and all the states parties to the NPT for successfully putting aside the failures of the past to make this review conference a success.

The UK pushed hard for this success. During the Foreign Affairs debate in this House on 26 May, as an immediate contribution further to assist in building the climate of trust between nuclear and non-nuclear weapons states, I announced the ceiling figure for the UK's overall nuclear warhead stockpile (225) and that the Government will re-examine the UK's nuclear declaratory policy as part of the strategic defence and security review. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) attended the review conference on the same day to repeat these announcements there as well as to meet other delegations to help promote a positive outcome.

The negotiations were not easy and the outcome necessarily represents compromise between the states parties. But it also marks, after the failure to secure agreement at the previous review conference in 2005, the first time in 10 years that the international community has been able to come together to agree on the collective efforts that will be required. President Obama's leadership, with the conclusion of the New START agreement, the US nuclear posture review and the Washington nuclear security summit in April provided critical political impetus.

The UK's Objectives

We wanted the conference to agree on a balanced outcome with specific forward action plans to strengthen implementation of the treaty's non-proliferation and disarmament provisions and to support civil nuclear energy without increasing proliferation risks. We also wanted the conference to decide how to implement the resolution, adopted at the 1995 review and extension conference, on a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the middle east, particularly as agreement on this was critical to achieving consensus on the other elements.

Achieving consensus among 189 states parties on such a substantive agenda was deliberately ambitious and we recognised that it would be challenging. The conference none the less succeeded in reaching agreement, for the first time in the NPT's history, on a detailed and balanced set of actions to revitalise the treaty, establishing benchmarks for future progress.

That sends a strong signal both of united commitment among the overwhelming majority of states which abide by their responsibilities under the treaty, and of warning to Iran, North Korea and any other state or terrorist

group which might be tempted to try to acquire nuclear weapons. It affirms that the world is ready to stand united against this threat and to rebuild the trust and partnership necessary as well as ensuring access to the peaceful applications of nuclear technology to all those countries desiring it in accordance with the NPT. It is proof that multilateral diplomacy can bear fruit, even in this sensitive area.

Non-Proliferation

We need to strengthen the regime of checks and controls to ensure that nuclear technology can be shared while reducing to a minimum the risk that technology and material could be used to provide a weapons capability to countries that do not now possess one.

It is highly encouraging that, for the first time in an NPT document, the conference recognised that comprehensive safeguards agreements and the additional protocol are essential for the IAEA to carry out its international safeguards responsibilities and that they represent the enhanced standard for verification of the NPT. All parties are encouraged to conclude and bring into force additional protocols.

The conference underscored the importance of the IAEA exercising fully its mandate and authority to verify states' nuclear activities and supported strengthening the IAEA and assuring that it has sufficient resources. It called for strengthened export controls and urged states parties to improve their standards to combat illicit trafficking in nuclear materials and become parties to the international convention for the suppression of acts of nuclear terrorism.

But enhancing the IAEA's ability to detect safeguard violations is not enough. Potential violators must know that if they are caught, they will pay a high price. Given that the conference worked by consensus, it was regrettably not possible for the actions of Iran—the only country at the conference which had been found by the IAEA board of governors to be currently in non-compliance with its nuclear safeguards obligations—to be directly criticised in the concluding documents. The conference none the less emphasised the importance of addressing questions over compliance with the treaty and the role of the UN Security Council to take appropriate measures in cases of violations reported to it.

On 9 June, the UN Security Council imposed further sanctions on Iran for its ongoing violations of previous resolutions and its failure to co-operate with the IAEA over its nuclear programme. We will be working with our partners to introduce further EU measures against Iran in the coming months.

The situation in North Korea, which did not attend the conference as it claims to have withdrawn from the treaty, was identified as constituting a threat to the peace and security of north-east Asia and the entire international community, and posing a critical challenge to the global non-proliferation regime. North Korea was urged to fulfil its commitments under all relevant non-proliferation and disarmament obligations.

For the first time in any NPT final document, the conference recognised that withdrawing parties are responsible for violations committed prior to withdrawal, and that consultations and actions by nuclear suppliers are needed to discourage abuse of the treaty's withdrawal provision.

The non-parties to the treaty, India, Israel and Pakistan, were urged to accede to it as non-nuclear-weapon states and to place all their nuclear facilities promptly under comprehensive agency safeguards without conditions.

Nuclear Disarmament

The long-term vision of a world without nuclear weapons was reflected in an action plan which demonstrates to the international community that the five nuclear weapon states are taking their disarmament obligations seriously, and which sets out measures which will help us all—nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states alike—to make real progress in the coming years. The conference recognised the achievement of the US-Russia New START agreement, and steps taken by other nuclear weapon states, and reflected the shared interest in achieving deeper reductions of all types of nuclear weapons and reducing their role.

My announcements on 26 May demonstrated the UK's resolve to make further nuclear disarmament steps possible: by building trust, by setting high standards for others to follow, and by ensuring that our nuclear declaratory policy is fully appropriate to the political and security circumstances of 2010 and beyond. We circulated papers at the conference detailing the UK's strong disarmament record and on our joint research with Norway into the complex science of verifying warhead dismantlement, demonstrating the substantial action that we are taking.

The nuclear weapons states agreed to consider collectively further steps on transparency, negative security assurances and nuclear weapons-free zones. The conference encouraged the early entry into force of the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty and the start of negotiations, without further delay, of a fissile material cut-off treaty.

Civil Nuclear Energy and Nuclear Security

Oil prices and climate change will make nuclear energy attractive to many, just as growing populations and economies in the developing world will make it increasingly necessary. There is already increased demand for the construction of new nuclear facilities worldwide.

Proliferation control needs to keep pace with this fast-changing reality. Nuclear energy will only fulfil its full potential if it is developed within a culture of openness, transparency and confidence. In this regard, the conference recognised the importance of continuing discussions to secure the introduction of multilateral approaches to the nuclear fuel cycle. It also called for greater efforts to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the IAEA's technical co-operation programme, which contributes to development in some of the poorest regions of the world.

The conference acknowledged the successful Washington nuclear security summit in April, in which the UK played a leading role, and encouraged carrying forward its recommendations, including recognition of the IAEA's role in promoting nuclear security co-operation and best practices, and the need to minimise the use of highly enriched uranium in the civilian sector.

The Middle East

The outcome on the middle east represented a major step forward, with agreement to hold a regional conference in 2012 to discuss issues relevant to a middle east zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems. Responsibility for the regional conference is shared between the UN Secretary-General and the NPT depositary states (Russia, the UK and the US).

The UK has long supported such a zone as an achievable goal—we co-sponsored the resolution on the middle east at the 1995 review conference—while recognising that its realisation lies in progress towards a comprehensive peace in the middle east and in ensuring that other states in the region, including Iran and Syria, are fully implementing and upholding the existing international agreements.

The agreement on the middle east involved difficult compromise from all parties involved. The singling out of Israel in the final document, and without any reference to Iran, will make progress more difficult: Israel was not a formal party to the discussion and has already made clear its difficulty with the decision. Building confidence among all the parties in the region and giving them full ownership of the conference will be essential for success. The UK will play a full and active role.

Conclusion

This review conference was an important milestone in our long-term vision for a world without nuclear weapons. Now we have a map to help us move forward. We will now work, with our international partners, to capitalise on these achievements and to translate these commitments into concrete action in the years ahead.

TRANSPORT

Rail Value For Money Study

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Philip Hammond): I welcome the publication of the scoping study report from Sir Roy McNulty's review of value for money on the railway. While I recognise that this report represents a very early stage in the work of Sir Roy and his team, I believe that the report represents an important step in identifying the factors that drive up the cost of the UK railway.

Given the scale of the fiscal deficit the UK is facing, it is vital that public spending be subject to scrutiny to ensure that it represents value for money. We must adjust to a world in which our aspirations for a successful railway have to be met from within a much tighter public spending envelope. As the scoping study highlights, there is evidence that the cost of the UK railway is relatively high, both in historic terms, and by comparison with other European railways.

The next stage will be to look at options for ensuring public investment in the railways is delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible. I have therefore asked Sir Roy to accelerate key elements of his work so that his preliminary findings can inform the decisions on public spending that will have to be taken in the autumn.

I would call upon all stakeholders in the rail industry to offer Sir Roy and his team their fullest co-operation. By driving efficiencies on the railway, we can ensure that passengers and freight users get the railway they need at a price which Government and taxpayers can afford.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and are available on the Department's website (www.dft.gov.uk).

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 15 June 2010

TREASURY

ECOFIN

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): The Economic and Financial Affairs Council was held in Luxembourg on 8 June 2010. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury represented the UK.

A-points

Council agreed legislative A-points on VAT administrative co-operation regulation, regulation on the quality of statistics, and the European Investment Bank (EIB) external lending mandate. Given that Parliament has not had the opportunity to clear these documents, the Government abstained on these items at ECOFIN and entered a statement to the minutes to that effect.

Convergence reports and enlargement of the euro-area

The Council took note of reports from the Commission and the European Central Bank on the fulfilment of economic and monetary union (EMU) convergence criteria by the nine non-euro area member states with an EMU derogation. It also noted a proposal for a Council decision aimed at enabling Estonia to adopt the euro as its currency on 1 January 2011, following positive signals that it has met the entry criteria. The final decision will be taken at the July ECOFIN.

Stability and Growth Pact

The Council adopted an opinion on an update by Cyprus of its stability programme. There were also discussions following announcements from Spain and Portugal of their fiscal consolidation measures. Ministers from several member states updated the Council on their domestic austerity measures. The Government outlined the savings package of £6.24 billion for financial year 2010-11 announced on 24 May.

Preparation of the 17 June European Council

a) Broad economic policy guidelines

Ministers approved a report to the European Council on the broad economic policy guidelines for Member States and the EU as a whole. The treaty on the functioning of the EU provides that member states are to regard their economic policies and promoting employment as matters of common concern and co-ordinate them within the Council. As these have not had a chance to complete scrutiny, the UK abstained, and the Government made clear they reserved their position on some aspects of the substance of the proposals. The guidelines will go for discussion at the 17 June European Council before returning to ECOFIN for formal adoption in July.

b) Europe 2020 Strategy

ECOFIN agreed conclusions on the Europe 2020 strategy to feed in to discussions at the European Council. The conclusions cover proposed headline targets for the strategy; the broad economic policy guidelines; national bottlenecks to growth; and enhanced economic policy co-ordination and timing. The Government will continue to encourage a focus on specific, meaningful steps the EU could take to promote growth.

c) Progress report on financial reform

ECOFIN discussed a progress report on financial reform to the European Council covering crisis management (including levies and funds), financial supervision, credit rating agencies, derivatives and financial exit strategies. The Government outlined their priorities for the reform of European regulation of financial services and the need to ensure international consistency and pursue non-discriminatory policies. The Council will now work with the Commission to take forward the ambitious programme it has proposed.

d) Fiscal exit strategies

The Council approved a report to the European Council on progress made in the development of an exit strategy for the unwinding of budgetary stimulus measures introduced in response to the economic crisis. The Government support the strategy, which is in line with announced plans for an additional £6.24 billion spending cuts in the UK.

e) Preparation for the G20 Summit

Ministers prepared an EU position for the June G20 summit in Toronto, where Presidents Van Rompuy and Barroso will represent the EU. The Government supported the agreed terms of reference, which reflect the agreements reached at the 5 June G20 finance ministerial in Korea. The final position will be adopted by the European Council.

HEALTH

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Anne Milton): The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council met on 7 and 8 June in Luxembourg. The health and consumer affairs part of the Council was taken on 8 June. I represented the UK.

At the meeting, following an exchange of views on the draft directive on patients' rights in cross-border health care, political agreement between member states was reached. This text will now be forwarded to the European Parliament for their consideration.

A policy debate on the proposed regulation on the provision of food information to consumers focused on two aspects of the proposal. Member states considered the clarity of food labelling and discussed who might bear responsibility for the information provided on food labels.

Council conclusions on health inequalities and reduction of salt intake were adopted. The presidency also provided an update on progress of the proposals in the pharmaceutical package.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Vetting and Barring Scheme

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): I am announcing today that the commencement of voluntary registration with the new vetting and barring scheme (VBS) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which was due to begin on 26 July, will be brought to a halt as of today.

The Government have made clear their intention to bring the criminal records and vetting and barring regimes back to common-sense levels. Until this remodelling

has taken place, we have decided to maintain those aspects of the new scheme which are already in place, but not to introduce further elements.

The safety of children and vulnerable adults is of paramount importance to the new Government. We will therefore maintain the current arrangements under which the Independent Safeguarding Authority is able to bar from "regulated activities" those considered unsuitable to work with children or vulnerable adults, and appropriate cases must be referred to them. Criminal records checks will also remain available for those eligible to receive them, and will continue to be required for certain posts where regulations are already in place.

However it is vital that we take a measured approach in these matters. Vulnerable groups must be properly protected in a way that is proportionate and sensible. The remodelling of the VBS will ensure this happens.

The terms of reference for the remodelling of the VBS and of the criminal records regime are currently being considered and a further announcement will be made in due course.

JUSTICE

International Anti-Corruption Champion

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Kenneth Clarke): On 10 June 2010 the Prime Minister appointed me to become the Government's international anti-corruption champion. The continuation of this central role demonstrates the coalition Government's clear commitment to transparency and accountability. The role is also in recognition of the significant cost of international corruption, both to individuals and to our economy. The appointment of anti-corruption champion is a personal appointment by the Prime Minister.

As champion I will hold a key co-ordination role for Government and be answerable to Parliament on corruption issues. I recognise that the interest and impact of corruption is felt not only by all Government Departments but also by British businesses and individuals, particularly those working overseas. I will therefore be working closely with colleagues across Departments, devolved Administrations, law enforcement, prosecution authorities and regulatory agencies to ensure a coherent and joined-up approach to combat international corruption. The champion role sends out a clear message that the UK coalition Government will not tolerate bribery or corruption and that we will work together to stamp out these practices across the board.

My first priority in this role will be to ensure the effective implementation of the Bribery Act 2010, legislation which will help to achieve the highest in international standards and which demonstrates cross-party commitment to the fight against bribery.

I will make further information on the detail of my role available to the House shortly.

PRIME MINISTER

Office of Government Commerce

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I am today announcing a machinery of Government change affecting HM Treasury and the Cabinet Office.

Responsibility for the Office of Government Commerce and its executive agency, Buying Solutions, will transfer from the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the Minister for the Cabinet Office, and the organisations will become part of the Cabinet Office's efficiency and reform group.

Property functions in the Office of Government Commerce and the shareholder executive will combine into a single unit responsible for property efficiency and will be based in the shareholder executive within the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. It will report jointly to the Minister for the Cabinet Office and to the Chief Secretary as part of the efficiency and reform group.

TRANSPORT

South East Airports Task Force

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Philip Hammond): The Government believe that aviation makes a vital contribution to the economy of this country and to the lives of our citizens. The aviation sector contributes some £11 billion to GDP and directly employs some 200,000 people. Its true economic value is much greater than this when we consider the importance of air travel to the global economy and to UK competitiveness. But we cannot simply allow growth to continue at the levels it has in the past. Doing so risks unacceptable consequences in terms of noise and local air quality, quite apart from the global impacts in terms of CO_2 emissions.

We need to start a new chapter in aviation policy—one that promotes a competitive aviation industry, supporting UK economic growth, while recognising the need for restraint. We have already begun that by making clear our opposition to adding yet more runways at Heathrow, Stansted or Gatwick. Instead, we must explore different ways in which to improve the efficiency of these key components of our national transport infrastructure.

Improving the passenger experience is at the heart of this Government's vision for UK aviation. We announced in the Queen's Speech our intention to reform the economic regulation of airports to deliver better outcomes for passengers. But I believe that there are also other things that Government and the industry can do together, and so today I am announcing the establishment of a South East Airports Task Force with key players from across the industry to explore the scope for other measures to help make the most of existing airport infrastructure and improve conditions for all users. The group will be chaired by the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs Villiers) and its initial focus will be on action at our three biggest airports—Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted.

I am confident that, by working closely with the aviation sector, alongside our regulatory reforms, this will help deliver improvements for all.

WALES

Government of Wales Act 2006 (Section 104)

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mrs Cheryl Gillan): The National Assembly for Wales passed a resolution on 9 February 2010 calling for a referendum under the terms of the Government of Wales Act 2006. The First Minister notified my predecessor of this resolution on 17 February 2010.

I have a statutory duty to respond to that notice within 120 days of the date of the notice, either by laying a draft referendum order, or refusing to do so and giving reasons for the refusal.

I have today notified the First Minister that I am unable to lay a draft referendum order before Parliament within the 120 days, and have set out my reasons. I have also made clear that our aim is for a referendum to take place before the end of the first quarter of next year.

A copy of my letter to the First Minister is available in the Vote Office and has also been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 16 June 2010

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Bilateral Aid Review

The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Andrew Mitchell): The Government will honour the commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on overseas aid from 2013. We are determined to ensure that this vital and important aid budget is used effectively and delivers value for money for the world's poorest people. In this context I would like to inform the House that I have commissioned a review of the DFID Bilateral Aid Programme to ensure that we target UK aid where it is needed most and will make the most significant impact on poverty reduction.

The review will consider which countries should receive British aid, how much they should receive and which countries should stop receiving British aid. It will also consider which aid instruments are most effective at delivering poverty reduction in different contexts. Any savings generated will be redirected to more effective programmes in other poor countries.

I look forward to sharing the full results of the review with the House when it is completed.

TRANSPORT

North Review (Drink and Drug Driving)

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Philip Hammond): A review of drink and drug driving regulation was commissioned by the then Secretary of State on 3 December 2009, to be undertaken by Sir Peter North. Sir Peter's final report has been published today. This report covers a wide range of issues and makes 51 detailed recommendations, which we need to consider carefully with other Government Departments. In doing so, it is important that we fully investigate the economic and public service resource impact of any suggested changes to the law, taking account of the current financial and economic situation.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 17 June 2010

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Further Education Colleges and Training Organisations

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Mr John Hayes): I am pleased to inform Parliament that the Government are announcing today a series of measures aimed at boosting economic recovery. These measures will give further education colleges and training organisations greater freedom to deliver the education and training that employers and individuals need, and to raise opportunities for lifelong learning through a system that is freed of unnecessary bureaucracy, and driven by empowered, informed learners.

The main measures are:

All colleges, except those which are performing poorly, to be given new freedoms to move money between budgets. This will allow them to respond quickly to local demand.

Working to bring colleges into line with schools in respect of Ofsted inspection, so that colleges which achieve outstanding results do not face inspection unless their performance drops.

Refocusing £150 million of resources to expand the number of apprenticeships available; and £50 million to support FE capital development;

Giving learners the information they need to drive the system, through the publication of clear and consistent information about performance, quality and standards.

I will be writing today to all colleges and training organisations about these and other changes, which will help them to focus on meeting the demands of employers and learners in their areas.

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills will also be writing to the chief executive of the Skills Funding Agency—the body responsible for funding colleges and training organisations—confirming his priorities for the adult education and skills budget in 2010-11, including the refocusing of £150 million to pay for 50,000 extra apprenticeship places this year, and £50 million for new capital grants to colleges. A key goal will be to strengthen the supply of qualifications that are valued by employers; and to secure high-quality training opportunities to help unemployed people get the skills they need for work-readiness and sustainable employment; as well as encouraging an increasing number of people to participate in adult and community learning, both to re-engage those disenchanted by previous educational experience and to offer people opportunities to enrich their lives through learning.

Underpinning these changes, we are seeking to empower learners so that they can drive the learning and skills delivered by colleges and training organisations. A professional and impartial advice and guidance service will be available to support learners. Publication of clear information about the performance of colleges and training organisations will allow learners and employers to make well-informed choices. This will include information about learner success rates, learner and employer satisfaction, and the destinations of those who leave learning. As a result of the freedoms that we are announcing today, colleges and training organisations will be able to respond quickly and flexibly to their choices, offering a wide range of programmes that drive both high-tech innovation and new enterprise and support adult recreational learning.

Over the coming months, the Government will be looking at a wide range of other ways to remove unnecessary bureaucracy from the system, and we will be making further announcements in due course.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Houses in Multiple Occupation

The Minister for Housing (Grant Shapps): Today I am announcing the Government's intention to amend the planning rules for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) which were introduced on 6 April 2010.

I understand the concerns of local people who see their neighbourhoods being damaged by undue concentrations of HMOs and the significant impact this is having on their quality of life. However there are also many areas where HMOs are not causing problems and indeed provide an important supply of low cost housing. I believe that the planning system needs to take account of both these differing circumstances and allow for local solutions rather than continue with the present "one size fits all" approach.

The current rules impose a blanket requirement for planning permission in order to change use from a domestic house to a HMO. When introduced, it was estimated that these rules could result in an additional 8,500 planning applications per year and could lead to a reduction in supply. This goes against the recommendations in successive reports on the planning system that Government should reduce the number of planning applications for minor development. It also runs the risk of losing low cost housing in areas where it is needed most.

I believe that we need to move away from this kind of centralised, regulatory approach which has dominated planning in recent years and create a system which encourages local people to take responsibility for shaping their communities. Decisions should reflect local priorities expressed through the local plan, rather than nationally imposed rules.

I therefore intend to amend the HMO rules to allow changes of use between family houses and small, shared houses to take place freely without the need for planning applications. However, in those areas experiencing problems with uncontrolled HMO development, local authorities will be able to use their existing direction-making powers to restrict this freedom of movement by requiring planning applications. This change will allow the free development of smaller shared housing, which is a vital component of our private rented sector, unless there is a serious threat to the area.

My officials will work through the detail of the proposed changes with interested partners to ensure that the new rules work for local people without placing an unnecessary burden on businesses.

My aim is to have the revised arrangements in place by 1 October 2010.

DEFENCE

Defence Vetting Agency: Key Targets Financial Year 2010-11

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Andrew Robathan): Key targets have been set for the chief executive of the Defence Vetting Agency for financial year 2010-11 to deliver national security vetting to defence customers. Delivery of vetting to its repayment customers will be to similar standards as set out in their joint business agreements.

Key target 1: External validation of quality of defence vetting cases

To achieve at least a 98% satisfaction rating with 200 cases independently selected and reviewed from a random sample of security check (SC) and developed vetting (DV) cases completed in the preceding 12-month period.

Key target 2: Delivering excellent customer service

To maintain customer service excellence accreditation.

Key target 3: Completing routine cases for defence customers

a. 85% of counter terrorist checks (CTC) within 30 calendar days.

b. 85% of SCs within 30 calendar days.

c. 85% of DVs within 100 calendar days.

Key target 4: Completing priority cases for defence customers

a. 95% of CTC/SCs within 10 calendar days.

b. 95% of DVs within 30 calendar days.

Key target 5: Completing aftercare cases for defence customers by

a. Taking into action all aftercare incident reports within seven calendar days of receipt.

b. Taking into action 95% of scheduled aftercare within 30 calendar days of the scheduled date of review.

c. Taking into action (where appropriate) 95% of security appraisal reviews within 21 days of receipt.

The timeliness key targets represent net performance that exclude delays outside of DVA control.

Key Target 6: Delivery of the Cerberus project in line with planning tolerances.

a. Manage third party suppliers to provide their side of the Cerberus interfaces by September 2010.

b. Achieve an operational capability for e-forms and case management system by December 2010.

c. Achieve roll-out in line with plan to vetting customers by March 2011.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

EU Environment Council

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Chris Huhne): I represented the UK at the Environment Council in Luxembourg on 11 June, together with Lord Henley, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Stewart Stevenson, Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change in the Scottish Government, also attended.

The presidency presented progress reports on the proposal for a regulation on biocidal products, the restriction of hazardous substances (RoHS) directive and the waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) directive.

The Council agreed conclusions on forest protection, and water scarcity and drought. A number of member states intervened to stress the importance of adequately preparing forests for climate change, and the presidency highlighted the need to reconcile increasing water scarcity with rising demand. Ministers also agreed conclusions setting out the EU position for the forthcoming meeting of the parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in October, and conclusions in support of the "Rio+20" UN conference on sustainable development. Lord Henley stressed the importance of concrete outputs from the conference which recognised the need for sustainability, the importance of ecosystems services and international governance in line with future climate change arrangements.

Under any other business, the UK and Germany raised the forthcoming meeting of the International Whaling Convention (IWC). Lord Henley emphasised the importance of IWC reform to ensure conservation of whales, and stressed the need for the EU to show leadership and consistency in opposing commercial whaling. The French raised an AOB item pushing for a moratorium on the authorisation of genetically modified organisms; the UK welcomed the progress made by the Commission and stressed the importance of ensuring proportionate and efficient regulation, but argued against a moratorium.

The lunchtime discussion focused on international climate change. The presidency gave a presentation on the outreach activities undertaken by the presidency and the Commission during the past six months.

The Commission presented their communication analysing the options to move beyond 20% greenhouse gas emission reductions and assessing the risk of carbon leakage. In the policy debate that followed, member states welcomed the communication as providing a solid evidence base for further discussions on this issue. I intervened to underline the key message of the communication that the costs of moving to a 30% target are significant but manageable, and that they have reduced since 2008. I expressed my hope that the EU would show leadership by increasing our target to 30%, and insisted that unless we do so it is very hard to imagine that we will be able to remain on the trajectory of keeping global temperature increase to within 2°C. While a number of other member states' interventions supported these arguments, others highlighted the reduced capacity in the European economy for the investment which would be required to meet a higher target. The Council agreed conclusions on the communication which noted the need to return to the issues no later than October 2010 and welcomed the Commission's intention to conduct more detailed analysis.

Lastly, the presidency presented a progress report on the proposed regulation on reducing CO_2 emissions from light commercial vehicles (i.e. vans), which was noted by the Council.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Veterinary Medicines Directorate and Veterinary Laboratories Agency

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr James Paice): The 2009-10 annual report and accounts for each of the following was laid before Parliament today:

Veterinary Laboratories Agency
Veterinary Medicines Directorate

HEALTH

NHS South West

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Andrew Lansley): I have asked Sir David Nicholson, chief executive of the NHS in England, to initiate a review into the approach and behaviour of the NHS South West in relation to Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust, in particular, to the dismissal of John Watkinson and, by association, the trust's position in relation to the provision of upper gastro-intestinal (GI) services in Cornwall.

John Watkinson was dismissed from his role as chief executive of the Royal Cornwall NHS Trust in April 2009. He took his case to employment tribunal, which has recently published its judgment that he was unfairly dismissed.

In the opinion of the employment tribunal, John Watkinson was unfairly dismissed because he made a "protected disclosure" covered by the Public Interest Disclosure Act. The disclosure was linked to the reconfiguration of upper GI services in Cornwall. The employment tribunal also found that Royal Cornwall NHS Trust acted as it did as a result of pressure from the South West Strategic Health Authority (NHS South West).

Verita, a specialist company that conducts independent investigations, reviews and inquiries has been commissioned to undertake this review.

The Terms of Reference for this review will be;

to examine all the SHA's interactions with the Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust in relation to the dismissal of John Watkinson and, by association, the trust's position in relation to the provision of the upper GI services in Cornwall. In particular, to determine:

the chronology of events and decisions made in the running up to the dismissal of John Watkinson;

what involvement NHS South West had in his dismissal and whether or not this was motivated by the reconfiguration of upper GI services or otherwise; and

whether the SHA acted appropriately, proportionately, in keeping with its role and within its statutory responsibilities.

The review should not duplicate the review of the upper GI service configuration which was recently carried out by the independent reconfiguration panel, nor any subsequent appeal of the employment tribunal's decision. However, it may consider these and any other relevant background evidence to make its determinations.

The findings of the review will be published later this year and I will update the House on the outcome of the review and my response.

TRANSPORT

Rail Franchising

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mrs Theresa Villiers): The Department for Transport will shortly begin a consultation exercise on the future of rail franchising policy. This consultation will provide industry partners with the opportunity to comment on the Government's approach to rail franchising and whether bidders for longer franchises would be able to offer investment in improvements to trains and services. It will also allow the industry to set out its proposals for improving the efficiency and value for money of rail franchises, for both taxpayers and fare payers. I will set out further details to the House in due course.

To enable the next Greater Anglia and Essex Thameside franchises—which are currently in the process of being re-let—fully to reflect the changes resulting from this review of policy the competitions for these franchises, which were started in January 2010, are to be cancelled.

It is currently expected that a new competition for the Greater Anglia franchise will be advertised by the end of the year, after the consultation responses have been considered, with the Essex Thameside franchise following in autumn 2011.

It is also expected that there will be some consequent changes to the procurement time scales previously published for the InterCity East Coast franchise. Rail services will continue to run as normal on all affected franchises. A prior information notice (PIN) setting out the Department's proposed future rail franchising programme will be issued in due course.

Petitions

Monday 7 June 2010

OBSERVATIONS

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Size Zero Models

The Petition of the students of Coloma Convent High School and the people of Croydon,

Declares that size zero models set an unhealthy and unrealistic example to young girls, and influence the incidence of eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to introduce industry guidelines for the responsible employment of health models and guidelines for the media to ensure the responsible portrayal of women.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Mr. Andrew Pelling, Official Report,* 6 April 2010; Vol. 508, c. 944.]

[P000817]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport:

The Government take seriously all matters of health and wellbeing, including the prevention of eating disorders, and would like to see all those working in the fashion industry taking a strong lead on the promotion of a healthy body image, particularly to young people.

The Government keep these matters under review and this Department remains in regular touch with the principal regulatory bodies in the media whose responsibility it is to ensure that that matters of serious public concern continue to be addressed by their codes.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Wheelchair Access for Care Home Residents

The Petition of Maureen Faith, residents of sheltered accommodation at Kitkatts Road, Canvey Island, and others,

Declares that elderly residents in sheltered accommodation at Kitkatts Road, Canvey Island are in significant danger and unable to easily get around communal areas of their home due to the lack of ramps, trip hazards and other minor changes to assist their mobility around their home and make it easier and safer; notes that Josie Cooper at the home is wheelchair bound and has not been out of her home for two years due to access issues with the structure of her home and particularly the lack of a ramp at her back door and the inability of her wheelchair to pass through her door frame, which leaves her isolated and unable to enjoy her garden or join in any of the community activities, denying her choice and quality of life although she remains extremely positive and caring towards others.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage the local Council and wheelchair service providers to resolve the problems for Josie and for all residents by immediately implementing a programme of access and safety improvements for all these excellent local residents.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Bob Spink, Official Report,* 6 May 2009; Vol. 492, c. 317.]

[P000362]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions:

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA), currently places landlords and those who manage rented premises, and commonhold associations, under a duty in certain circumstances to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people who are either tenants or occupiers of those rented premises, or the owners or occupiers of units in commonhold premises. They are only required to make the adjustments where these are requested by the disabled person and the duty is limited to making reasonable adjustments to policies, practices or procedures, or the provision of auxiliary aids or services. The DDA duties do not extend to requiring landlords and managers etc. to make physical adjustments to the let premises themselves. However, provisions in housing legislation allow disabled people to make alterations to the let premises, in certain circumstances. The DDA provides for a disabled person, to whom the provisions in the housing legislation do not apply, to seek consent to make alterations to the premises that they rent and the landlord or manager cannot unreasonably refuse to give consent.

A Government review, completed in 2005, looked at problems faced by disabled people in accessing communal areas of residential property (for example, a communal lounge or garden, or entrance hall to a block of flats). The Review Group on Common Parts carried out a thorough review of the issues and made a number of recommendations. In particular, the Group recommended that the Government should establish, through consultation, whether new legislation was required to solve the difficulties that people face when they need an adjustment made to the common parts of let residential premises, and that it should seek views on the Group's specific proposals for England and Wales. These proposals included, for example, a requirement that the landlord, where reasonable, should make an adjustment to physical features of the common parts of residential let premises to improve access for a disabled tenant, lessee or occupier when requested to do so by the tenant or lessee. Similar provisions were to be developed for commonhold premises.

In response to consultation, the Equality Act 2010, when it comes into force, will place a new duty on those who are responsible for the common parts of premises. They will be required to make disability-related alterations to the common parts of let residential premises or units owned on a commonhold basis, where the alteration is requested by, or on behalf of, a disabled tenant, occupier or commonhold unit holder, and it is reasonable in all the circumstances of the case to make the alteration. However, the disabled person may be obliged to pay the costs of the alteration.

It will fall to the relevant authority responsible for the provision of sheltered housing accommodation at Kitkatts Road, Canvey Island, to decide how best to implement access arrangements in respect of the residents there.

Petitions

Wednesday 9 June 2010

OBSERVATIONS

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Croydon FC

The Petition of the supporters of Croydon FC,

Declares that there have been talks with Croydon Council for many years about providing security of tenure for Croydon FC at the Arena, South Norwood, as well as talks about the destruction of the playing fields to the south of the Arena as a result of their use as a place to dump spill from the construction of Croydon Tramlink, and that no progress has been made with these talks.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to ask Croydon Council to bring the discussions with Croydon FC to a positive conclusion for both parties and for the South Norwood community.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Mr Andrew Pelling, Official Report,* 7 April 2010; Vol. 508, c. 41P.]

[P0000826]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport:

The issue regarding Croydon FC's tenure at the Arena, South Norwood is a matter that should be resolved by the Local Authority and Croydon FC. Government cannot get involved in the local decision making process.

In respect of the playing fields situated to the south of the Arena, under planning guidance, local authorities are required to protect all open space which communities need. For this reason, the dumping of spill from the nearby Tramlink development should be dealt with as a priority by the local authority.

Crystal Palace FC

The Petition of football supporters,

Declares that The Football League should exercise discretion in its application of its rules that has led to the 10 point deduction from Crystal Palace FC, and notes that unlike other football clubs penalised after seeking administration Crystal Palace FC was placed in administration against its wishes, and notes that Lloyds Banking Group has an important role to play in returning Crystal Palace FC to profitable trading by working on the ownership of Selhurst Park being returned to the club.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage The Football League to consider whether it should remove or reduce the points penalty meted out to Crystal Palace FC, and as a major shareholder in Lloyds Banking Group that it should ask the senior management of Lloyds Banking Group as to what action it is taking to reunite Selhurst Park with Crystal Palace FC so as to aid Crystal Palace FC in returning to profitable trading.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Mr Andrew Pelling, Official Report,* 30 March 2010; Vol. 788, c. 508.]

[P0000808]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport:

It is naturally a worrying time for all those associated with Crystal Palace, and of course we understand the frustrations felt—not least by the supporters who remain the lifeblood of the club.

Football clubs remain an important part of the community, and every care should be taken to protect their long-term future through good financial management.

It is for the clubs themselves to ensure they manage their finances well, and for the football authorities to regulate the game to the highest standards.

Government are supportive of the measures that the football authorities have taken in recent years to strengthen the financial regulation of clubs and help monitor club debt. However, the issue of a points deduction is one for the relevant regulatory authority, in this case the Football League, not Government, to address.

We are delighted that an agreement in principle has been reached for the sale of the club and Selhurst Park to the CPFC 2010 Group and we hope this agreement can be finalised quickly to ensure the club can focus on the forthcoming season. The club has a proud history, built on the loyalty of its supporters, and we wish it the very best for the future.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

EU Referendum

The Petition of the people of Croydon,

Declares that there should be a referendum on European Union membership.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to call a referendum on EU membership at the same time as the next General Election.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Mr Andrew Pelling, Official Report,* 24 March 2010; Vol. 508, c. 348.]

[P0000782]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs:

The Petition of the people of Croydon declares that there should be a referendum on European Union membership and requests that the House of Commons urges the Government to call a referendum on EU membership at the same time as the next General Election.

The Government do not plan to hold a referendum on whether the UK should remain a member of the EU. However, we are determined to maximise democratic and Parliamentary control over EU decision making. We will amend the 1972 European Communities Act so that any proposed future Treaty that transferred areas of power or competences from the UK to the EU would be subject to a referendum before the UK could ratify that Treaty. We will also ensure that any decision by a

future Government to join the euro would be subject to a referendum, though we have agreed not to join or to prepare to join the euro in this Parliament. We have also agreed that there should be no further transfer of sovereignty or powers from the UK to the EU over the course of the next Parliament.

We will amend the 1972 Act to ensure that the use of any clauses which allow the powers of the EU to expand in future without a new Treaty—sometimes known as passerelle or ratchet clauses—would require primary legislation. Any use of a major ratchet clause which amounted to the transfer of an area of power to the EU will also be subject to a referendum. We will examine the case for a United Kingdom Sovereignty Bill to make it clear that ultimate authority remains with Parliament.

All of this will ensure that there will be no extension of the EU's power over the UK without the British people's consent. The UK will continue to be a positive participant in the European Union, playing a strong and positive role with our partners, with the goal of ensuring that all the nations of Europe are equipped to face the challenges of the 21st century: global competitiveness, global warming and global poverty.

Petition

Thursday 10 June 2010

OBSERVATIONS

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Hunting with Dogs

The Petition of residents of Hastings and Rye and others,

Declares that the petitioners believe that hunting with dogs is cruel; further

declares that the Petitioners oppose the efforts of local Conservative Parliamentary Candidate Amber Rudd and the Conservative Party to have the ban repealed, further declares that the Petitioners support the Hunting Act 2004 and the Back the Ban campaign; and that the Petitioners support Michael Foster, MP for Hastings and Rye, in his campaign to keep hunting illegal.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons reject any proposal to legalise hunting with dogs.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Michael Jabez Foster, Official Report,* 30 March 2010; Vol. 508, c. 786.]

[P000802]

The Petition of residents of Blaydon Constituency and others,

Declares that the Petitioners agree with a ban on hunting with dogs, and believe the ban should be enforced rigorously and effectively; further declares that the Petitioners are opposed to any efforts to overturn the ban and allow the re-introduction of hunting with dogs in the future.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons reject any proposal to legalise hunting with dogs and asks the Government to reaffirm its opposition to hunting with dogs.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Mr David Anderson, Official Report,* 30 March 2010; Vol. 508, c. 788.]

[P000805]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs:

The Hunting Act was passed by Parliament in 2004. It has not been a demonstrable success and is difficult to enforce. Only three hunts have been successfully prosecuted for illegal hunting.

There are many more pressing issues for parliamentary time at the moment, but the Government wish to give Parliament the opportunity to review the Hunting Act and, if it wishes, repeal this legislation. The Government will, therefore, put a motion before the House of Commons on whether the Hunting Act should be repealed and, if the motion is carried, they will bring forward legislation in due course.

Petitions

Monday 14 June 2010

OBSERVATIONS

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Power Station (Blythe Park)

The Petition of residents of Creswell and the surrounding areas in Staffordshire regarding the Blythe Park gas-fired power station proposal,

Declares that the Petitioners recognise that the gas-fired power station is completely out of character with the area; the pollution created will be deposited across in and around an area of outstanding beauty; this site has historic and ongoing issues with toxic waste, and any major development will unsettle this waste leading to serious health concerns for the local community; the infrastructure leading to the site is wholly inadequate; the development will have disastrous consequences for local wildlife; following development, the community and surrounding areas will be blighted by significant noise and light pollution; the proposed site for the development is a known flood plain; Staffordshire County Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council have already made it officially clear that they completely object to these proposals; and the power source is non-sustainable, costly and not environmentally friendly.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change to launch a public inquiry into the proposed Blythe Bridge power station proposal and take further steps to prevent this project from going any further.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Mr William Cash, Official Report,* 23 March 2010; Vol. 508, c. 218.]

[P000773]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change:

Where an application is made under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for consent to construct an electricity generating station with a capacity greater than 50 megawatts, a public inquiry must be held if an objection is made by a relevant planning authority. In the case of the Blythe Park application, the relevant planning authority, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, has objected and therefore a public inquiry must now be held before any decision on the application is made.

The Department of Energy and Climate Change is making the necessary arrangements for the public inquiry and these will be publicised and objectors notified once they are finalised.

Petition

Tuesday 15 June 2010

OBSERVATIONS

TREASURY

Public Sector Employment

The Petition of the people of Croydon,

Declares that the Croydon economy depends on public sector employment.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to ensure that public sector positions are not transferred away from Croydon.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Mr Andrew Pelling, Official Report,* 30 March 2010; Vol. 508, c. 789 .]

[P000810]

Observations from the Chancellor of the Exchequer:

The Government cannot comment specifically on public sector positions in Croydon or in any other area of the country at this point. The location of positions is inextricably linked to any decisions concerning efficient use of the Government's estate. Plans for the estate will need to be considered alongside other public spending issues that, as a new Government, we will be looking at in some detail over the coming months.

Petitions

Thursday 17 June 2010

PRESENTED PETITION

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Blockade of Gaza

The Petition of the West Wiltshire Palestinian Support Group and residents of the Chippenham Constituency,

Declares that Israel's blockade of Gaza is illegal and inhumane.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Foreign Secretary to call on Israel to end its blockade of Gaza.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Duncan Hames.]*

[P000836]

OBSERVATIONS

WORK AND PENSIONS

Carer Poverty

The Petition of Mr Darren Osborne, Carers Poverty Alliance, Carers Poverty Protest and others,

Declares that carers allowance should be paid at a level that gives carers the dignity, quality of life and recognition this hard working group deserves within the benefits system; that all carers who provide 35 hours per week unpaid care for a relative, partner or friend of any age with a long term illness or disability, or who is elderly and frail, be paid an increased allowance regardless of means or receipt of any other benefits, including the state pension; further notes that carers should not be forced to live on a limited income, nor should they have to self fund their caring role, by living off their limited savings; that for these and other valid reasons, carers who provide over 35 hours of care per week should receive an increased carers allowance exempt from assessment for all other benefits and believes that this is in the public interest.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to pay increased carers allowance, exempt from all other benefit assessment, to all carers who provide over 35 hours of care per week.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Bob Spink, Official Report,* 2 March 2010; Vol. 506, c. 916.]

[P000746]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions:

The Government are aware of and fully appreciate the hard work and dedication of all those who provide unpaid care for relatives, partners and friends.

The Government are considering a wide range of issues as we develop our plans for welfare reform and a commission on long term care will consider the position of carers in this context.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 7 June 2010

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Helen Goodman: To ask the Leader of the House how many special advisers *(a)* he and *(b)* the Parliamentary Secretary (i) has appointed and (ii) plans to appoint. [326]

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

European Union: Parliamentary Scrutiny

Mr Cash: To ask the Leader of the House what recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on compliance by Ministers with the terms of the Resolution of the House of 17 November 1998 on the scrutiny of European business, with particular reference to agreements given in *(a)* the Council of Ministers and *(b)* the European Council to any proposals which are still subject to scrutiny by the House under the terms of the Resolution; and what steps he plans to take to ensure that the House is notified of the Government's position on proposals still subject to scrutiny, with particular reference to (i) the decision of the extraordinary meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) of 9 May 2010 in respect of EU Document 9606/10, proposed Council Regulation establishing a European financial stabilisation mechanism, (ii) the decision at the ECOFIN meeting of 18 May 2010 in respect of EU Document 6795/3/10, proposed Directive on Alternative Investment Fund Managers and (iii) the Commission Communication of 26 May 2010, COM(2010) 254, on bank resolution funds; and if he will make a statement. [904]

Sir George Young: I have had no discussions about the specific documents to which the hon. Gentleman refers. The Government are committed to complying with the terms of the House's Scrutiny Reserve Resolution and look forward to working closely and constructively with the European Scrutiny Committee when it is established.

Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority

Mr Winnick: To ask the Leader of the House if he will discuss with the Chair of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) *(a)* the further requirements for documentary evidence IPSA required from hon. Members in support of their claims and *(b)* the basis for the assumption by IPSA that the costs incurred in claims so submitted are being met by another until demonstrated otherwise. [621]

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 45W. There is no ministerial responsibility for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Leader of the House who provides the *(a)* external audit and *(b)* internal audit functions for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. [1186]

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) on 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 45W. There is no ministerial responsibility for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

Members: Allowances

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Leader of the House if he will bring forward proposals to end the payment of allowances to hon. Members who do not take their seats. [242]

Sir George Young: The payment of allowances to hon. Members is now a matter for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) on 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 45W. There is no ministerial responsibility for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

Members: Security

Bob Russell: To ask the Leader of the House if he will bring forward proposals for funding from the public purse for hon. and right hon. Members to provide such security measures at their constituency offices as police forces may advise; and if he will make a statement. [894]

Sir George Young: The payment of allowances to hon. Members is now a matter for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) on Wednesday 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 45W. There is no ministerial responsibility for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

Bob Russell: To ask the Leader of the House if he will discuss with the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority the provision of funding for security measures at constituency offices of hon. and right hon. Members; and if he will make a statement. [895]

Sir George Young: The payment of allowances to hon. Members is now a matter for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 45W to the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick). There is no ministerial responsibility for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority

Parliamentary Questions

Mr Watson: To ask the Leader of the House if he will review his advice to Ministers on responses to parliamentary questions to take into account the determination of the Information Commissioner on the application of commercial confidentiality criteria to a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (reference FS 50688016); and if he will make a statement. [649]

Sir George Young: Individual answers are a matter for the relevant Minister. Guidance issued on the Cabinet Office website suggests that commercial confidentiality may be a reason for not providing information in response to a written question. While requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and written parliamentary questions are different, we do however advise that Ministers should be as open as possible with Parliament and the public.

The hon. Gentleman may wish to write to me with further information on the issue that he raises.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1286]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office paid 99.7% of invoices from suppliers within 10 days of receipt in March 2010 and 98.2% in April 2010.

Departmental Electronic Equipment

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* plasma and *(b)* LCD televisions there are in Ministerial offices in his Department. [396]

David Mundell: There are no plasma or LCD televisions in ministerial offices.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many full-time equivalent staff at each Civil Service grade are employed in the private office of each Minister in his Department. [119]

David Mundell: Information on staff numbers, including numbers of staff working in Private Office, is published routinely in the Office's Annual Report, copies of which are in the House Library. One member of staff is a member of the Senior Civil Service and the others range between the equivalent of Senior Executive Officer down to Executive Officer level.

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what his estimate is of the cost to the public purse of proposed reductions in numbers of non-front line staff in his Department and its agencies. [496]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office keep its staffing complement under constant review to ensure that the most efficient use is made of public resources. It has made not made any recent decisions to reduce staff numbers.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many special advisers *(a)* he, *(b)* the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and *(c)* the Advocate-General (i) has appointed and (ii) plans to appoint. [328]

David Mundell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Departmental Official Hospitality

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what budget his Department has allocated for entertainment, including alcohol, in each of the next three years. [1321]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office does not separately record entertainment costs, including alcohol. Any such costs will be met from within the Office's hospitality budget. The budget for future years will be calculated once the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review is announced.

All expenditure incurred is in accordance with the principles of Managing Public Money and the Treasury handbook on Regularity and Propriety.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when and in what form he plans to publish a list of all items of expenditure by his Department over £25,000. [282]

David Mundell: The Prime Minister has written to Cabinet Ministers reiterating transparency commitments made in the Coalition Programme for Government, and setting out a timetable for achieving them. In particular, all new items of central Government spending over £25,000 will be published online in an open format from November 2010.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to consult trade unions in his Department concerning deficit reduction plans. [613]

David Mundell: Any deficit reduction plans which affect staff will be shared with staff and the relevant trade unions, as appropriate.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Carers' Benefits

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to amend the regimes affecting *(a)* benefits and *(b)* other assistance provided by his Department for carers. [503]

Maria Miller: The Government recognise that the UK's 6 million carers play an indispensable role in looking after friends or family members who need support. We also acknowledge the important role that both cash benefits and employment assistance play, especially in enabling many carers to combine care giving with paid employment.

We have set out our commitment to simplify the benefit system in order to improve work incentives and encourage responsibility and fairness. We will consider carefully the needs of carers as we develop our thinking on welfare reform. Additionally, over the coming months we will be considering the services that Jobcentre Plus currently provide for carers along with other issues affecting their daily lives such as flexible working.

Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for the future of the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission. [336]

Maria Miller: The Government are committed to supporting families, ending child poverty and encouraging, where possible, shared parenting from the earliest stages of pregnancy. For families where both parents do not live together, helping to deliver financial support is an important part of achieving these broader objectives. The 2010-11 business plan for CMEC sets out their role in this process.

http://www.childmaintenance.org/en/pdf/Business-Plan-2010.pdf

Detailed future plans are subject to review, along with all areas of Government expenditure.

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to his Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff employed by (i) his Department and (ii) its agencies; [627]

(2) what his estimate is of the cost to the public purse of proposed reductions in numbers of non-front line staff in his Department and its agencies. [501]

Chris Grayling: The information requested is not available.

Future Jobs Fund: Bristol

Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Bristol East constituency have received assistance from the Future Jobs Fund. [1164]

Chris Grayling: The information requested is not available.

Poverty: Children

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will bring forward proposals to seek to eliminate child poverty in the lifetime of this Parliament. [337]

Maria Miller: Section 14 of the Coalition document confirms the Government's commitment to ending child poverty in the UK.

The Child Poverty Act commits Government to meeting targets towards ending child poverty by 2020. The Government must also publish a strategy to show how they will meet these targets by March 2011.

The latest figures (2008-09) show that 2.8 million children remain in poverty, well off the target set by the previous Government of reducing this to 1.7 million by 2010-11. It is important that over the next 12 months a robust strategy be put in place to put the 2020 commitment back on track. In doing so we will want to listen to and consult a wide range of bodies.

We believe that the best way to tackle this issue is to address the root causes of poverty. It is only by doing this that we can effectively improve the outcomes for children in a sustainable way.

Unemployment Benefits: Medical Examinations

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what criteria must be met before an individual may be judged medically unfit for work; and under what circumstances an individual may be deemed unable to work again. [715]

Chris Grayling: Eligibility for employment and support allowance is assessed using the work capability assessment. The work capability assessment focuses on the functional effects of an individual's condition on their physical and mental capabilities, rather than on the condition itself. The criteria are set out in Parts 5, 6 and Schedules 2 and 3 of the Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008 (SI 2008 No. 794).

It is important that we move away from previous practices of parking people on this benefit, so anyone getting employment and support allowance will have a new assessment if and when their individual circumstances and functional abilities are expected to have changed. If at this point the decision-maker determines that they no longer meet the eligibility criteria, they will be found fit for work.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Electoral Register

Chris Ruane: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission with reference to the Answer of 6 May 2009, *Official Report*, columns 222-3W, on the electoral register, which electoral registration officers identified themselves as below the standard for using information sources to verify entries on the register of electors and identify potential new electors. [164]

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that in 2008, 18 Electoral Registration Officers were below performance standard 1, 'Using information sources to verify entries on the register of electors and identify potential new electors'.

The Commission further informs me that in 2009, three Electoral Registration Officers were below the same performance standard.

The relevant officers are listed by local authority as follows.

EROs below Performance Standard 1

2008

Barnsley
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Blaby
Blackburn with Darwen
Brentwood
Chester-le-street[1]
Durham[1]
Harborough
Ipswich
North East Derbyshire
North Lanarkshire[2]
Nottingham
Sutton
South Lanarkshire[2]
Three Rivers
Windsor and Maidenhead
Weymouth and Portland
Walsall

2009

Bradford
Nottingham
Sefton

[1] Chester-le Street and Durham are now part of County Durham unitary authority.

[2] North and South Lanarkshire are covered by one ERO.

Chris Ruane: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, in which local authorities electoral registration officers have declared themselves to be underperforming in one or more areas of electoral registration. [174]

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that in 2008, 297 Electoral Registration Officers were below at least one performance standard. In 2009, 185 Electoral Registration Officers were below at least one performance standard. A list of the Electoral Registration Officers by local authority has been placed in the Library.

More information about Electoral Registration Officers' performance against the standards can be found at:

http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards/results_and_analysis

Chris Ruane: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission how much each local authority spent per elector on electoral registration in the last year for which figures are available. [180]

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that it has placed a document in the Library which shows local authority spending per elector on electoral registration for the financial years 2007-08 and 2008-09, where the information is available.

The Commission further informs me that it has published full financial data for each local authority in Great Britain, covering the 2007-08 and 2008-09 financial years. The information can be found on the Commission's website:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards/financial-information

The Commission is collecting information for the financial year 2009-10, which will be published on its website next year.

General Election 2010: Young People

Jo Swinson: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, what recent estimate the Electoral Commission has made of the number and proportion of people aged 18 to 24 who voted in the last general election. [893]

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that it has made no such estimate. However, Ipsos MORI estimate that 44% of 18 to 24-year-olds voted in the last general election.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces: Health Services

Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what targets have been set for the recruitment of armed forces medical personnel. [852]

Mr Robathan: Figures for the medical trades/corps for which recruitment targets have been set are shown in the following tables:

Royal Navy

	Financial year 2010-11
Officers	
Queen Alexandra Royal Navy Nursing Service	5
Environmental health officer	2
Doctors	19
Dentists	3
Ratings	
Naval nurse (qualified)	11
Naval nurse (student)	4
Medical assistant	32
Medical assistant (submarines)	7
Dental surgery assistant	7

Army officers

	Financial year	
	2010	*2011*
Royal Army Medical Corps	70	70
Royal Army Veterinary Corps	3	3
Royal Army Dental Corps	12	12
Queen Alexandra Royal Army Nursing Corps	24	24

Soldiers

	Financial year 2010-11
Combat medical technician	140
Environmental health technician	2

Soldiers

	Financial year 2010-11
Biomedical scientist	3
Operating department practitioner	3
Pharmaceutical technician	1
Dog trainer	20
Veterinary technician	1
Dental support specialist	3
Registered Nurse adult health	31
Registered Nurse mental health	0
Health Care Assistant	8

RAF

	Financial year 2010-11
Medical Officer	33
Dental Officer	4
Nursing Officer	16
Registered Nurses	14
Student Nurses	12
Physiotherapist	14

Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with reference to the answer of 29 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 639W, on "Armed Forces: Health Services", whether the analysis of the extent to which armed forces medical personnel are in breach of the single service harmony guidelines is *(a)* complete and *(b)* available. [898]

Mr Robathan: More comprehensive data on medical personnel in breach of individual Service harmony guidelines are now available and are shown in the following tables. However, this information is not available against individual medical trades in the Army. Investigations on whether this will be possible given the nature of the data are ongoing.

Royal Navy

Branch/Trade	*Personnel over Royal Navy harmony guidelines (%)*
Dental hygienists	1
Medical assistant	1

Note:
Data covers 36 month period up to 1 April 2010.

Army

The following table details the number and proportion of Army personnel within the Royal Army Medial Corps and the Queen Alexandra Royal Army Nursing Corps Arms/Services that breach the Individual Harmony Guidelines.

Arm/Service	*Personnel over Army harmony guidelines (%)*
RAMC	7
QARANC	5

Note:
The statistics relate only to trained regular officers and soldiers as at 1 January 2010.

It should be noted that, because some personnel do not record the reason for their separated service on the JPA system, the above figures may not capture all personnel over harmony guidelines.

RAF

Branch/Trade	*Personnel over RAF harmony guidelines (%)*
Medical Officer	5
Nursing Officer	7
Medical Support Officer	9
RAF Medic	4
Nurse	4

Note:
Data derived from statistics for 1 January 2010.

Armed Forces: Housing

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what powers the *(a)* Ministry of Defence Police and *(b)* Royal Military Police have in respect of responding to criminal and antisocial behaviour involving civilians living in or visiting former Ministry of Defence housing at the Colchester Garrison; and if he will make a statement. [357]

Mr Robathan: Essex police lead on investigating criminal offences at Colchester garrison as they do across the country. As the Ministry of Defence police have full constabulary powers they can, at the request of Essex police, investigate crimes and antisocial behaviour. The Royal Military Police jurisdiction is limited to offences committed by service personnel.

Armed Forces: Recruitment

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much *(a)* the Royal Air Force, *(b)* the Royal Navy and *(c)* the Army spent on recruitment in each of the last five years. [666]

Mr Robathan: The total recruitment spend for the Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy and the Army in each of the last five years is as follows:

£ million

	Financial year				
	2005-06	*2006-07*	*2007-08*	*2008-09*	*2009-10*
Royal Navy	—	—	34.80	36.39	36.86
Army	86.40	86.50	108.90	129.60	129.60
RAF	37.14	38.49	41.43	55.43	52.18

Note:
Figures for Royal Navy spend can only be provided for the last three years due to difficulties in recalling data from historic records.

The total spend is made up by the following: manpower (military and civilian wages), marketing, recruiting incentives, recruitment vehicles and fuel, equipment support, rent, infrastructure, utilities and depreciation (costs for recruiting offices etc.) and the IT system used during the application process.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on recruitment advertisements in national and local media in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* Wales in each of the last five years. [667]

Mr Robathan: The majority of advertising conducted by the Ministry of Defence is targeted at the recruitment of personnel to the armed forces and civil service. In addition, the Department may promote other initiatives such as Armed Forces Day.

The data are not held or listed against country as requested, but represent UK-wide activity. Information for 2009-10 is not yet available.

Advertising spend

£ million

	Print (press and poster)	Online and interactive TV	TV and cinema	Radio
2004-05	2.0	0.8	15.9	2.3
2005-06	2.5	1.6	15.2	2.2
2006-07	2.0	2.3	10.1	1.3
2007-08	3.7	3.0	18.7	1.6
2008-09	4.9	4.6	17.4	1.5

Royal Fleet Auxiliary

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary; and if he will make a statement. [1037]

Nick Harvey: The arrangements for delivering maritime operational support through the Royal Fleet Auxiliary have been under review since the end of last year. This work has not yet been completed and may in any case be affected by the Strategic Defence and Security Review. It would be premature to speculate about its outcome at this stage.

Trident

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether plans for the replacement of Trident will be included in the Strategic Defence Review. [1300]

Dr Fox: Both the value for money review of the Trident programme and the re-examination of the UK's declaratory nuclear policy will be conducted within the framework of the Strategic Defence and Security Review.

WALES

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of invoices from suppliers to her Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1284]

Mrs Gillan: In March and April 2010 respectively, 98.8% and 95.6% of invoices were paid by the Wales Office within ten days.

Departmental Electronic Equipment

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* plasma and *(b)* LCD televisions there are in ministerial offices in her Department. [398]

Mr David Jones: None.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full-time equivalent staff at each Civil Service grade are employed in the private office of each Minister in her Department. [121]

Mrs Gillan: There are currently 3.63 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in my office and 3.0 FTE in the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State's office. The following table shows a breakdown of the FTEs by grade:

Grade	SofS office	PUSS office	Number Total
Senior Civil Service	1.0	—	1.0
Senior Executive Officer	—	1.0	1.0
Executive Officer	2.0	2.0	3.0
Admin Officer	0.63	—	0.63
Total	3.63	3.0	5.63

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which Ministers in her Department have been issued with *(a)* a Blackberry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1421]

Mr David Jones: Both the Secretary of State and I have been issued with a standard mobile telephone.

Departmental Official Cars

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Government *(a)* cars and *(b)* drivers are allocated to Ministers in her Department. [304]

Mrs Gillan: The current interim arrangements for The Wales Office are *(a)* three cars and *(b)* two drivers allocated to departmental Ministers. Two cars are in London and one is in Cardiff. This is supplemented by the use of pool cars as needed.

The new Ministerial Code, published on 21 May 2010, contains changes that affect ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. It states that:

"the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed."

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with Departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements.

The Ministerial Code, published on 21 May 2010, is available on the Cabinet Office website.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when and in what form she plans to publish a list of all items of expenditure by her Department over £25,000. [284]

Mrs Gillan: The Prime Minister has written to Cabinet Ministers[1] reiterating transparency commitments made in the Coalition Programme for Government, and setting out a timetable for achieving them. In particular, all new items of central Government spending over £25,000 will be published online in an open format from November 2010.

[1] http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/statements-and-articles/2010/05/letter-to-government-eg-up-data-51204

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture: Subsidies

Tim Farron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much her Department allocated for potential disallowances and penalties for claims made against the Rural Payments Agency in each of the last five years. [434]

Mr Paice *[holding answer 2 June 2010]*: The following financial provisions were created in the Department's annual accounts in each of the last five years for potential disallowances and late payment penalties arising from the Rural Payments Agency's administration of CAP schemes. These provision figures represent the Department's estimate of what disallowance was expected to arise in future years. In most cases the actual amounts are only known several years later. Please note that the following figure for the 2009-10 financial year has not yet been audited by the National Audit Office.

	£000
2005-06	115,750
2006-07	197,812
2007-08	-15,000[1]
2008-09	0
2009-10	58,383

[1] The reduction in 2007-08 was due to a reassessment of potential disallowance upon receipt of further information from the EC.

Biofuels

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on increasing the number of anaerobic digestion facilities for the production of biogas. [347]

Richard Benyon: We will introduce measures to promote a large increase in energy from waste through anaerobic digestion. Central to this will be work to facilitate an increase in the number of anaerobic digestion facilities producing biogas from waste.

Bovine Tuberculosis: Disease Control

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of culling badgers as a means of controlling TB in cattle; and if she will make a statement. [892]

Mr Paice: The Government have committed that, as part of a package of measures, we will introduce a carefully-managed and science-led policy of badger control in areas with high and persistent levels of bovine TB.

We need to consider all the issues carefully, including the scientific evidence, to work out the detail of the package to ensure we get it right. We will be looking at vaccine and culling options as part of that package.

Cattle: Animal Welfare

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will bring forward proposals to *(a)* set standards for welfare in cows and *(b)* prohibit the factory farming of dairy cows; and if she will make a statement. [1125]

Mr Paice: The welfare of livestock, including cows, is protected by the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 and the Animal Welfare Act 2006. There are codes of recommendations published on the DEFRA website which farmers are required by law to have access to, and be familiar with, which encourage high standards of husbandry. Enforcement action can be taken against farmers who do not comply with this legislation.

The Government welcome innovative and entrepreneurial efforts by dairy farmers to improve their global competitiveness, while protecting the environment and meeting animal welfare standards. All dairy cattle, in whatever system they are kept, are protected by comprehensive animal welfare legislation in England. It is important to recognise that poor welfare can occur in both intensive and extensive systems, and the most significant influence on the welfare of livestock is the stock-keeper, not the system in which it is reared.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the cost to the public purse of proposed reductions in numbers of non-front line staff in her Department and its agencies. [489]

Richard Benyon: The Chancellor's statement about savings of £6.2 billion across the public sector outlined that DEFRA and its arm's length bodies would contribute to £162 million of this saving. As a Department we have identified some specific areas where savings will be achieved in addition to the efficiencies being implemented across the Civil Service.

At present, no decisions have been taken on reductions in the numbers of staff. It is therefore not possible to make an estimate of the cost. Any staff reductions will be made in line with business need and with a view to providing value for money.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many special advisers *(a)* she and *(b)* each named Minister in her Department (i) has appointed to date and (ii) plans to appoint. [309]

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments she has made since her appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [372]

Richard Benyon: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Departmental Official Cars

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many Government *(a)* cars and *(b)* drivers are allocated to Ministers in her Department. [294]

Richard Benyon: Under the arrangements inherited from Ministers in the previous Government, the current interim arrangements for DEFRA are *(a)* two cars and *(b)* two drivers allocated to departmental Ministers, supplemented by the use of pool cars if needed.

The new Ministerial Code, published on 21 May 2010, contains changes that affect ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. It states that "the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed".

DEFRA Ministers have decided not to have allocated cars and drivers. DEFRA is working with the Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency to effect the transition to the new arrangements.

The Ministerial Code, published on 21 May 2010, is available on the Cabinet Office website.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the cost to her Department of the *(a)* implementation of penalty clauses and payments in its contracts and *(b)* potential legal action arising from the deferral and cancellation of contracts and projects under her Department's plans to achieve cost savings; and whether those estimates are included in the total cost savings to be achieved by her Department. [561]

Richard Benyon: Our plans for achieving the Department's share of the £6 billion savings announced by the Chancellor on 24 May 2010 will not, as far as we are aware, raise the issue of meeting any such claims.

Flood Control

Mr Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she *(a)* has had and *(b)* plans to have with (i) the Environment Agency and (ii) other flood partners on (A) the recommendations of the Pitt Review and (B) the provisions of section 14 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 on the sharing of information with local authorities and local flooding working groups. [1187]

Richard Benyon: Ministers have had initial discussions with the Environment Agency and are starting to meet others with an interest in flood and coastal erosion risk management. Officials have regular discussions with the Environment Agency, local authorities and others about the Pitt Review recommendations and the Flood and Water Management Act.

Incinerators

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she plans to bring forward proposals to require incinerator operators to install continuous emission monitoring systems for the detection of dioxins and heavy metals including mercury in flue gas emissions. [549]

Richard Benyon: Monitoring requirements for waste incinerators are set out in the Waste Incineration Directive (2000/76/EC). They are implemented in England and Wales by the Environment Agency or—for very small incinerators—local authorities through the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010.

Proposals for detailed changes to EU requirements have come from other countries during the negotiation of the proposed industrial emissions directive, now approaching Second Reading in the European Parliament. It is not yet clear whether these will be incorporated in the finalised directive and become binding upon member states.

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the merits of alternatives to mass burn incineration; and whether she plans to provide assistance to local authorities to implement alternative schemes; [550]

(2) what her most recent assessment is of the level of efficiency of energy generation from *(a)* mass-burn incinerators and *(b)* alternative forms of energy generating waste disposal facilities including anaerobic digesters. [554]

Richard Benyon: DEFRA and DECC are jointly leading a cross-Government Energy from Waste (EfW) project that will report towards the end of the year. This will produce a clear policy framework through which the most environmentally, socially and economically beneficial outcomes can be achieved. The project will consider the range of technologies and waste feedstocks and recommend which feedstocks are suitable to produce EfW, and which technologies are best for individual waste feedstocks.

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she has made a recent assessment of the cost of building new mass burn incineration facilities. [551]

Richard Benyon: DEFRA funds the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), which performs an annual survey to assess gate fees charged for a range of alternative options in the treatment and disposal of waste, including incineration plants. Further details can be found on WRAP'S website:

www.wrap.org.uk

Construction costs for Energy from Waste (EfW) plants (incinerators) are project-specific dependent on size, specification and location of plant; and timing relative to external events like exchange rate movements and the availability and cost of finance.

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she for the future number of mass-burn incineration facilities. [552]

Richard Benyon: Local authorities have the responsibility for deciding how waste is managed in their respective areas. The choice of technology must reflect local circumstances, which will vary, and it is important that any plans for Energy from Waste facilities emerge out of local waste strategies to ensure the optimisation of reuse, recycling and composting activities.

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department plans to increase the level of reduction, re-use and recycling of municipal solid waste for the purpose of minimising the amount of such waste which is sent for incineration or landfill. [553]

Richard Benyon: Local authorities are responsible for the management of waste disposal in their areas and they are encouraged to follow the waste hierarchy, in which energy from waste ranks higher than landfill but below waste prevention, re-use, and recycling.

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on mass-burn incineration of municipal solid waste. [555]

Richard Benyon: DEFRA is working to manage waste as far up the waste hierarchy as possible—with energy from waste ranking higher than landfill but below waste prevention, re-use, and recycling.

There will always be some waste streams that cannot be re-used, recycled or composted and recovering energy from that waste, including by incineration, results in reduced greenhouse gas emissions compared to the alternative of landfill. Recovering energy from waste is complementary to, and will not displace, waste reduction methods further up the waste hierarchy.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to consult trade unions in *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies on cost reduction plans. [605]

Richard Benyon: It is standard practice to consult the Department's trade unions on all matters concerning the contractual terms and conditions of its employees.

DEFRA, including its agencies, will use its existing consultation processes to discuss future deficit reduction plans with our trade unions.

Water Charges

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which of the recommendations of the Walker Review of charging for household water and sewerage services he plans to implement. [988]

Richard Benyon: Ministers will consider the recommendations made in the Walker Review ahead of taking decisions around implementation.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the WaterSure system in protecting vulnerable water customers. [989]

Richard Benyon: The Walker Review of charging for household water and sewerage services examined the WaterSure scheme. Ministers will consider the conclusions of the Walker Review, including the recommendations regarding WaterSure, and respond to them in due course.

Whales: Conservation

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she plans to take in respect of the possible end to the International Whaling Commission's moratorium on whaling. [1180]

Richard Benyon: This Government oppose the resumption of commercial whaling, and protecting the moratorium on commercial whaling is of great importance. We will strive to ensure long-term protection and conservation of whale populations worldwide, and are taking every opportunity to build strong support for a continuation of the moratorium, including raising this matter with Ministers in Europe.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects the report of the Saville Inquiry to be published; and if he will ensure that the cost to the public purse of all expenditure in relation to the Saville Inquiry is published at that time. [240]

Mr Paterson: I refer the hon. Member to my statement of 26 May 2010, *Official Report*, column 5 WS, where I informed the House that the report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, chaired by Lord Saville, will be published on Tuesday 15 June.

Financial information relating to the Inquiry has previously been published in this House. I intend to publish the most up-to-date financial information available at the same time as the Inquiry's report is published.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many full-time equivalent staff at each Civil Service grade are employed in the private office of each Minister in his Department. [118]

Mr Paterson: There is a joint Private Office in London which supports my work and that of the Minister of State. In Belfast, Ministers do not have a dedicated Private Office but have access to central support staff that carry out a broad range of functions for the Department.

The breakdown of staff in London office is as follows:

	Number
A	1
B1	1
B2	1
C	2 full-time and 1 part-time
D1	1
D2	1 part-time

There is also an agency typist.

The breakdown of central support staff in Belfast is as follows:

	Number
B2	1
C	1
D1	1 full-time and 1 part-time
D2	1 full-time and 1 part-time

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the ministerial responsibilities are of *(a)* him and *(b)* the Minister of State for Northern Ireland. [241]

Mr Paterson: The ministerial responsibilities are as follows:

Secretary of State

overall responsibility for all aspects of the Department's work; and relationships with the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly, on the Department's overall strategy, and on the Government's approach to the past, constitutional issues, national security and budgetary priorities.

Minister of State

Leads on human rights, day-to-day national security matters, sponsorship of the Parades Commission, equality and electoral law. He also supports the Secretary of State across the range of the Department's responsibilities in Northern Ireland and in Westminster.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of the *(a)* implementation of penalty clauses and payments in its contracts and *(b)* potential legal action arising from the deferral and cancellation of contracts and projects under his Department's plans to achieve cost savings; and whether those estimates are included in the total cost savings to be achieved by his Department. [560]

John Penrose: The Department's key contracts are currently under review. As such, no estimate has yet been made of the total potential cost in the event of *(a)* the implementation of penalty clauses and payments in contracts and *(b)* potential legal action arising from the deferral and cancellation of contracts and projects.

Digital Broadcasting: Radio

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport if he will assess the merits of withdrawing the proposals for switchover from FM to digital radio. [582]

Mr Vaizey: We will be looking closely at the proposals for a digital radio upgrade; however, around a quarter of all radio listening is now to digital, so a future transition to digital radio continues to gain impetus.

Any transition to digital radio will not necessarily mean switching off FM radio in its entirety, and it is important that any switchover date is realistic in terms of consumer engagement, technical advances, in particular as regards car radios, and financial constraints.

Olympic Games 2012: Tickets

Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport whether tickets for the London 2012 Olympics have been designated for allocation to *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* civil servants. [854]

Hugh Robertson: Three quarters of the 10 million tickets available will be open to the public through a public ballot process. The remaining tickets will be primarily for overseas fans and as travel packages within the UK, as well as for sponsors and rights holders. In addition, Government and other Games public sector delivery partners will be entitled to purchase a small number of tickets from the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG). The Government have not decided whether to take up this offer. All tickets need to be purchased from LOCOG—there are no free tickets.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what plans he has to consult trade unions in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agency on cost reduction plans. [601]

John Penrose: The Department is already in informal discussions with both staff and trade unions, both at departmental and agency level. We will continue to talk to our staff and, where relevant, their trade unions too, and will enter into formal consultations wherever there is a requirement to do so.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Africa: Peacekeeping Operations

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the UK has provided to the UN mission *(a)* MONUC, *(b)* MINURCAT, *(c)* UNAMID, *(d)* UNMIL, *(e)* UNMIS and *(f)* UNOCI in the last three years. [1158]

Mr Bellingham: Over the last three years the UK has contributed between 7.8 and 8.1% towards the costs of UN Peacekeeping. Assessed contributions to UN peacekeeping missions are paid in US Dollars.

Our sterling costs for those missions covered in the question, over the last three UK financial years, are as follows:

£

	2007-08	*2008-09*	*2009-10*
MONUC (Democratic Republic of Congo)	39,728,447	49,272,772	61,892,423
MINURCAT (Chad/ Central African Republic)	5,771,218	18,153,470	29,474,421
UNAMID (Darfur)	37,228,728	55,229,550	68,961,432
UNMIL (Liberia)	25,403,196	25,324,767	25,687,061
UNMIS (Sudan	28,920,533	29,807,091	40,761,445
UNOCI (Cote D'Ivoire)	15,184,311	19,968,023	23,775,607

The figures for 2009-10 are estimates, as we cannot confirm final figures until the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's resource accounts are closed. These figures do not include any bilateral assistance or training to troop-contributing countries.

Burma: Elections

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the security situation in Burma in respect of the forthcoming elections. [1157]

Mr Jeremy Browne: Burmese elections planned for later this year are set to be held under deeply oppressive conditions. Recently passed election laws and existing security provisions place severe restrictions on campaigning and participation in the process. Over 2,100 political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, remain under detention, and arbitrary arrests continue. The regime has rejected offers of international election observers. In such circumstances, elections will not have legitimacy or international credibility. Tensions between the military Government and Burma's ethnic ceasefire groups have also increased, as they resist the regime's attempt to absorb their armed wings into the Burmese army.

China: Family Planning

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the discovery of foetuses and bodies of babies in the Guangfu river, Jining City, China; whether he plans to make representations to the Government of China on that matter; and if he will make a statement. [74]

Mr Jeremy Browne: We are aware of reports of the discovery of foetuses and babies' bodies in the Guangfu River in March this year, and of reports that hospital workers connected to it were suspended or removed from their posts pending an investigation. We have no further information on the case.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what reports he has received since his appointment on the operation of a one child policy by the Government of China; and if he will make a statement; [75]

(2) what discussions *(a)* he has had since his appointment and *(b)* plans to have with the Government of China on its population planning policies; and if he will make a statement; [76]

(3) what recent discussions officials in the British Embassy in China have had with officials of the Government of China on *(a)* reports of forced abortion and sterilisation and *(b)* birth control quotas in China; and if he will make a statement; [77]

(4) if he will make representations to the Government of China seeking the relaxation of its population planning policy; and if he will make a statement. [78]

Mr Jeremy Browne: Since his appointment, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not received reports about China's one child policy, and has not had any discussions with the Chinese Government about it. We are concerned about the implementation of China's Population and Family Planning Law. This issue was last raised in detail under the previous Government with the Chinese authorities at the 16th round of the UK/China Human Rights Dialogue in January 2008. We do not dispute China's right or need to implement family planning policies but we do believe they should be based on principles of consent.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many full-time equivalent staff at each Civil Service grade are employed in the private office of each Minister in his Department. [113]

Mr Lidington: The number of civil service staff (excluding Special Advisers) employed in each Foreign and Commonwealth Office ministerial office is as follows:

	Number
Foreign Secretary's Office	
SMS2	1
D7	1
D6	2
B3	5
A2	8
A1	1
Henry Bellingham's Office	
D6	1
C4	2
B3	1
A2	1
Jeremy Browne's Office	
D7	1
C4	1

	Number
B3	2
A2	1
David Luddington's Office	
D6	1
C4	2
B3	1
A2	1
The right hon. Lord Howell of Guildford's Office	
C4	1
A2	1
Alistair Burt's Office	
D6	1
C4	2
B3	1
A2	1

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the cost to the public purse of proposed reductions in numbers of non-front line staff in his Department and its agencies. [491]

Alistair Burt: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office expects to achieve all its currently anticipated reductions in UK civil service staff through a recruitment freeze and natural wastage. These would not incur compensation costs.

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* front-line and *(b)* other staff were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) each of its agencies in the latest year for which figures are available; and what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to the public purse of employing staff of each type at each of those bodies. [537]

Alistair Burt: The average number of permanent front-line Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) civil servants, in London and overseas, in financial year 2009-10 was 2,868. The forecast salary cost for these staff is £157.3 million. In addition, approximately 10,000 locally engaged staff at overseas posts were employed during financial year 2009-10 costing £186.5 million.

There were an average of 1,562 other UK based FCO civil servants employed during financial year 2009-10 costing £85.7 million.

The FCO Services Trading Fund employed an average of 927 UK based staff during financial year 2009-10 costing £44.8 million.

Wilton Park Agency employed an average of 77 UK based staff during financial year 2009-10 costing £2.5 million.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he plans to take to save £55 million from his Department's budget for 2010-11. [103]

Alistair Burt: The £55 million will be delivered from cutting waste and inefficiency, and reducing lower priority spend including through:

reduced spend on consultancy and support functions;

more collaborative procurement with other Departments who have a presence overseas, such as the Department for International Development;

increasing asset sales in less-used parts of Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) overseas estates; and

a review of the FCO's programme spend to be led by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of the *(a)* implementation of penalty clauses and payments in its contracts and *(b)* potential legal action arising from the deferral and cancellation of contracts and projects under his Department's plans to achieve cost savings; and whether those estimates are included in the total cost savings to be achieved by his Department. [563]

Alistair Burt: The ministerial announcements of 31 May 2010 relating to the £6.2 billion of cuts included an intention to conduct a review of major projects and renegotiate major contracts with top suppliers to Government to seek efficiencies. These programmes will be led by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) on behalf of central Government. To achieve maximum savings, the analysis of contingent liabilities will form part of the review methodology. Contract deferral and termination is taken very seriously by Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The OGC will also take into account any potential costs associated with those areas during their review.

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to his Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff employed by (i) his Department and (ii) its agencies. [637]

Alistair Burt: We have not made any estimates of redundancy costs as we currently have no plans to make any staff redundant.

Iran: Sanctions

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he plans to take to tackle the shipment of weapons and funds from Iran to *(a)* Afghanistan, *(b)* Iraq, *(c)* Lebanon and *(d)* Gaza in the next six months; and if he will make a statement. [R] [69]

Alistair Burt: Iranian support in the form of weapons, funding and training to the Taliban, Iraqi militia groups, Hezbollah, Hamas and other Palestinian Rejectionist Groups is unacceptable. It further undermines international confidence in the Iranian regime's intentions, and is at odds with the regime's claim to the international community and its own people, that it supports stability in the Middle East and Afghanistan.

The UK has worked with and will continue to work with International Security Assistance Force to interdict shipments of weapons to the Taliban, including from Iran. We will work with international partners and in the UN to urge Iran to comply with international law, including UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR). Iran's transfers of weapons to the groups mentioned are contrary to UNSCRs 1737, 1747, 1803, 1701 (Hezbollah) and 1860 (Gaza).

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he plans to take at the United Nations to seek to prevent *(a)* weapons and *(b)* funds from the Government of Iran being sent to terrorist groups in (i) Afghanistan, (ii) Iraq, (iii) Gaza and (iv) Lebanon in the next six months; and if he will make a statement. [70]

Alistair Burt: Following a series of sanctions violations by Iran in 2009 (including the interdictions of weapons from Iran on the Hansa India, Monchegorsk and Francop vessels), the UN Sanctions Committee on Iran issued an Implementation Assistance Notice in January 2010. This urged all UN member states to be especially alert to further violations, in particular to exercise enhanced vigilance over all Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines activity, including subjecting its cargo to enhanced scrutiny.

We and E3+3 partners are leading efforts to secure a UN resolution imposing further sanctions on Iran in the light of the Iranian Government's continued refusal to abide by UN Security Council Resolutions on its nuclear programme. We are seeking targeted measures, including against the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which funds and supplies proxy groups in the region.

We will pay close attention to these issues and consider further means of constraining Iran's ability to cause instability in the region. The proximity talks that are under way, between the Israelis and Palestinians, are more important than ever to help pave the way towards a comprehensive peace in the region.

Middle East: Armed Conflict

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the compatibility of Israel's blockade of Gaza with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention. [1190]

Alistair Burt: Although there is no permanent physical Israeli presence in Gaza, given the significant control that Israel has over Gaza's borders, airspace and territorial waters, Israel retains obligations under the fourth Geneva convention as an occupying power.

The UK has been clear that the current restrictions are unacceptable and counterproductive and it is the people of Gaza who suffer from them. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made this clear in his conversation with the Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman. We will continue to work with international partners and press the Israeli Government to allow unfettered access of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will press the EU to raise the restrictions placed by the Government of Israel on access for humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials into Gaza at the next discussion of the Middle East Quartet; and if he will make a statement. [1193]

Alistair Burt: As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear in his public statement on 5 June 2010, we continue to press the Government of Israel to lift Gaza's closure. The Foreign Secretary is also discussing these issues urgently with our international partners—including during his ongoing visits to EU capitals. We welcome Quartet discussion of these issues.

Middle East: Politics and Government

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps the Government have taken to increase the level of political stability in the Middle East; and if he will make a statement. [93]

Alistair Burt: The UK continues to press both sides to show the courage, commitment and compromise needed to make real progress on the peace process.

We remain determined to do everything possible to work towards a two state solution that achieves a viable and sovereign Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel, with its right to live in peace and security recognised by all its neighbours. The proximity talks that are under way are more important than ever to help pave the way towards a comprehensive peace in the region.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister underlined our commitment in his recent conversations with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian President Abbas. And my right hon. friend the Foreign Secretary also made this clear in the House.

Nigeria: Politics and Government

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's most recent assessment is of the security situation in Nigeria, with particular reference to Jos; and whether he has made representations to the Government of Nigeria on that situation. [1235]

Mr Bellingham: The security situation in Jos remains fragile following several disturbing outbreaks of violence since January. We have conveyed our concerns at a senior level to the Government of Nigeria and the Plateau State Government. We have made clear publicly that those who have committed atrocities should be held accountable. We believe a way forward must be found for the communities of Jos to live together in a spirit of reconciliation and dialogue. We continue to work with our international partners to support a long lasting peaceful solution to the intercommunal violence in Jos.

Occupied Territories: Housing

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the proposed demolition of houses in East Jerusalem; and if he will make a statement. [899]

Alistair Burt: We are aware of proposals by the Mayor of Jerusalem regarding demolition of homes in East Jerusalem.

The Government believe that any attempts by Israel to alter the character or demography of East Jerusalem are unacceptable and damaging to the peace process. House demolitions cause suffering to Palestinians, increase tension within the city and make it more difficult for Palestinians life to continue in East Jerusalem.

Both my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have reiterated in contacts with Israeli and Palestinian counterparts, the importance of proximity talks and overall progress on the peace process.

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on the proposed demolition of houses in East Jerusalem. [900]

Alistair Burt: I would like to make clear, with few exceptions, house demolitions in occupied territory, including in East Jerusalem, are in direct contravention of article 53 of the fourth Geneva convention.

Evictions of Palestinian families and the destruction of Palestinian homes and property are also deeply unhelpful to the wider Middle East Peace Process.

My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have reiterated to their Israeli counterparts the importance we attach to making progress towards a two-state solution.

South America: Embassies

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for the future of diplomatic posts in *(a)* Peru, *(b)* Colombia, *(c)* Venezuela, *(d)* Uruguay and *(e)* Chile. [1111]

Mr Jeremy Browne: We have no plans that would affect the future of diplomatic posts in those countries.

Sudan: Elections

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK citizens are based in Sudan as election observers; and what steps his Department is taking in response to President al-Bashir's threat to remove foreign observers. [1156]

Mr Bellingham: Five British citizens participated in the EU Election Observation Mission which was deployed for the Sudanese elections in April 2010. We are also aware that a number of British citizens also participated in a privately-organised election monitoring mission.

Our embassy staff in Khartoum and Juba also participated in diplomatic observation efforts.

The UK was concerned at President Bashir's threats towards election observers. We raised our concerns at a senior level with the Government of Sudan and sought reassurance that such threats would not be repeated.

Sudan: Politics and Government

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the security situation in Sudan; and if he will make a statement. [1155]

Mr Bellingham: Insecurity in Sudan is of serious concern and continues to have a devastating impact on the lives of many Sudanese across the country. The UK continues to support work towards the peaceful implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and an inclusive and lasting settlement in Darfur which is essential for long-term peace in Sudan.

In Darfur security has deteriorated considerably in the past few months, including the resumption of fighting between Government forces and Darfuri movements, intertribal conflict, attacks on peacekeepers and humanitarian workers and civil unrest in North Darfur. The fighting in Eastern Jebel Mara, and around Jebel Moon, is particularly worrying, with potentially severe humanitarian consequences for the civilian population. We continue to urge all sides to immediately cease hostilities and to allow humanitarian access.

We are also concerned by the situation in South Sudan. In 2009 over 390,000 people were forced from their homes and 2,500 were killed, a trend that has continued in 2010. Current insecurity in Jonglei and Unity states are particularly worrying. We continue to urge the Government of South Sudan and the United Nations Mission in Sudan to respond proactively to and reduce the risks of violent clashes. We are also working to improve the capacity of the Government of South Sudan to respond to and reduce insecurity.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to consult trade unions in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies on cost reduction plans. [607]

Alistair Burt: Discussion of how the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will meet its current savings targets is under way. We will share relevant information with the trade unions and consult as necessary.

Turkey: EU Enlargement

Mr David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Government supports Turkey's application to join the European Union. [515]

Mr Lidington: The Government strongly support Turkey's application to join the EU, subject to the rigorous application of the accession criteria.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Alcoholic Drinks: Prices

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps she plans to take to prevent the sale of alcohol below cost price; and if she will make a statement. [857]

James Brokenshire: We are determined to tackle the sale of alcohol below cost price, and clamp down on irresponsible sales where this has been shown to impact on crime and disorder. The Government are considering the detail of what "below-cost selling" constitutes and how the ban will be enforced. We will work closely with other Government D partments including DBIS and the OFT, as well as representatives of the licensed trade, including the supermarkets, to determine how best to effectively implement this commitment, without unduly adding a bureaucratic burden for businesses.

British Nationality: Assessments

Mr David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people with learning difficulties have applied to be exempted from the citizenship test; how many have been exempted; and how many who were not exempted subsequently *(a)* passed and *(b)* failed the test. [522]

Damian Green: Neither requests for exemption from the requirement to demonstrate a sufficient knowledge of life in the United Kingdom nor the outcomes of such requests are recorded centrally. The information requested could be obtained only by detailed examination of individual case records at disproportionate cost.

Crimes of Violence: Females

Jo Swinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether her Department plans to implement the cross-departmental strategy to tackle violence against women published in November 2009. [842]

James Brokenshire: Violence against women and girls remains prevalent in our society. This is unacceptable and there should be a cross-departmental approach to addressing it. I look forward to discussing with colleagues across Government how we will take forward our approach in this area as both coalition parties planned in opposition. As a first step, the coalition programme for government pledges to consider how to use proceeds from the victim surcharge to deliver up to 15 new rape crisis centres, and give existing rape crisis centres stable, long-term funding.

Jo Swinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether she plans to extend the pilot project for women with no recourse to public funds beyond August 2010; and whether she plans to make this initiative permanent. [843]

James Brokenshire: A Home Office pilot project for women with no recourse to public funds is due to run until the end of August 2010. It is being monitored on a monthly basis with a full evaluation taking place following completion of the pilot. This will assist in informing our next steps.

Deportation: Poland

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Polish nationals have been deported from the UK for reasons other than criminal convictions or other criminal proceedings in each of the last three years. [53]

Damian Green *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* The UK Border Agency has not deported any Polish nationals for reasons other than criminal convictions or other criminal proceedings in any of the last three years.

Total numbers of removals and voluntary departures of Polish nationals, including deportations, were 80 in 2007, 135 in 2008 and 160 in 2009.

Detention Centres: Children

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children have been transferred from Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre to centres elsewhere in the UK since 6 May 2010. [655]

Damian Green: Four children (from two families) have been transferred from Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre to centres elsewhere in the UK since 6 May 2010.

The data are normally used for management information only and are not subject to the detailed checks that apply for National Statistics publications.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government has to end child detentions at all immigration removal centres in the UK. [656]

Damian Green: This Government are committed to ending the detention of children for immigration purposes and we have already begun a review to find a way forward which protects the welfare of children, while ensuring the removal of those who have no right to be in the UK.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether Ministers in her Department have signed authorisations for the continued detention of children at immigration removal centres beyond 28 days since taking office. [657]

Damian Green: Local management information indicates that no authorisations have been sought for the continued detention of a child beyond 28 days since 12 May 2010.

These data are normally used for management information only and are not subject to the detailed checks that apply for National Statistics publications.

Identity Cards

Paul Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many identity cards were issued before 11 May 2010 *(a)* in total and *(b)* to residents of Greater Manchester. [467]

Damian Green *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* There were approximately 13,200 identity cards issued before 11 May 2010, around 6,000 of which were issued in Greater Manchester.

Paul Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether those identity cards that have already been issued will remain valid for a full 10 years; [468]

(2) if she will make arrangements to offer a refund to individuals who have paid for an identity card; [469]

(3)whether individuals who have paid for an identity card will be offered a credit when they next renew their passport. [470]

Damian Green *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* Currently Identity Cards remain valid until the date of expiry on the card. However, the Identity Documents Bill was laid before Parliament on 26 May 2010. The Bill proposes the scrapping of ID Cards and the National Identity Register. Cards would remain valid for one month after Royal Assent. The Identity and Passport Service is writing to each cardholder informing them of progress and contact details for further advice. Card refunds or credit for a future passport application will not be offered.

Oakington Immigration Removal Centre

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent steps have been taken to review policy and procedures at the Oakington Immigration Centre; and if she will make a statement. [67]

Damian Green *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* All immigration removal centres are governed by the Detention Centre Rules 2001, which are underpinned by a set of operating standards.

Centres are subject to a programme of inspection visits by HM Inspectorate of Prisons, and the UK Border Agency considers carefully any comments about the operation of the Centre. The last inspection report for Oakington was published in December 2008 and has a service improvement plan to address areas where UKBA accepted the recommendations. A copy of the plan is available in the House Library.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1268]

Gregory Barker: The percentage of invoices from suppliers paid by the Department within 10 days of receipt was 96% in March and 96.2% in April 2010.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many special advisers *(a)* he and *(b)* each named Minister in his Department (i) has appointed to date and (ii) plans to appoint. [316]

Gregory Barker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Departmental Public Appointments

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments he has made since his appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [375]

Gregory Barker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W to the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman).

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of the *(a)* implementation of penalty clauses and payments in its contracts and *(b)* potential legal action arising from the deferral and cancellation of contracts and projects under his Department's plans to achieve cost savings; and whether those estimates are included in the total cost savings to be achieved by his Department. [562]

Gregory Barker: The Department is continuing to assess the possibility of costs arising from penalty clauses or legal action arising from cancellation of contracts to achieve the cost savings. Our current estimate is that no such costs are likely to be incurred.

Transocean

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many oil rigs operating in UK waters *(a)* are owned by Transocean and *(b)* were registered in (i) the Marshall Islands, (ii) Panama, (iii) Liberia and (iv) the Bahamas. [1175]

Charles Hendry: The information requested is as follows:

(a) There are around 10 Transocean rigs in UK waters at the moment, with a further four currently idle and stacked.

(b) I understand that, of the 10 rigs currently operating here, (i) two are registered in the Marshall Islands, (ii) two in Panama, (iii) three in Liberia, and (iv) none in the Bahamas. Of the remaining three, two are registered in Vanuatu and one in Germany.

Warm Front Scheme

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what his policy is on the continuation of the Warm Front scheme beyond the 2010-11 financial year; and if he will make a statement. [845]

Gregory Barker: Funding for the scheme is just over £1.1 billion for the current three year spending period to March 2011. This includes a cash provision of £345 million for 2010-11. Funding for future years will be considered as part of the budget and spending review processes.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Anderson: To ask the Minister for Women and Equality what her most recent estimate is of the annual cost to the Government Equalities Office of redundancy payments for *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff. [646]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government Equalities Office has not made any redundancy payments since its inception and is not proposing to make any redundancy payments in 2010-11.

TRANSPORT

Aviation: Taxation

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to implement his proposal to replace *(a)* air passenger duty with a per plane duty and what account the proposed new scheme will take of air freight movements and *(b)* routes for which alternative forms of transport which have less environmental impact are available. [870]

Justine Greening: I have been asked to reply.

The coalition agreement includes a switch from a per passenger to a per plane duty; the Government are considering options for doing so, and welcome the views of interested parties.

Announcements on tax policy will be made in the usual way.

Biofuels

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is on encouraging the use of methane from biogas as a transport fuel. [548]

Norman Baker: The coalition agreement included a commitment to

> "measures to promote a huge increase in energy from waste through anaerobic digestion",

and to

> "seek to increase the target for energy from renewable sources, subject to the advice of the Climate Change Committee".

The use of biomethane as a transport fuel will be considered as part of this process.

Crossrail Line

Kelvin Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the Government's plans are for the future of Crossrail. [909]

Mrs Villiers: As we made clear in the coalition agreement, the Government support Crossrail. The project will support and enable growth—now, and in the future, in London and across the UK as a whole. At the same time, we need to ensure that every pound invested in the project is well spent and that the scheme remains affordable. Crossrail Ltd is focused on optimising value for money through effective management of risk and best value engineering solutions to achieve this goal.

Crossrail Line: Finance

Dr Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which private sector organisations have committed financing to Crossrail in *(a)* 2010-11 and *(b)* each of the two subsequent financial years; and how much each has committed. [414]

Mrs Villiers: Private sector commitments to Crossrail include a number of commercial agreements with private sector companies to provide contributions to Crossrail, given the benefits which will flow to businesses as a result of the scheme.

There are specific agreements with Canary Wharf Group (for £150 million), City of London (for £350 million), BAA (for £230 million), and Berkeley Homes Group (to construct the Woolwich Station box) as well as wider contributions being made through Business Rate Supplements, the planned Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 developer contributions.

Construction of the Canary Wharf Crossrail station is currently under way and good progress is being made. It is envisaged, on the current rate of construction, that the £150 million Canary Wharf Group contribution to Crossrail will have been put in to the project by June 2011.

The other contributions are not due within the next three financial years and are subject to conditions being met which are set out in the specific agreements.

Dartford-Thurrock Crossing: Road Traffic Control

Michael Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to reduce traffic congestion at the Dartford Crossing. [154]

Mike Penning *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* The Highways Agency is developing a package of technology measures to improve journey times and hence reduce congestion at the Dartford Crossing. These include:

- Installing average speed cameras on the southbound carriageway between A282 junction 31 and the Toll Plaza.
- Installing average speed cameras on the northbound carriageway between M25 junction 2 and A282 junction 1a.
- Improving information to drivers by variable message signing.
- Implementing variable speed limits during periods of congestion between M25 junctions 3 and 2, south of the crossing.

The Department for Transport is investigating further measures to improve performance at the existing crossing in the medium-term. The potential options for additional crossing capacity are also being considered.

Departmental Electronic Equipment

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* plasma and *(b)* LCD televisions there are in Ministerial offices in his Department. [397]

Norman Baker: There are no plasma televisions and four LCD televisions in the ministerial offices in the Department for Transport. These were all purchased prior to May 2010.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when and in what form he plans to publish a list of all items of expenditure by his Department over £25,000. [283]

Norman Baker: The Prime Minister has written to Cabinet Ministers

http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/statements-and-articles/2010/05/letter-to-government-departments-on-opening-up-data-51204

reiterating transparency commitments made in the Coalition Programme for Government, and setting out a timetable for achieving them. In particular, all new items of central Government spending over £25,000 will be published online in an open format from November 2010.

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to his Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff employed by (i) his Department and (ii) its agencies. [644]

Mr Philip Hammond: The Department for Transport has introduced restrictions on recruitment in order to reduce the numbers of staff in non-front line roles, with exceptions for front line staff and business critical positions with appropriate control measures.

There are no departmental or agency specific redundancy programmes and the cost of capturing this information for individual cases is available only at disproportionate cost.

The cost to the Department of redundancy and other exit payments this year will be disclosed in our Annual Report and Resource Accounts for 2010-11.

Driving Offences: Insurance

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department plans to take to reduce the number of people who drive without insurance; and how many vehicles were seized for being driven without insurance in the most recent year for which figures are available. [702]

Mike Penning: We are working in collaboration with the insurance industry to implement continuous insurance enforcement early in 2011. This will involve regularly comparing the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's vehicle database with the Motor Insurance Database to identify uninsured vehicles and to follow up with enforcement action against their keepers. In 2009, 178,000 uninsured vehicles were seized by the police.

Guided Bus Projects

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will hold a public inquiry into the Cambridge Guided Bus project; and for what reasons his Department decided to allocate funding to the Luton and Dunstable Guided Bus project. [66]

Norman Baker *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* The issue of how best to assess the delivery of the Cambridgeshire Guided Bus scheme, and how the contract for the scheme has worked, is a matter for the scheme promoter, Cambridgeshire county council. However, I have asked my officials to begin investigating options for a review of guided bus policy, which will draw on the Cambridgeshire experience, among others. I will write to my hon. Friend shortly to confirm details of this review.

Funding for the Luton Dunstable Busway scheme was approved by the previous Government under the arrangements at that time for assessing and approval of local major transport schemes.

Midland Main Railway Line

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the timetable is for electrification of the Midland Main Line rail route. [1296]

Mrs Villiers: We are in the early stages of the new Government and Ministers are considering the full range of transport policy. The Government support rail electrification as it helps to reduce carbon emissions and cut running costs. No decisions have been made on the electrification of the Midland Main Line.

Network Rail

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he plans to take to ensure that Network Rail *(a)* is more accountable to its customers and *(b)* puts the interests of passengers first; and when he plans to publish his proposals. [867]

Mrs Villiers: The Government have a commitment to make Network Rail more accountable to its customers. We are investigating options for implementing this and no final decisions on specific measures have yet been taken. At the same time, we are also investigating options for turning the Office of Rail Regulation into a powerful passenger champion.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to implement his proposal to specify Network Rail as a body to which the Freedom of Information Act 2000 applies. [869]

Mrs Villiers: The Government are considering a range of options for delivering its commitment to increase the accountability and transparency of Network Rail.

Office of Rail Regulation

Kelvin Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he plans to ensure the Office of Rail Regulation effectively represents the interests of passengers. [911]

Mrs Villiers: The Government have a commitment to turn the Office of Rail Regulation into a powerful passenger champion. We are currently investigating options for the implementation of this policy.

Official Cars

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many civil servants are entitled to use the Government Car Service; and how many will be entitled to use the service in the future. [107]

Mike Penning: Civil servants use public transport wherever possible although in some circumstances they can use a taxi-style service provided by the Government Car and Despatch Agency, bookable on demand. Four senior civil servants currently have allocated Government cars and drivers, three of whom have notified their intention to cancel existing arrangements.

Public Expenditure

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the breakdown is of the planned £683 million reduction in his Department's expenditure. [359]

Mr Philip Hammond *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* I have agreed to contribute £683 million to the £6 billion of in-year Budget reductions sought in the emergency Budget. The breakdown of these reductions is as follows:

Local authority grants—A £309 million reduction in the Department's specific grants to local authorities.

Transport for London—I am consulting with the Mayor on a proposed £108 million reduction in the Department's grant to Transport for London.

Network Rail will reduce spend by £100 million.

The Department is also making £112 million savings in its direct expenditure through a range of measures including a recruitment freeze, reduction in discretionary spend, and re-negotiation of contracts with major suppliers to reduce their cost.

It has also been necessary to defer £54 million that would have been spent on a small number of lower priority rolling stock and highway improvement schemes.

Railway Stations: Leeds

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funding his Department has allocated to the proposed new railway station at Kirkstall Forge; what recent discussions he has had on the allocation of that funding; and if he will make a statement. [760]

Mrs Villiers: I refer the hon. Member to my answer given to the hon. Member today (UIN 765).

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans his Department has for the proposed new railway station at Kirkstall Forge in West Leeds; what recent discussions he has had on the building of that proposed station; and if he will make a statement. [765]

Mrs Villiers: The Government's key priority at present is to tackle the budget deficit. The Department for Transport will consider the funding for local authority and Passenger Transport Executive major transport schemes as part of the Government's spending review, to be carried out by the autumn. The Department is not therefore currently in a position to give any commitments on projects such as a new railway station at Kirkstall Forge.

Railways: Bus Services

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to implement his proposal to require Network Rail to refund a third of the ticket price if a passenger has to take a rail replacement bus service as a consequence of engineering work; and from what budget such refunds will be provided. [868]

Mrs Villiers: I have made no specific proposal. However, the Government have a commitment to reform Network Rail to make it more accountable to its customers. We are in the process of considering a number of options to implement this, and no decisions on specific measures have yet been made.

Railways: Construction

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the proposed High Speed Rail links to be operational; and if he will make a statement. [763]

Mr Philip Hammond: HS2 Ltd's report estimates that a high speed line from London to the West Midlands could be operational from 2026. As the Government review this work we will consider any options for accelerating this timetable.

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received on the possible route of the proposed High Speed Rail link through Leeds; and if he will make a statement. [764]

Mr Philip Hammond: I have received no such recent representations, but I do support the inclusion of Leeds in a high speed rail network for the UK. Full consultation will take place before final decisions are taken on the preferred route for any section of the high speed rail network.

Railways: Electrification

Kelvin Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what railway lines the Government proposes to introduce railway electrification. [910]

Mrs Villiers: We are in the early stages of the new Government and Ministers are considering the full range of transport policy. The Government support rail electrification as it helps to reduce carbon emissions and cut running costs.

Railways: North West

Dr Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department has allocated to capital expenditure on rail infrastructure in the North West in *(a)* 2010-11 and *(b)* each of the two subsequent financial years. [421]

Mrs Villiers: Network Rail is responsible for delivering the majority of investment in rail infrastructure across the UK rail network. The High Level Output Specification (HLOS) developed by the Department for Transport that formed the basis on which Network Rail's income

was set by the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) for the current regulatory control period (CP4) in 2008. This specifies a number of investments in the north-west of England that are designed to improve services in the region. These include extra capacity in Manchester and Liverpool, longer trains on the West Coast Main Line and improvements in operational performance for regional services. There are also other improvements to the rail network that are being undertaken outside of the north-west that will deliver benefits to the region.

Full details of how Network Rail propose to deliver these are set out in their business plan which is available on their website at:

www.networkrail.co.uk

That said, Government funding for the railway is not allocated on a regional basis. It is for Network Rail to deliver their obligations to individual regions as set out in the HLOS within the funds that have been made available to them by the ORR. The sources of these funds come from train operators and direct grants from the Government. Full details of the funding allocation are set out in the ORR's income determination for CP4. Copies of this document are available in the Libraries of the House.

Railways: Overcrowding

Kelvin Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is for reducing overcrowding on trains. [908]

Mrs Villiers: We are assessing our policy for managing crowding on the rail network in the light of likely spending constraints over the next few years. Proposals by the previous Administration for the purchase of additional carriages will be reappraised and assessed for affordability. It is also the Government's aim to improve efficiency in procurement practices in relation to rolling stock.

Rapid Transit Systems: Tees Valley

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the merits of a Metro system for the Tees Valley area; and whether he plans to allocate funding to such a system. [507]

Norman Baker: The Department for Transport has not made an assessment of any plans for a Metro system for the Tees Valley area. Nor has it received a formal funding request for such a proposal.

Transport: Finance

Amber Rudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what mechanism he intends to use to review regional transport board expenditure in 2010-11. [579]

Norman Baker *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* The Government do not allocate capital funding for transport projects to regional transport boards, although regions have advised the Secretary of State on the priorities for allocating capital funding to local authorities for major transport schemes in 2010-11.

The Government have made clear their most urgent priority is to tackle the UK's record deficit. The first step to achieve this was announced by the Treasury on 24 May, setting out details of how the Government will save £6.2 billion from spending during this financial year by cutting waste and low value programmes.

Local government will take its fair share of these savings, resulting in a reduction of £1.165 billion in grants paid to local authorities during 2010-11 of which £309 million will be from regional and local transport grants. The Government will shortly announce in more detail the implications for individual grants.

EDUCATION

Building Schools for the Future

18. **Emma Reynolds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for the Building Schools for the Future programme. [000818]

Michael Gove: I am currently reviewing the methods by which capital has been allocated to ensure we can build schools more effectively and cost-efficiently in the future.

19. **Kate Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his plans are for the Building Schools for the Future programme in the metropolitan borough of Trafford; and if he will make a statement. [000820]

Michael Gove: I am currently reviewing the methods by which capital has been allocated to ensure we can build schools more effectively and cost-efficiently in the future.

All-through Schools

20. **John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent assessment he has made of the performance of three-to-18 schools. [000821]

Michael Gove: There are currently 35 schools nationally operating as all-through, 26 of which have opened in the last three years. It is therefore too soon to make a detailed assessment of their performance, but we will keep under review their progress and the lessons that can be learned.

Free Schools

21. **Lindsay Roy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of implementation of the free schools policy. [000822]

Michael Gove: Decisions about the level of funding available to set up and run new schools will be dependent on the outcome of the spending review in the autumn. But the clear principle is that we will fund free schools on a comparable basis to other state-funded schools and that, as now, money should follow the pupil.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the number of free schools which will be established in each of the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [248]

Mr Gibb: The number of free schools established over the next few years will depend on the level of demand from parents and communities.

Academy: Gloucester

22. **Richard Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for the establishment of a new academy school in Gloucester; and if he will make a statement. [000823]

Michael Gove: This Department has been planning to open a new academy in Gloucester in September 2010. The academy, sponsored by Prospects Education Services as lead sponsor and Gloucestershire college as co-sponsor, has been planned as a merger of two predecessor schools, the Central Technology college, a boys-only school, and Bishops' college, a co-ed school. The academy has been planned to be a mixed secondary school with sixth form provision, and will offer specialisms in digital technology, computing and vocational education.

Academies

23. **Dr Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent progress has been made on the academies programme; and if he will make a statement. [000824]

Michael Gove: There are currently 203 academies open in 83 local authorities. More academies will open in September, with numbers continuing to grow each year now that the programme has been opened up to all schools. For the academies with results in 2008 and 2009 the increase in the proportion of pupils achieving at least five A*-C GCSEs including English and maths is 5.0 percentage points, an increase on last year's academy improvement rate of 4.3 percentage points and double the average national increase.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his policy is on the number of parent governors allocated places on the governing body of any Academy school. [258]

Mr Gibb: We value the role of parental engagement in schools; however no decisions have yet been taken on the number of parent governors allocated places on academy governing bodies.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his policy is on the publication of financial accounts by Academy schools. [259]

Mr Gibb: All academy trusts (which includes charitable trusts running more than one academy) are required to publish annual accounts in accordance with the Companies Act 2006.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which organisations administer two or more Academy schools; and how many Academy schools each such organisation administers. [262]

Mr Gibb: The requested information is shown in the following table.

Name of sponsor	*How many open academies do they sponsor*
Absolute Return for Kids (ARK)	8
Academies Enterprise Trust (AET)	4
Barnfield College Further Education Corporation	2
Bob Edmiston	3
Brian Scrowcroft	2
Cornwallis Online Learning	2
Corporation of London	3
David Meller	2
Diocese of London	3
Diocese of Manchester	2
Diocese of Oxford	2
Diocese of Southwark	2
Dixons Academy Trust	2
Edge Foundation	2
Edutrust Academies Charitable Trust (EACT)	8
Emmanuel Schools Foundation	3
Girls' Day School Trust (GDST)	2
Haberdashers' Livery Company	2
Harris Federation of South London Schools	9
John Cabot Academy	2
Leigh CTC	2
Oasis Community Learning	11
Outwood Grange College of Technology	2
Priory Fundraising Trust	3
RC Archdiocese of Southwark	2
Samworth Brothers	2
Schools Partnership Trust	2
Stanton Lane Trust	2
The Manchester College	2
The Mercers Company	2
The Ormiston Trust	7
The Ridings Education Trust	2
The Society of Merchant Venturers	2
Thomas Telford Online	2
United Learning Trust (ULT)	17
Weston Foundation	3
Woodard Corporation	2

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if he will make it a requirement for Academy schools to comply with the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement; [405]

(2) if he will bring forward proposals to prevent Academy schools downgrading or removing from their curriculums any of the subjects of *(a)* geography, *(b)* history, *(c)* each of the sciences and *(d)* modern languages; and if he will make a statement. [408]

Mr Gibb: We trust teachers and head teachers to run their schools. This will include giving academies freedom from following the national curriculum and enabling them to raise standards by tailoring the curriculum to the needs of their students. Academies will still be required to provide a broad and balanced curriculum.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent research he has evaluated on the effects on the examination results of Academy schools of concentration of resources by those schools on vocational courses instead of academic courses; and if he will make a statement. [407]

Mr Gibb: It is for schools to decide the most appropriate range of courses and qualifications to offer to their students. There is no evidence that academies are concentrating resources on vocational courses instead of academic courses. The latest examination results for 2009 show that academies have seen a 5.0 percentage point increase in the proportion of pupils achieving at least five GCSEs at A*-C including English and maths (for those academies with results in 2008 and 2009), double the average national increase of 2.5 percentage points.

Mark Lancaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent assessment he has made of progress on the academies programme; and if he will make a statement. [819]

Michael Gove: There are currently 203 academies open in 83 local authorities. More academies will open in September, with numbers continuing to grow each year now that the programme has been opened up to all schools. For the academies with results in 2008 and 2009 the increase in the proportion of pupils achieving at least five A*-C GCSEs including English and maths is 5.0 percentage points, an increase on last year's academy improvement rate of 4.3 percentage points and double the average national increase.

Duchess's High School, Alnwick

24. **Sir Alan Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will visit Alnwick to discuss the rebuilding of the Duchess's high school. [000825]

Michael Gove: I am currently reviewing the methods by which capital has been allocated to ensure we can build schools more effectively and cost-efficiently in the future. But I hope that I or one of the ministerial team will have the opportunity to visit Alnwick again in due course.

Apprentices

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he plans to take to increase the number of 16 and 17 year-olds who *(a)* start and *(b)* complete apprenticeships; and if he will make a statement. [94]

Mr Gibb: We intend to increase the number of apprenticeship places for people of all ages, and we are committed to improving the quality of apprenticeships to make them better suited to the needs of employers and learners.

We will seek ways to support the creation of apprenticeships, internships, work pairings, and college and workplace training places as part of our wider programme to get Britain working.

CAFCASS: Complaints

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many complaints the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service has received about its services in each year since its inception. [142]

Tim Loughton: The number of complaints received by CAFCASS in its services is an operational matter for CAFCASS. The chief executive of CAFCASS, Anthony Douglas will write to the hon. Member and a copy of his response will be placed in the House Libraries.

Letter from Anthony Douglas:

I am writing to you in response to Parliamentary Question that you tabled recently.

The table below indicates the number of complaints received by Cafcass since its inception in April 2001.

	Number of complaints received
2001/02	[1]476
2002/03	440
2003/04	500
2004/05	484
2005/06	474
2006/07	640
2007/08	709
2008/09	1,030
2009/10	1,310

[1] 132 of these relating to work carried out prior to the establishment of Cafcass on 1 April 2001.

January 2009 saw the introduction of a revised complaints procedure that was intended to enable a larger proportion of service users' feedback to be dealt with within the boundaries of the revised procedure. Thus, the figures for 2008/09 and 2009/10 are not directly comparable with those from earlier years.

Children: Exercise

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how much his Department has spent on Tai-Chi programmes in schools in the last three years for which figures are available; which five companies or charities have received the largest sums in such funding; and how much each has received; [265]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of the value for money of his Department's expenditure on provision of Tai-Chi courses. [38]

Mr Gibb: Neither the Department nor its predecessor has spent any money directly on Tai-Chi programmes in schools in the last three years. Any Tai-Chi programmes in schools would be funded directly by the schools themselves. We do not collect data relating to the value for money of schools provision of Tai-Chi for their pupils.

History: Curriculum

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make it his policy to include the history of the 20th century in the National Curriculum; and if he will make a statement. [251]

Mr Gibb: We are currently considering our priorities for the national curriculum, including what it should cover. We will be announcing our plans in due course.

Music: Education

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much his Department has spent on singing programmes in schools in the last three years for which figures are available; which five companies or charities have received the largest sums in funding; and how much each has received. [264]

Mr Gibb: Tenders were invited in 2007 to provide support for the Singing Ambassador, Howard Goodall, in developing and delivering the national singing programme. The "Sing Up" consortium with Youth Music, the Sage Gateshead, Faber Music and Abbot Mead Vickers submitted a successful bid in July 2007. Funding to the "Sing Up" Consortium was £7.4 million in 2007-08, and £9 million in each of 2008-09 and 2009-10. In addition £1 million was paid in each of those years to the Choir Schools Association for the Chorister Outreach Programme, a part of the national singing programme.

HEALTH

Alcoholic Drinks: Rehabilitation

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he plans to take to improve treatment of people with alcohol problems. [257]

Anne Milton: Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) are responsible for arranging to meet the local needs of those with alcohol-related problems from their resources and for ensuring that services commissioned are of the required quality.

The Department's Alcohol Improvement programme supports the NHS to help PCTs commission improvements in prevention and treatment, through:

Regular data from the National Alcohol Treatment Monitoring System on improvements in treatment in each PCT and local alcohol profiles for England to help PCTs understand local need in relation to alcohol harm;

Publication each quarter by PCT of the vital signs indicator on alcohol-related hospital admissions, to show how local improvements in prevention and treatment are reducing harm;

Guidance on effective commissioning and treatment, for example "Models of care for Alcohol Misusers" (2006) and "Signs for Improvement—commissioning interventions to reduce alcohol-related harm" (2009); and

A national support team for alcohol, which supports PCTs and their partner organisations in areas with the highest rates of alcohol related hospital admissions to review their commissioning and delivery systems for alcohol harm reduction and identify what improvements can be made.

Alcohol is a major public health issue. We intend to ensure a proper focus on public health within the NHS. This will include prevention of alcohol-related illness. We are also determined to help the NHS effectively commission services, with a focus on good outcomes from treatment, including treatment for alcohol dependence. We will set out our plans in more detail through announcements in the coming months.

Autism: Health Services

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent progress has been made on the Adult Autism Strategy; what guidance he plans to provide to *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* local authorities on implementation of that strategy; what (i) short and (ii) long-term targets he plans to set as part of that strategy; and if he will make a statement. [68]

Mr Burstow *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* The Government are committed to addressing the needs of people with autism and their families. The Autism Strategy for adults with autism in England—"Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives—was published on 3 March 2010 and copies placed in the Library.

To assist the national health service and local authorities to implement the strategy locally, the Department will fulfil the commitment set out in the Autism Act 2009 and consult on and publish guidance in December 2010. Consultation will begin in the next few weeks.

The Autism Programme Board, which includes health professionals, third sector voluntary organisations and people with autism, has been established and will meet quarterly to monitor progress of the strategy and determine if targets are required. This board will be co-chaired by me as the Minister of State for Care Services, and Mr David Behan, the Director General for Social Care, Local Government and Care Partnerships.

Blood: Contamination

Harriett Baldwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the Government's policy on provision of compensation for NHS patients with haemophilia who were infected with hepatitis C through treatment with contaminated blood products. [742]

David Mowat: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support he plans to provide for those people who were infected with hepatitis C as a result of receiving contaminated blood in the 1970s and 1980s. [744]

Anne Milton: The national health service provides treatment for patients diagnosed with hepatitis C, in accordance with the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence recommendations.

Individuals who were inadvertently infected with hepatitis C by NHS supplied contaminated blood and blood products are also eligible to receive financial assistance from the Skipton Fund. We are carefully considering policy in this area, and we will announce a decision in due course.

Care Homes

Mr Buckland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will undertake a review into the funding and provision of residential care for the elderly for the purposes of assessing the merits of different mechanisms for allocating the funding of such care. [1303]

Mr Burstow: "Freedom, Fairness, Responsibility", the Coalition's Programme for Government, set out plans to establish a commission which will consider how to ensure responsible and sustainable funding for long term care. The Commission will be established as soon as possible and report within a year.

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Primary Care Trust

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly primary care trust to reach its target level of funding; [685]

(2) what estimate he has made of the dates on which *(a)* the first and *(b)* the last primary care trust to reach target funding will do so. [686]

Mr Simon Burns: We have guaranteed that health spending will increase in real terms in each year of the Parliament. However, health care spend will also be looked at as part of the next Spending Review. This will inform the speed at which primary care trusts move towards their target revenue allocations.

Departmental Electronic Equipment

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* plasma and *(b)* LCD televisions there are in ministerial offices in his Department. [391]

Mr Simon Burns: There are no plasma televisions and seven LCD televisions in Ministerial Private Offices in the Department.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which *(a)* grants and *(b)* other funding made available for (i) joint working between central and local government and (ii) local government-led services will be affected by his Department's planned spending reductions; and if he will make a statement. [980]

Mr Burstow: With regards to local government grants, no Department of Health grants for adult social care will be reduced in 2010-11. So, in 2010-11, the Department will fund over £1.4 billion of grants to local government for adult social care, as planned.

The Department for Communities and Local Government will shortly be announcing the Government's detailed proposals for local authorities.

With regards to other funding made available for joint working between central and local government, health funding is protected from the £6.2 billion of cross Government spending reductions announced recently. Efficiency savings identified in 2010-11, for example from programme budgets which are not consistent with the Government's priorities, will help ensure we protect front line services.

Drugs: Rehabilitation

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many specialist in-patient *(a)* drug and *(b)* alcohol detoxification beds were available on the latest date for which figures are available. [261]

Anne Milton: Data on the total number of in-patient detoxification beds available in England across national health service and independent sector settings are not available centrally.

However, local drug partnerships will have information on their arrangements for inpatient detoxification, including specialist treatment centres. Contact details for each partnership can be found via the Home Office website:

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100419081707/
http://drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk/dat/directory/

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting for access to in-patient detoxification facilities in each National Treatment Agency region on the latest date for which figures are available. [330]

Anne Milton: Published national drug treatment statistics, recorded by the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System, record the number of people who wait under and over three weeks for their first and subsequent drug treatment. They do not report waiting times for specific treatments.

Fluoride: Drinking Water

Dr Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it remains his policy that fluoridation of the water supply in Totton and Southampton should not take place without the consent of a majority of the local population. [1011]

Mr Simon Burns: Section 58 of the Water Act 2003 empowers strategic health authorities (SHAs) to contract with water undertakers to fluoridate a water supply after conducting public consultations. It is essential that any consultation gives people a real opportunity to make their views known and that those views are taken into account before a final decision is made.

The decision by South Central SHA to approve the fluoridation of water supplies to the Southampton area is the subject of a judicial review, which is likely to be heard in the autumn, and so due to the legal challenge the Department is unable to comment.

Homeopathy

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he is taking to increase the accuracy of labelling of licensed homeopathic products; [10]

(2) if he will ensure that no further clinical trials of homeopathy are funded by the NHS; [12]

(3) what recent assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of homeopathic treatments funded by the NHS; [13]

(4) when the Government plan to respond to the Science and Technology Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2009-10, Evidence Check 2: Homeopathy, HC45. [222]

Anne Milton: The issues mentioned were all raised by the Science and Technology Committee's report Evidence Check 2: Homeopathy: The Government are currently considering the report, including the issues mentioned, and will respond in due course.

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the prescription of placebo treatments. [11]

Anne Milton: The issue mentioned was raised by the Science and Technology Committee's report "Evidence Check 2: Homeopathy". The Government are currently considering the report, including the issue mentioned, and will respond in due course.

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has issued on the prescribing of homeopathic treatments on the NHS. [221]

Anne Milton: The issue mentioned were all raised by the Science and Technology Committee's report "Evidence Check 2: Homeopathy". The Government are currently considering the report, including the issue mentioned, and will respond in due course.

Hospitals: Wynyard

Grahame M. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will ensure that £464 million expenditure for the new hospital at Wynyard is maintained; [872]

(2) whether all funding for capital projects agreed by his Department since 1 January 2010 will be maintained. [873]

Mr Simon Burns: As with all significant spending commitments made between 1 January 2010 and the election on 6 May, the proposed new hospital scheme at Wynyard for North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust will be subject to the Government's re-examination of such approvals to ensure they are consistent with the Government's priorities and good value for money.

Marie Stopes International

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS spent on *(a)* pregnancy counselling, *(b)* abortions and *(c)* other counselling, including post-abortion counselling provided by Marie Stopes International in each of the last five years; and how many people received each such service in each such year. [196]

Anne Milton: This information is not collected centrally.

The cost to the national health service of abortions performed in NHS hospitals in 2008-09 was £82.1 million. This figure does not include abortions performed by independent sector organisations, such as Marie Stopes International, under contract to the NHS. In 2009, 60% of NHS funded abortions were performed under contract by the independent sector.

Mental Health Services: Children

Mr Buckland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* qualifications and *(b)* competencies are required of specialist child and adolescent mental health service staff working with children with autism and related mental health problems. [885]

Mr Burstow: Specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services staff have a professional qualification in one of a number of disciplines, such as psychology, psychiatry, social work or education. Many will also hold post-professional awards in specific therapeutic approaches.

A properly qualified, trained and competent workforce is required to meet the complex needs of children with autism and related mental health problems.

Mr Buckland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish his Department's guidance to commissioners of child and adolescent mental health services of the services they are required to provide in respect of the availability of 24-hour care to meet urgent mental health needs in order to meet the criteria for *(a)* national indicator 51, proxy measure 3 and *(b)* vital signs indicator 12. [886]

Mr Burstow: The guidance to commissioners on completing the Vital Signs Monitoring Return asks:

"Are arrangements in place to ensure that 24 hour cover is available to meet the urgent mental health needs of children and young people and specialist mental health assessments undertaken within 24 hours or during the next working day where indicated?"

The guidance recognises that there will be a variety of ways of providing this provision. In most cases it will involve informing possible referral points such as accident and emergency departments, general practice out of hours services, police, of appropriate contact information for on call Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services specialist staff.

Mental Health Services: Finance

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the effect, in cash terms, on *(a)* the budget for mental health services and *(b)* funding for mental health research, including joint work between his Department and the university sector of his Department's planned spending reductions; and if he will make a statement. [979]

Mr Burstow: No such estimate has been made.

Decisions on spending on mental health services, in common with other areas of health spending, are made locally by primary care trusts and local authorities. The Department has no plans to reduce current expenditure on mental health research.

National health service spending is protected from the planned £6.2 billion cuts to Government spending in 2010-11. Decisions on NHS funding beyond 2010-11 will be made during the next spending review this autumn. Health spending is a priority for this Government and we have committed to increase the overall level of health funding in real terms during each year of the current Parliament. We will also identify NHS efficiency savings, which we will reinvest in frontline services.

Mental Health Services: Young People

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he plans to take to maintain the level of funding of child and adolescent mental health services. [981]

Mr Burstow: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is funded locally by both the NHS and local authorities.

We have set out our intention to protect the national health service budget in line with inflation over the course of the next spending review, and NHS funding

for CAMHS is within this total. Funding for local government, including that provided for CAMHS will be determined as part of the spending review later this year.

Mobile Phones: Health Hazards

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has evaluated on the effects on human health of use of mobile telephones for more than 30 minutes a day. [36]

Anne Milton: The Health Protection Agency keeps the relevant research publications under continual review through its Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR), and provides advice to Government on health effects of electromagnetic fields from various sources including radiofrequency radiation from mobile phones.

AGNIR is currently conducting a further comprehensive review of the health risks from radiofrequency radiation, which will take into account findings from the recently published international Interphone study, which reported on mobile phone use and the risk of brain cancer. AGNIR is also considering other relevant research that has been published since its last review in 2003. AGNIR's new review is expected to be completed over the next 12-24 months. Further information is available at:

www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/Radiation/UnderstandingRadiation/UnderstandingRadiationTopics/ElectromagneticFields/MobilePhones/info_INTERPHONE_agnir/

The independently managed Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research (MTHR) programme, jointly funded by Government and industry, has supported a number of studies into the possible health effects of radiofrequency technology, including two studies for the United Kingdom part of the Interphone project. The MTHR programme published its first report in September 2007. The report and details of these and ongoing studies can be found on the MTHR website at:

www.mthr.org.uk/research_projects/research.htm

MTHR supports a long term cohort study on mobile phone use and health (COSMOS) which will capture information on patterns of mobile phone use, including call duration, and changes in the frequency of specific symptoms over time, such as headaches and sleep disorders, and also the risks of cancers, benign tumours, neurological and cerebrovascular diseases.

NHS

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for strategic health authorities. [676]

Mr Simon Burns: The coalition agreement made clear that the Government intend to establish a new independent NHS Commissioning Board, to allocate resources and provide commissioning guidelines.

The NHS Commissioning Board will combine functions currently provided by the Department and strategic health authorities (SHAs), and deliver these in a more streamlined way. The remit of SHAs will change: the NHS Commissioning Board will exercise its functions through regional offices that will report directly to the Chief Executive.

In the meantime, SHAs will continue to have a vital role in supporting the delivery of financial control and performance, and driving improvements in quality and productivity.

NHS: Public Consultation

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to introduce direct elections for members of the boards of primary care trusts. [891]

Mr Simon Burns: Proposals on elections to the boards of primary care trusts will be brought forward in due course.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the *(a)* mode, *(b)* class and *(c)* total cost of travel was of his recent visit to Afghanistan. [15]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: On my recent visit to Afghanistan I travelled business class on a return BA commercial flight from London to Bahrain, the total cost of which was £1,839.63. From Bahrain I flew on a return RAF flight to Kabul.

China: Family Planning

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the United Nations Population Fund in promoting non-coercive approaches to family planning in China since October 2009; and if he will make a statement. [81]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: It is a major priority for the UK Government to improve sexual and reproductive health and rights, including access to modern family planning methods and promoting women's choice, in the developing world.

The Department for International Development (DFID) is currently reviewing its bilateral and multilateral development assistance, including funding of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), to ensure effectiveness and value for money.

Departmental Cost-effectiveness

Mr Bone: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what mechanisms he plans to use to review value for money in his Department's expenditure. [998]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: We will fundamentally change the way in which we look at the value for money of aid, moving from a focus on inputs to what our money achieves, the outputs and outcomes we secure. We will gain maximum value for money for every pound through greater transparency, rigorous independent evaluation and an unremitting focus on results.

Departmental Electronic Equipment

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many *(a)* plasma and *(b)* LCD televisions there are in Ministerial offices in his Department. [393]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: There is a total of two LCD televisions in ministerial offices in the Department for International Development (DFID). These were purchased in July 2007 and January 2010.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many full-time equivalent staff at each Civil Service grade are employed in the private office of each Minister in his Department. [116]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: Details of full-time equivalent staff at each civil service grade working in each private office at the Department for International Development (DFID) are provided in the following table.

DFID Minister	*DFID grade*	*Equivalent traditional Civil Service grade*	*No. members of staff*
Secretary of State	B2	EO	2
	B1(D)	Fast Stream	2
	A1	G6	1
	Deputy Director	G5	1
Minister of State	C1	AO	1
	B2	EO	1
	B1	HEO	2
	A1	G6	1
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State	C1	AO	1
	B2	EO	1
	B1	HEO	1
	A2	G7	1

Departmental Official Cars

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many Government *(a)* cars and *(b)* drivers are allocated to Ministers in his Department. [299]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The current interim arrangements for the Department for International Development (DFID) are *(a)* three cars and *(b)* three drivers allocated to departmental Ministers.

The new Ministerial Code, published on 21 May 2010, contains changes that affect ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. It states that

"the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed".

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with Departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements.

The Ministerial Code, published on 21 May 2010, is available on the Cabinet Office website.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when and in what form he plans to publish a list of all items of expenditure by his Department over £25,000. [279]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The Prime Minister has written to Cabinet Ministers reiterating transparency commitments made in the coalition programme for Government, and setting out a timetable for achieving them. In particular, all new items of central Government spending over £25,000 will be published online in an open format from November 2010.

Global School Partnerships

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans he has to continue to support the Global School Partnerships Programme. [132]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: As part of the Department for International Development's (DFID's) wider development awareness work in the UK, the Global School Partnerships Programme is subject to review. A decision on future support to this area of work will be made in due course.

Malawi: Overseas Aid

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid the Government provided to Malawi in *(a)* 2008 and *(b)* 2009. [556]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The amount of Official Development Assistance (ODA) provided to Malawi by the UK Government is published in Statistics on International Development, which is available on the Department for International Development's (DFID's) website at:

http://www.dfid.gov.uk/About-DFID/Finance-and-performance/Aid-Statistics/Statistics-on-International-Development-2009/

In 2008 the UK Government provided £81.4 million in ODA to Malawi. The figure for 2009 has not yet been finalised and will be published later this year.

Niger: Droughts

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of the likelihood of drought in Niger in the next six months; and whether he plans to offer assistance to Niger to alleviate the effects of any drought. [1179]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: Over 7.1 million people in Niger already face severe or moderate food insecurity following poor rains, harvests and pastures in 2009. The Africa Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development latest forecast is for normal levels of rainfall during the next six months. We will continue to monitor the situation carefully.

The Department for International Development (DFID) has already provided over £9.5 million to United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations to respond to the most urgent needs in Niger. Our funding will

provide food aid to 118,000 people for three months; treat 20,000 children with severe acute malnutrition; provide cash for work or payments to 20,000 households; support 15,000 vulnerable households maintain a minimum number of livestock and provide seeds to more than 81,000 households. An additional £1 million has been provided to strengthen the longer term resilience of communities to future disasters.

Overseas Aid: Family Planning

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much funding his Department has allocated to the *(a)* International Planned Parenthood Federation and *(b)* United Nations Population Fund in each year since 1997. [198]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: Details of the Department for International Development's (DFID's) core unrestricted funding to the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in each year since 1997 are provided in the following table.

	£ million	
	IPPF	*UNFPA*
1997-98	5	13
1998-99	5.5	13
1999-2000	5.5	15
2000-01	5.5	15
2001-02	4.5	15
2002-03	4.5	15
2003-04	10.5	18
2004-05	6	20
2005-06	0	20
2006-07	7.5	20
2007-08	7.5	20
2008-09	8.6	20
2009-10	8.6	22.06

In addition to this core unrestricted expenditure, payments are made through our country offices to support reproductive and maternal health programmes.

From 2007 to 2009 a further payment of £4 million was allocated to the Safe Abortion Action Fund (SAAF), a trust fund that IPPF manages.

DFID also supports UNFPA's Global Programme for Reproductive Health Commodities with a five year contribution of up to £100 million. DFID's contribution in 2009-10 was £20 million.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether his Department places restrictions on the purposes for which funds allocated to the *(a)* International Planned Parenthood Federation and *(b)* United Nations Population Fund are used; what guidance his Department has issued to each such organisation on the use of such funds in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [199]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: It is a major priority for the UK Government to improve sexual and reproductive health and rights, including access to modern family planning methods and promoting women's choice, in the developing world.

The Department for International Development's (DFID's) funding to International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is unrestricted. Guidance on the use of DFID's funding is contained in a Partnership Programme Arrangement (PPA) which was agreed in 2008. The PPA states that funding is provided in support of reproductive health.

DFID provides up to £20 million of unrestricted funding to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) per year. Guidance on how these funds should be used is contained in a Memorandum of Understanding between DFID and UNFPA. Release of funding is subject to progress against targets that relate to the objectives in UNFPA's Strategic Plan.

In 2008 DFID also agreed to provide £100 million to UNFPA's Global Programme for Reproductive Health Commodity Security (GPRHCS) for the period 2008-13. Guidance in the Memorandum of Understanding between DFID and UNFPA states that this funding can only be used to meet the aims of the GPRHCS.

Palestinians: International Assistance

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will visit Gaza to assess the humanitarian situation as a matter of urgency. [1189]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: I am extremely concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and hope to visit as soon as possible to assess the conditions for myself.

Officials from my Department are closely monitoring events on the ground, including through regular visits to Gaza. I also met this week with John Ging, Head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) operations on Wednesday 2 June, who briefed me in detail on the current situation.

USA: Family Planning

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether his Department plans to discuss with the US administration the implications for his Department's policies of its decision to *(a)* reinstate the US contribution to the United Nations Population Fund and *(b)* rescind the Mexico City policy; and if he will make a statement. [82]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: Department for International Development (DFID) officials are in regular contact with their US counterparts about sexual and reproductive health and rights and other health issues, and I have personally spoken to the new USAID Administrator, Dr Rajiv Shah. As my hon. friend will know, this is a particular priority of the Government.

The UK Government welcome US President Obama's decision of January 2009 to restore funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and to rescind the Mexico City policy.

Zimbabwe: Overseas Aid

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of bi-lateral UK assistance to Zimbabwe; and what measures are being taken to ensure such aid is not affected by corruption. [161]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The Department for International Development's (DFID's) programme in Zimbabwe has helped deliver Anti-Retroviral Treatment to 58,000 people, provide essential medicines to approximately 1,300 primary care clinics and rural hospitals, and contributed to a programme to give every primary school child access to school materials.

None of the funds provided by the UK are channelled through the Government of Zimbabwe. DFID works through established partners such as the United Nations and non-governmental organisations.

In the coming months, I will be reviewing DFID's aid programme in Zimbabwe to determine how we can achieve better value for money for the British taxpayer and accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Housing: Construction

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps he plans to take in relation to planning the supply of housing in central Oxfordshire. [206]

Robert Neill: We have committed, in the coalition Government document, "The Coalition: our programme for government", that we would radically reform the planning system to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live, based on the principles set out in the Conservative Party publication "Open Source Planning". In terms of planning the supply of housing, we have set out our intention to rapidly abolish regional spatial strategies and return decision-making powers on housing and planning to local councils. We will provide more details on our approach shortly.

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether he will accept further representations from *(a)* local residents and *(b)* other interested parties, on planning application 07/00680/OUT at Innsworth, Gloucestershire; and if he will make a statement. [974]

Robert Neill: It is not the Secretary of State's intention to accept any further representations from local residents or other interested parties on planning application 07/00680/OUT at Innsworth, Gloucestershire. Representations have in fact already been received. My right hon. Friend will issue his decision on or before 30 June, as advised to all main parties.

Licensed Premises: Planning Permission

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether his Department has issued guidance to local planning authorities on their powers to control the flying of national flags outside licensed premises. [975]

Robert Neill: Flags are classified as advertisements and are controlled by local planning authorities, under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007. Guidance on these Regulations has been issued in CLG Circular 03/2007, available at:

http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/circulartown

No consent or permission is required to fly any country's national flag at any premises provided nothing is added to the design of the flag or to any flagstaff and it complies with the standard conditions that apply to all advertisements.

Local Government Finance

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to which grants to local authorities the de-ring-fencing proposals announced on 24 May will apply. [207]

Robert Neill: An announcement on the specific grants that will be de-ring-fenced in 2010-11 will be made shortly.

Local Government: Public Consultation

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in what circumstances he intends to grant a public right of veto of council tax increases. [1145]

Robert Neill: We will give residents the power to veto excessive council tax rises that go above a set threshold. We will set out our proposals on the threshold and the mechanism for initiating a referendum in a consultation document later this year.

Regional Planning and Development

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what assessment he has made of the effects of the abolition of regional spatial strategies on the joint core strategies which are being developed by local councils; and if he will make a statement. [973]

Robert Neill: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to all local authority leaders and the Planning Inspectorate confirming the Government's intention to abolish regional strategies and saying that he expects them to have regard to his letter as a material consideration in decisions on applications and local development frameworks, including core strategies. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

We want local authorities to put local plans in place as soon as possible, including joint plans where appropriate, to provide greater certainty for communities and investors. However authorities may wish to review elements of their local development frameworks in the light of the impending abolition of regional strategies.

JUSTICE

Departmental Official Cars

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many Government *(a)* cars and *(b)* drivers are allocated to Ministers in his Department. [300]

Mr Blunt: The current interim arrangements for the Ministry of Justice are *(a)* four cars and *(b)* four drivers allocated to departmental Ministers. This is supplemented by the use of pool cars as needed.

The Home Office provides the arrangements in relation to The Minister of State for Policing and Criminal Justice, who also has ministerial responsibilities at the Ministry of Justice.

The new Ministerial Code, published on 21 May 2010, contains changes that affect ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. It states that:

"the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed".

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with Departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements.

The Ministerial Code is available on the Cabinet Office website.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice when and in what form he plans to publish a list of all items of expenditure by his Department over £25,000. [280]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: The Prime Minister has written to Cabinet Ministers[1] reiterating transparency commitments made in the Coalition Programme for Government, and setting out a timetable for achieving them. In particular, all new items of central Government spending over £25,000 will be published online in an open format from November 2010.

[1] http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/statements-and-articles/2010/05/letter-to-government-departments-on-opening-up-data-51204

Elections: Fraud

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps his Department is taking to reduce the level of electoral fraud; and if he will undertake a review of current legislation with a view to restricting on-demand postal and proxy votes. [706]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are committed to tackling electoral fraud by speeding up the introduction of individual electoral registration. This will enhance the accuracy of the register, ensuring that only those entitled to vote are registered.

Postal and proxy voting, along with all other areas of electoral law, are kept under review. As part of this process, we will carefully consider the findings and any recommendations contained in the reports of the Electoral Commission into the conduct of the recent general election.

The Government will work closely with the Electoral Commission, police, political parties and returning officers to raise awareness and strengthen systems to ensure that fraud is detected and prosecuted.

Electoral Register

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what recent steps his Department has taken against local authority electoral registration departments that have not achieved registration targets. [163]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for registering electors lies with individual electoral registration officers (EROs) based within local authorities. EROs do not have statutory registration targets in terms of numbers registered, but operate within a performance standards framework.

Sections 9A and 9B of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 empower the Electoral Commission to set and monitor performance standards for electoral registration officers. As part of this monitoring role, the Commission recently published its second assessment of "The Performance Standards for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain (March 2010)".

The Government understand that the Commission has committed to contacting all EROs who have fallen below certain criteria to identify the reasons for poor performance and then to develop appropriate methods to ensure improvement.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice with reference to the answer of 9 March 2009, *Official Report*, column 88W, on the electoral register, what progress has been made on standardising the wording and layout of rolling registration forms. [166]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have committed to speeding up the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration. We also need to make sure that—for those who are entitled to vote—it is as straightforward as possible to register. As part of that, we will give consideration to whether all electoral registration forms, including a rolling registration form, should be prescribed. In the meantime the design of rolling registration forms under the current system of electoral registration is a matter for Electoral Registration Officers.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment has been made of the socio-economic profile of citizens who are eligible to be on the electoral register and are not on it. [168]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Electoral Commission in its report "The Completeness and Accuracy of Electoral Registers in Great Britain" published in March 2010 found that case studies confirmed that registration rates were especially low among young people, private renters and those who had recently moved home.

It found that the highest concentration of under-registration was likely to be in metropolitan areas, smaller towns and cities with large student populations and coastal areas with significant population turnover and high levels of social deprivation.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice with reference to the answer of 4 March 2009, *Official Report*, column 1708W, on the electoral register, what the outcomes were of the 2007 financial information survey; and what period elapsed between the survey sampling exercise and the production of the final report. [169]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Electoral Commission has informed me that it will be publishing its report into the cost of electoral administration covering the 2007-08 and 2008-09 financial years in early June 2010. The deadline for the survey covering the 2007-08 financial year was 31 July 2008 and that for the 2008-09 financial year was 31 July 2009. After this information was collated, the data were verified, analysed and checked and the findings are to be published shortly. The information will be placed on the Commission's website when it is published.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment has been made of the effects of functional illiteracy on the ability of people to fill in electoral registration forms; and what steps have been taken to assist functionally illiterate people to register. [170]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have not made an assessment on the effects of functional illiteracy on the ability of people to fill in electoral registration forms.

The Electoral Commission is responsible for guidance for electoral registration officers (EROs). The Commission recommends that the electoral registration office and contact staff are trained to deal with inquiries from people who have low level reading and writing skills and suggests that EROs may want to produce easy-read literature to enable greater understanding of the registration process.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice with reference to the answer of 4 March 2009, what the results were of the pilot data matching schemes under which public authorities will provide registration officers with information to assist them in maintaining an accurate and comprehensive register. [171]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 makes provision for the piloting of data-matching schemes to test which data sets help to maintain the completeness and accuracy of the register. As yet, no pilots have been carried out under this legislation.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will bring forward proposals to register unregistered voters before the implementation of any review of parliamentary constituency boundaries. [663]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

It is important that all eligible individuals should exercise their democratic right to register and vote. The Government have committed to speed up the introduction of individual electoral registration (IER). We will be considering how the electoral registration system can be improved in that context.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what estimate his Department has made of the effect on the size of the registered electorate of the introduction of individual voter registration. [664]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have committed to speed up the introduction of individual electoral registration (IER). Work is under way to consider how implementation will be carried out.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many full-time equivalent personnel were employed in electoral registration departments in each local authority on the latest date for which figures are available. [695]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

I understand from the Electoral Commission that it has collected this information for the 2007-08 financial year only. I also understand that it will be published on the Commission's website alongside its report into the cost of electoral administration, covering the 2007-08 and 2008-09 financial years, which it expects to publish in early June.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice which local authorities have achieved the highest increase in levels of voter registration in the last two years; and what steps his Department has taken to ensure that the practices leading to such increases are adopted in other local authorities. [697]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

According to data supplied by the Office for National Statistics, the five local authorities with the highest cumulative increase in levels of voter registration over the last two years were Sheffield city council, Birmingham city council, the London borough of Hackney, Manchester city council and the London borough of Barnet.

The Electoral Commission provides guidance to electoral registration officers (EROs) in undertaking electoral registration, and sets and monitors performance standards for EROs.

The Electoral Commission published research on electoral registration and a report on EROs' performance in March 2010: "The Completeness and Accuracy of Electoral Registers in Great Britain"; and the "Report on Performance Standards for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain".

The Government are considering the findings of the reports and the issue of electoral registration as part of the wider context of the move to Individual Electoral Registration in Great Britain.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will commission research on the effects of levels of functional illiteracy on electoral registration rates. [698]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have no current plans to commission such research. The Government have committed to accelerate the introduction of individual electoral registration (IER). Work is under way to consider how implementation will be carried out. The design of forms and access issues will clearly be relevant to any changes to the electoral registration system.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice with reference to the answer of 26 February 2009, *Official Report*, columns 988-89W, on the electoral register, what progress the Office for National Statistics made on publishing figures for the 2008 annual canvass. [724]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) published the figures for the 2008 annual canvass in February 2009. The number of parliamentary electors in the UK grew by 111,595 to 45,194,449 and the number of local government electors in the UK grew by 227,374 to 46,147,877.

In February 2010, the ONS published the figures for the 2009 canvass. The number of parliamentary electors grew by 226,359 to 45,420,808; and the number of local government electors grew by 308,013 to 46,455,890.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice with reference to the answer of 24 June 2008, *Official Report*, columns 243-4W, on the "Electoral Register: Fines", which local authorities have initiated proceedings for failure to complete and return an annual registration. [727]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not collected centrally. Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) have a statutory duty to maintain a complete and accurate electoral register. It is for individual EROs to decide on what action to take in relation to non-completion of an individual annual canvass form.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much his Department paid electoral registration officers in local government for work on election administration in the last 12 months. [730]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply

Funding for electoral registration activities is met through the Revenue Support Grant (RSG), administered by the Department for Communities and Local Government. Once these funds are allocated, decisions on how they are utilised are a matter for the local authorities concerned.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people resident in each parliamentary constituency were added to the electoral register in *(a)* February, *(b)* March and *(c)* April 2010. [732]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Electoral Commission has received some information from returning officers about increases to the register ahead of the general election and I understand that it will include such information in its election report, which it expects to publish in July.

Fathers4Justice

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has to meet representatives of the Fathers 4 Justice campaign. [7]

Mr Djanogly: The Government welcome opportunities for constructive dialogue with key interest groups about reform of the family justice system. Ministers will consider meeting requests on an individual basis. A request from Fathers 4 Justice was received on 18 May and is being considered.

General Election 2010

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the name was of each returning officer in the 6 May 2010 general election; what the full-time job was of each; what fee each received for acting as a returning officer; and from which budget those fees were paid. [409]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

A list of the names of each of the returning officers in the 6 May 2010 general election will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

In England and Wales, the Representation of the People Act 1983 provides for the duties of a returning officer in respect of the conduct of the election to be discharged by the electoral registration officer for the constituency as "acting returning officer". Accordingly, in respect of England and Wales, the list referred to above will set out the names of each of the acting returning officers. Details of the full-time employment of those individuals in England and Wales are not held by the Government. In Scotland, the returning officers for the 6 May 2010 general election were all local authority chief executives. In Northern Ireland, the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland is the returning officer for the parliamentary general election.

The returning officer's fee is calculated in relation to the number of electors in the constituency. The amounts which returning officers receive for the services rendered and expenses incurred in administering UK parliamentary elections are paid from the Consolidated Fund under section 29 of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983. The overall maximum amount which a returning officer is entitled to recover is set out in the Parliamentary Elections (Returning Officer's Charges) Order 2010. This order also sets out the maximum amount a returning officer may recover in respect of specified services and expenses.

The order provides different amounts for when a parliamentary election is conducted on its own, or when a parliamentary general election is taken together with the ordinary day of election of councillors in some constituencies in 2010.

General Elections

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will assess the merits of holding the next general election at a weekend. [335]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government will keep under review ways in which the democratic process can be enhanced. We will consider the reports of the Electoral Commission into the conduct of the most recent general election and respond in due course.

Government Departments: Data Protection

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice which Minister in his Department has responsibility for policy on data sharing between Government departments; and if he will make a statement. [20]

Mr Djanogly: My noble Friend the Minister of State for Justice (Lord McNally) has ministerial responsibility for policy on data protection, which includes policy on the sharing of personal data between Government Departments.

While the Ministry of Justice has this policy responsibility, it has no role in relation to individual data sharing initiatives between other Government Departments. Departments—as data controllers for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998—are responsible for ensuring their own compliance with the Act, including how data are shared.

Huntercombe Young Offender Institution

John Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the timetable is for changes to the future status of Huntercombe Young Offenders Institution; and what consultation he plans to have with *(a)* residents local to the institution and *(b)* its staff. [970]

Mr Blunt: The decommissioning of HMYOI Huntercombe has commenced and is taking place over the coming weeks to ensure a safe and smooth transition for the existing prisoner population. A project group has been set up and is meeting to consider the essential work to be completed in the establishment in regard to staffing profiles, budgets, contractual requirements and any structural and physical adjustments deemed necessary prior to re-role as a Category C Male prison at the end of 2010.

Senior NOMS officials will meet local residents to reassure them about the re-role in the near future. Once final decisions are made in regard to the proposals under discussion, full consultation will take place with all stakeholders, including all staff and local residents.

TREASURY

Annuities

Mr Wallace: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will bring forward proposals to reform legislation regarding the compulsory purchase of pension annuities by those aged 75; and if he will make a statement. [1003]

Mr Hoban: The Government are committed to removing the requirement to purchase a pension annuity by age 75. Further details, including information on when the Government intends to implement these proposals, will follow in due course.

Bank of England

Mr Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who holds the capital stock of the Bank of England on behalf of the Government; and what plans he has for a redemption of the 20-year bond issued at the time the Bank was taken into public ownership. [997]

Justine Greening: The entire capital of the Bank is held by the Treasury Solicitor on behalf of HM Treasury.

There are currently no plans to redeem the bond issued at the time the Bank was taken into public ownership.

Business

Mr Binley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many small businesses are registered for VAT. [1009]

Mr Gauke: There are currently 1.94 million VAT registered businesses. Using the turnover threshold of £5.6 million used in the Companies Act 2006 definition of a small business, 1.90 million of these businesses would be classed as small.

Capital Gains Tax

Graham M. Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the Government's proposed changes to capital gains tax, with particular reference to the effect on the housing market; and if he will make a statement. [875]

Mr Gauke: We have received a number of representations on the proposals to reform capital gains tax. In line with coalition agreement the Government are seeking ways of taxing non-business capital gains at rates similar or close to those applied to income, with generous exemptions for entrepreneurial business activities.

Child Trust Fund

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate has been made of the number of children *(a)* in each region, *(b)* in each socio-economic group and *(c)* nationwide who will be born in the first 12 months after abolition of the child trust fund. [100]

Mr Hoban: To contribute to the reduction of the Budget deficit, the Government intend to reduce and then stop all Government contributions into child trust funds. It is intended that vouchers to open new accounts will no longer be issued for children born from 1 January 2011. Existing accounts will continue to operate as before. From 2011-12 onwards, the funding allocated to disability payments into the child trust funds of disabled children will be redirected to provide additional respite care. Every pound paid into this scheme is an extra pound of public debt. By ending Government payments into the scheme we also save the £5 million annual cost of administering it.

The Government's current estimates of the number of children per region and nationwide predicted to be born in the 12 months from 1 January 2011 are tabled as follows. Data on numbers per socio-economic group are not available. All figures are Official Statistics published by the Office for National Statistics.

Projected population of children born in 2011 by country and region

Region or country	*Number (thousand)*
North East	30
North West	86
Yorkshire and The Humber	66
East Midlands	53
West Midlands	70
East	70
London	126
South East	100

Projected population of children born in 2011 by country and region

Region or country	*Number (thousand)*
South West	56
England	657
Wales	35
Scotland	58
Northern Ireland	25
United Kingdom	775

Source: Office for National Statistics 2008-based.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many child trust fund accounts at the *(a)* standard and *(b)* higher rate have been opened in each constituency since the introduction of the fund. [1020]

Mr Hoban: Statistical information is published on HM Revenue and Customs' website regarding the Child Trust Fund. The information includes data regarding the initial payments into accounts and account opening data for all Westminster parliamentary constituencies as at November 2008. It can be viewed at:

http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/ctf/stats.htm

Information on the additional payments to children in low income families is also included in these statistics but is not available at constituency level.

Credit Unions

Mr Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many separate credit unions are registered in each *(a)* London borough and *(b)* region. [1174]

Mr Hoban: Statistics for individual London boroughs are not available, but I can provide the following:

	Number
Greater London	42
East Midlands	21
East of England	32
North East	43
North West	85
South East	16
South West	41
West Midlands	45
Yorkshire and the Humber	38
England	363
Wales	28
Scotland	117
Northern Ireland	182

Departmental Electronic Equipment

Mr Watson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* plasma and *(b)* LCD televisions there are in Ministerial offices in his Department. [388]

Justine Greening: There is one plasma and eight LCD televisions currently in use in Ministers' private offices at 1 Horse Guards road.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Watson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many full-time equivalent staff at each Civil Service grade are employed in the private office of each Minister in his Department. [112]

Justine Greening: The following table gives details of the total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff employed in the private offices of each Treasury Minister as at 27 May 2010, by civil service equivalent pay grade.

Office	*Pay grade*	*FTE*
Chancellor of the Exchequer	AO	3
	EO	3
	HEO/SEO	2
	Grade 6/7	2
	SCS	1
Chief Secretary to the Treasury	AO	3
	EO	1
	HEO/SEO	3
	Grade 6/7	1
Commercial Secretary to the Treasury	AO	1
	EO	1
	HEO/SEO	1
	Grade 6/7	1
Economic Secretary to the Treasury	AO	1
	EO	1
	HEO/SEO	2
	Grade 6/7	1
Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury	AO	1
	EO	1
	HEO/SEO	2
	Grade 6/7	1
Financial Secretary to the Treasury	AO	1
	EO	1
	HEO/SEO	2
	Grade 6/7	1

Economic Growth

Richard Harrington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to increase economic growth. [999]

Mr Gauke: The Government are taking action to support enterprise and create a fair, competitive, and efficient tax system in order to deliver the private-sector led recovery that will be the foundation of future growth. Fundamental to this strategy will be tackling the budget deficit and providing a stable macroeconomic environment that will underpin private-sector investment and growth.

Further details of the action the Government will take to secure the UK's future growth will be included in the Emergency Budget on 22 June 2010.

Financial Ombudsman Service

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Financial Services Ombudsman cases went to judicial review in each of the last three years; and in how many such cases the complaint was upheld. [882]

Mr Hoban: The table shows the number of applications for judicial review (JR) against the Financial Ombudsman Service in the last three years. None of the cases succeeded.

	Cases resolved	*JR applications*
2007-08	99,699	13
2008-09	113,949	6
2009-10	166,321	10

Public Expenditure

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 26 May 2010, *Official Report*, columns 2-3WS, on savings (2010-11), what assessment he made of effects on the economy of allowing devolved administrations to defer their share of savings until the next financial year; and for what reasons central Government departments were not allowed to defer their allocated savings. [849]

Danny Alexander: The Government's top priority is to tackle the deficit. Tackling the deficit this year will promote confidence and support the economic recovery. Since budgets have already been set for devolved administrations it is for them to assess whether they wish to defer their share of the savings until next year.

Public Expenditure: Wales

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his announcement of 24 May 2010, if he will list the identifiable non-devolved public expenditure savings for Wales. [586]

Danny Alexander: On 24 May the Government announced the Welsh Assembly Government's share of the £6.2 billion savings, which was £187 million together with consequential or recycled savings amounting to £24 million.

It is for the Welsh Assembly Government to decide whether to defer the savings until next year.

Any savings impacting on Wales in respect of savings made by Government Departments in non-devolved areas of spending are a matter for the relevant Government Departments to decide.

Public Finance

Richard Harrington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to reduce the budget deficit. [1001]

Justine Greening: The Coalition Agreement states that

> "deficit reduction, and continuing to ensure economic recovery, is the most urgent issue facing Britain".

The Chancellor has announced the first step in tackling the deficit, setting out details of how to save over £6 billion from spending during this financial year, the fastest and most collegiate spending review in recent history.

These savings have been found by cutting waste and low value programmes across Government. The majority of these savings will be used to reduce the deficit this year.

At the Emergency Budget on 22 June, the Chancellor will set out a comprehensive plan to accelerate reduction of the UK's deficit over the course of this Parliament.

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what mechanism he intends to use to share data with the Bank of England in respect of its role in advising on budgets and public spending reductions in 2010-11; and what data his Department intends to provide. [1148]

Mr Hoban: The Governor of the Bank of England and the Chancellor discuss economic and financial developments on a regular basis.

In addition, the Bank of England Act 1998, which sets out the role and composition of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), provides that:

> "A representative of the Treasury may attend, and speak, at any meeting of the Committee".

The non-voting Treasury representative plays a key role in liaison between the Treasury and the Bank to ensure appropriate co-ordination of fiscal and monetary policy. For example, the Treasury representative will brief the MPC confidentially in advance of major events such as the Budget and the pre-Budget report.

Tax Avoidance

Tony Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects his Department's review of IR35 to be completed. [864]

Mr Gauke: The Government intend to review IR35 as part of a wholesale review of small business taxation. Further details will be announced in due course.

Taxation: Business

Richard Harrington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to assist businesses to become more competitive through reform of the corporate tax system. [1000]

Mr Gauke: The coalition agreement sets out the Government's aim to,

> "reform the corporate tax system by simplifying reliefs and allowances, and tackling avoidance, in order to reduce headline rates. Our aim is to create the most competitive tax regime in the G20, while protecting manufacturing industries."

Further announcements will be made by the Chancellor through the Budget process.

Taxation: Holiday Accommodation

Andrew George: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he plans to implement the proposed changes of taxation rates for furnished holiday letting properties in April 2011. [688]

Mr Gauke: The Government have committed to take measures to satisfy their EU treaty obligations in regard to the taxation of furnished holiday letting that do not penalise UK-based businesses. We are considering how best to deliver that commitment. In the meantime the existing furnished holiday lettings rules will continue to apply.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Constituencies

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what average population for each parliamentary constituency he plans to propose; and on what basis this figure will be determined. [677]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have announced that legislation will be introduced to provide for the introduction of the alternative vote in the event of a positive result in the referendum, and the creation of fewer and more equal sized constituencies. Further details will be announced in due course.

Electoral Systems

Mr Watson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to change the voting system for elections to the House of Commons; and if he will make a statement. [136]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

As indicated in the Gracious Speech, the Government will shortly bring forward legislation providing for a national referendum on the alternative vote system for future elections to the House of Commons, and measures to create fewer and more equal sized constituencies.

The Government will announce further details of how it intends to take forward this commitment in due course.

House of Lords: Reform

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what his proposals are for the *(a)* scrutiny and *(b)* legislative role of a reformed second chamber; [672]

(2) what proposals he is considering for the *(a)* minimum and *(b)* maximum membership of any reformed second chamber. [673]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

These important issues will be considered by the Committee which will be established to bring forward proposals for a wholly or mainly elected second chamber.

Lobbying

Mr Watson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to introduce a statutory code for lobbyists. [137]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

We have no current plans to introduce a statutory code for lobbyists.

CABINET OFFICE

Average Earnings: Pendle

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office whether an estimate has been made of the average earnings of full-time employees in Pendle constituency for April of each year since 2000. [1114]

Mr Maude: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated June 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking whether an estimate has been made of the average earnings of full-time employees in Pendle constituency for April of each year since 2000. (1114)

The Office for National Statistics carries out the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) each April. This is the most comprehensive source of earnings information in the United Kingdom. Levels of earnings are estimated from ASHE and are provided for employees on adult rates of pay, whose pay for the survey period was not affected by absence.

I attach a table showing the median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in Pendle constituency for April of each year from 2000 until 2009, the latest period for which figures are available.

Median gross weekly earnings (£)—for full-time employee jobs[1]: Pendle Constituency

	£/week	CV
2000	344	*
2001	323	*
2002	321	*
2003	318	*
2004[2]	340	*
2004[3]	339	*
2005	376	*
2006[4]	382	*
2006[5]	382	*
2007	389	*
2008	420	*
2009	383	*

[1] Full-time employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay-period was not affected by absence. As at April of each year.
[2] 2004 results excluding supplementary survey for comparison with 2003
[3] 2004 results including supplementary survey designed to improve coverage of the survey (for more information see National Statistics website)
www.statistics.gov.uk
[4] 2006 results with methodology consistent with 2005
[5] 2006 results with methodology consistent with 2007

Guide to Quality:
The Coefficient of Variation (CV) indicates the quality of a figure, the smaller the CV value the higher the quality.
The true value is likely to lie within +/- twice the CV—for example, for an average of 200 with a CV of 5%, we would expect the population average to be within the range 180-220.

Key:
* CV > 5% and < = 10%

Source:
Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), Office for National Statistics, 2000 to 2009

Business

Mr Binley: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many small businesses generated a turnover of *(a)* between £70,000 and £100,000 and *(b)* over £100,000 in the latest period for which figures are available. [1008]

Mr Maude: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the Authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated June 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning how many small businesses generated a turnover of between (a) £70,000 and £100,000 and (b) over £100,000 in the latest period for which figures are available. [1008]

Annual statistics on business counts are available from the ONS release UK Business: Activity, Size and Location at www.statistics.gov.uk. The attached table contains data from 2009 and shows the count of VAT and/or PAYE based enterprises by employee and turnover size band.

Count of VAT or PAYE enterprises by employee and turnover size

	Turnover size band (£000')			
Employee size band	*0 to 69*	*70 to 99*	*100*	*Total*
Small 0 to 49	583,695	320,565	1,206,305	2,110,565

Charities: Bexley

Mr Evennett: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many organisations based in the London Borough of Bexley have been granted charitable status. [459]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Charity Commission. I have asked the Commission to reply.

Letter from Andrew Hind dated 27 May 2010:

As the Chief Executive of the Charity Commission, I have been asked to respond to your written Parliamentary Question (459) how many organisations based in the London Borough of Bexley have been granted charitable status.

Organisations are automatically considered to be charities if their activities benefit the public in a way the law agrees is charitable. Most charities with an annual income of over £5,000 have to register with the Charity Commission.

I can confirm that there are 373 registered charities in Bexley.

I hope this is a helpful response to your question.

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what percentage of invoices from suppliers to the Prime Minister's Office were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1248]

Mr Maude: The Prime Minister's Office is an integral part of the Cabinet Office, and the answer provided is therefore for the whole of the Cabinet Office.

In March and April 2010 respectively, 97.9% and 91.6% of compliant invoices were paid by the Cabinet Office within 10 days of receipt.

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) whether mobile telephones issued to staff in *(a)* 10 Downing Street and *(b)* the Cabinet Office are issued with factory setting security codes; [545]

(2) what measures are in place to ensure that voicemail accounts associated with mobile telephones issued to *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in (i) 10 Downing Street and (ii) the Cabinet Office cannot be accessed without appropriate authorisation. [546]

Mr Maude: Cabinet Office does not currently issue mobile telephones with the factory loaded security setting to staff in *(a)* 10 Downing street and *(b)* the Cabinet Office. When issuing mobile devices they are reset manually by our telecoms specialists before they are given to staff.

Cabinet Office currently provides default security for voicemail retrieval on mobile telephones for *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in (i) 10 Downing street and (ii) the Cabinet Office. Only the registered handset can retrieve access to the associated voice mailbox and in the event of a lost/stolen handset the mobile telephone is cancelled. The registered user has the option to upgrade the security settings for voicemail retrieval by adding a personal PIN number to enhance the security. This is encouraged.

EcovertFM

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office which Minister in his Department has lead responsibility for monitoring his Department's contract with EcovertFM. [21]

Mr Maude: As Minister for the Cabinet Office I am responsible for monitoring the EcovertFM contract.

Electoral Register

Chris Ruane: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what estimated percentage of electors are registered in each parliamentary constituency in the UK. [165]

Mr Maude: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the Authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated May 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your question asking what estimated percentage of electors are registered in each parliamentary constituency in the UK (165).

The table shows the number of people who were registered to vote in parliamentary elections as a percentage of the estimated resident population aged 18 and over for each parliamentary constituency in the UK for 2007. This is the latest year for which estimates of the usually resident population are available by parliamentary constituency for the UK. A copy of the table has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

This percentage is the nearest approximation to the percentage registered to vote that can be provided but is not an electoral registration rate. This is because the estimated resident population is not the same as the population who are eligible to vote. The population eligible to vote in parliamentary elections includes British Citizens or qualifying Commonwealth citizens resident overseas (who are not included in the UK resident population) and excludes foreign citizens from outside the British Commonwealth and Republic of Ireland resident within the UK (who are included in the estimated resident population).

In addition, figures for the registered electorate may be inflated because people who have more than one address may register in more than one place (e.g. students may register at parental and term-time addresses) and electoral registration officers vary in how quickly they remove people from the registers after they have moved away from an area or died. This may lead to percentages of over one hundred per cent and can affect the comparability of figures across parliamentary constituencies.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the electorate was in each year since 1997 in the 100 parliamentary seats which have had the largest decrease in the number of electors on the register since that date. [179]

Mr Maude: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the Authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated June 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your question asking what the electorate was in each year since 1997 in the 100 parliamentary seats which have had the largest decrease in the number of electors on the register since that date (179).

The following table shows the number of people registered to vote in parliamentary elections from 1997 to 2008, for the 100 parliamentary constituencies with the largest decrease in the number of people registered to vote over that time period. This is the latest year for which comparable data are available. A copy of the table has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

The table covers only parliamentary constituencies in England and Wales. There are no Northern Ireland constituencies which fit the criteria. Figures have not been provided for Scotland as boundary changes which came into effect in 2004 mean that electoral registration figures will not be comparable across this time period.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the electoral registration rate is for each region of the UK. [245]

Mr Maude: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated May 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your question asking what the electoral registration rate is for each region of the UK (245).

The attached table shows the number of people who were registered to vote in parliamentary elections as a percentage of the estimated resident population aged 18 and over for each region in England, and UK constituent country, for 2008. This is the latest year for which electoral estimates by parliamentary constituency are available for the UK.

This percentage is the nearest approximation to the percentage registered to vote that can be provided but is not an electoral registration rate. This is because the estimated resident population is not the same as the population who are eligible to vote. The population eligible to vote in parliamentary elections includes British Citizens or qualifying Commonwealth citizens resident overseas (who are not included in the UK resident population) and excludes foreign citizens from outside the British Commonwealth and Republic of Ireland resident within the UK (who are included in the estimated resident population).

In addition, figures for the registered electorate may be inflated because people who have more than one address may register in more than one place (e.g. students may register at parental and term-time addresses) and electoral registration officers vary in how quickly they remove people from the registers after they have moved away from an area or died. This can affect the comparability of figures across parliamentary constituencies and potentially regions.

Electoral registration percentage rates for each region in England and UK constituent country in 2008[1]

Area	*Percentage rate*
England	94
North East	96
North West	97
Yorkshire and the Humber	92
East Midlands	95
West Midlands	96
East	94
London	85
South East	95
South West	96
Wales	96
Scotland	94
Northern Ireland	85

[1] The rates have been calculated using the mid-2008 population estimates of those aged 18 and above, and the number of people registered to vote in parliamentary elections on 1 December 2008.

Source:

Office for National Statistics, General Register Office for Scotland and Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

Lobbying

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will review the Government's response to the First Report of the Public Administration Select Committee, Session 2008-09, on lobbying: Access and Influence in Whitehall, HC 36, for the purposes of implementing in full the Committee's recommendations. [647]

Mr Harper: Many of the proposals in the Committee's report have been implemented. This Government will introduce a statutory register of lobbyists. We see no compelling reason to review the Government's response to the report.

Manufacturing Industries

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many people were employed in the manufacturing sector in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* the North West and *(c)* England (i) in 1997 and (ii) at the latest date for which figures are available. [1032]

Mr Maude: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the Authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated June 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking how many people were employed in the manufacturing sector in (a) Lancashire, (b) the North West and (c) England (i) in 1997 and (ii) at the latest date for which figures are available. (1032)

Table 1, attached, shows the number of people employed in the manufacturing sector resident in (a) Lancashire, (b) the North West and (c) England for the 12 month periods ending February 1998, and September 2009 which is the latest period for which figures are available. These estimates are derived from the Annual Population Survey which collects employment data by residence rather than by workplace.

National and local area estimates for many labour market statistics, including employment, unemployment and claimant count are available on the NOMIS website at:

http://www.nomisweb.co.uk.

Table 1: Number of people employed in the manufacturing sector resident in Lancashire, north west and England.

Thousands

	For the 12 month period ending	
	February 2008	*September 2009*[1]
England	4,173	*2,682
Northwest	616	*396
Lancashire	118	** 79

[1] Coefficients of Variation have been calculated as an indication of the quality of the estimates. See Guide to Quality below.

Guide to Quality:

The Coefficient of Variation (CV) indicates the quality of an estimate, the smaller the CV value the higher the quality. The true value is likely to lie within +/- twice the CV—for example, for an estimate of 200 with a CV of 5 per cent. we would expect the population total to be within the range 180-220

Key Coefficient of Variation (CV) (%) Statistical Robustness

* 0 ≤ CV<5 Estimates are considered precise

** 5 ≤ CV <10 Estimates are considered reasonably precise

*** 10 ≤ CV <20 Estimates are considered acceptable

**** CV ≥ 20 Estimates are considered too unreliable for practical purposes

Source:

Annual Population Survey and Annual Labour Force Survey

Ministerial Policy Advisers

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments he has made since his appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse; [379]

(2) how many special advisers are based in *(a)* 10 Downing Street, *(b)* the Cabinet Office and *(c)* the Deputy Prime Minister's office. [25]

Mr Anderson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the name is of each special adviser assigned to work with each Minister. [420]

Mr Maude: I refer the hon. Members to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report,* column 99W.

Nuclear Power Stations: Decommissioning

Mr Cash: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office on what occasions the Office for National Statistics received representations on the cost to the public purse of nuclear decommissioning as a proportion of net public sector *(a)* borrowing and *(b)* debt in each of the last two years; from whom each such representation was received; and if he will place in the Library a copy of that Office's response in each case. [1195]

Mr Maude: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking on what occasions the Office for National Statistics received representations on the cost to the public purse of nuclear decommissioning as a proportion of net public sector (a) borrowing and (b) debt in each of the last two years; from whom each such representation was received. (1195)

ONS produces the United Kingdom's National Accounts. The National Accounts are an internationally comparable accounting framework that describes the activities in a national economy, including the transactions that take place between sectors of that economy. The relevant international manuals are the System of National Accounts 1993(SNA93) and the European System of Accounts 1995 (ESA95) in particular.

As part of the process of producing the National Accounts, ONS decides on the classification of institutions and transactions within the economy. This well-established process is published on the ONS website at:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/national_statistics/cop/downloads/NAclassification.pdf

Over recent years, ONS has investigated the classification of a number of bodies related to the Nuclear Industry, and have classified the major bodies related to the decommissioning process—The Nuclear Decommissioning Agency (NDA), the Nuclear Generation Decommissioning Fund Ltd (NGDF) and its successor body the Nuclear Liabilities Fund Trust Company (NLF) as public sector bodies.

This will mean the costs of decommissioning borne by these bodies will be recorded within the public sector accounts. The cost of future decommissioning is a contingent liability and as such is outside the definitions of public sector net debt. Under current decommissioning arrangements, the expenditure on actual decommissioning will impact on public sector net borrowing at the time it occurs.

These classification decisions were taken during 2007 in the case of the NDA, and during 2003/4 in the case of the NGDF and NLF.

The decisions were taken independently by ONS and approved by the National Accounts Classification Committee (or its predecessor the Public Sector Classifications Committee). ONS has received no representations in the last two years on this subject.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Aimhigher Programme

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what his plans are for the AimHigher programme. [472]

Mr Willetts *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* The need to attract more students from disadvantaged backgrounds into higher education is written into the coalition agreement. The Government are clear about the need to make sure all spending is well targeted and properly evaluated. In respect of higher education funding, we will await Lord Browne's final report and judge its proposals against the criteria set out in the coalition agreement.

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how much his Department has allocated to the AimHigher programme *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the West Midlands for 2010-11. [473]

Mr Willetts *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* In the 2010-11 financial year, £87 million has been allocated to Aimhigher nationally[1, 2].

[1] This includes £9 million allocated to Aimhigher Associates.

[2] This includes £29 million from the Higher Education Funding Council for England and £0.6 million from the Department for Health

Of this, £10.4 million has been allocated to Aimhigher partnerships in the West Midlands.

Beer

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will estimate the change in the number of jobs in the UK dependent on the pubs and beer industry in the last 30 months. [954]

Mr Prisk: An estimate of the number and change in jobs in Great Britain (GB) in the pubs and beer industry over the last 30 months, between June 2007 and December 2009, is given in the following table.

Jobs in the pubs and beer industries, GB	*June 2007*	*December 2009*	*Thousand 30 month change*
Manufacture of beer[1]	14.1	12.9	-1.1
Wholesale of wine, beer, spirits and other alcoholic beverages[1, 2]	19.3	18.8	-0.5
Retail sale of alcoholic and other beverages in specialised stores[1, 3, 4]	29.1	24.7	-4.4
Bars and licensed clubs[5]	536.4	500.9	-35.5

[1] Estimate includes an adjustment derived from the Annual Business Inquiry.
[2] Includes non-beer alcoholic beverages.
[3] Includes non-beer alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.
[4] Excludes sale and related jobs in supermarkets and other non-specialised stores.
[5] Excludes sale and related jobs in other licence premises such as restaurants and hotels.
Source:
Employee jobs data, ONS

Business: Reading Berkshire

Mr Rob Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assistance the South East Regional Development Agency provided to businesses in Reading East constituency during the economic downturn. [983]

Mr Prisk: The South East Development Agency (SEEDA) provided the strategic lead for the response to the economic downturn across the South East.

In the summer of 2008 SEEDA reprioritised its budget to support services to businesses to help them out of the recession. It put together a £15 million rapid response rescue package, including a £3 million transition loan fund, an enhanced Business Link service, expanded grants for business investment and extra help for exporters.

During the economic downturn (covering the period between 1 April 2008 and 31 December 2009) SEEDA provided assistance to over three hundred businesses in the Reading East constituency:

270 businesses received intensive assistance via Business Link services;

11 companies received assistance via the Manufacturing Advisory Service;

Three businesses received support via the Designing Demand service;

Eight internally-owned businesses were assisted to establish their first operation in Reading East or to expand an existing one;

Nine businesses were supported via the Innovation and Growth Team;

Three businesses received assistance in accessing finance through Finance South East services.

Businesses based in the Reading East constituency also received assistance via SEEDA programmes operating in wider-Berkshire, such as the Continuing Employment Support Service.

More detailed information can be found in the SEEDA-produced background information.

Mr Rob Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills with which business organisations in *(a)* Reading East constituency and *(b)* Berkshire his Department has held discussions in the last 12 months. [984]

Mr Prisk: In the last 12 months, representatives from SEEDA and GOSE have maintained ongoing engagement with key business organisations in Berkshire and the Reading East constituency on behalf of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills by:

(i) attending meeting of the Berkshire Economic Strategy Board, which is a cross Berkshire board made up of representatives from both the private and public sector, responsible for delivering the Regional Economic Strategy across Berkshire;

(ii) meeting with representatives from the Reading Community Interest Company, which is responsible for Economic Development in Reading; and

(iii) engaging in the Reading Diamond for Investment and Growth, which was defined by the South East Regional Economic Strategy as a significant, urban functional area with the potential to act as a catalyst for wider prosperity.

Business: Regulation

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills by what mechanisms he plans to implement his proposals to give the public the opportunity to challenge the worst regulations. [862]

Mr Prisk: We are committed to giving the public the opportunity to challenge the worst regulations, thus putting power back in the hands of businesses and citizens, making regulations less complicated and boosting enterprise by cutting red tape. We are working to develop innovative and practical ways for individuals, business and others to have their say on regulation. I will make a statement to the House with more details in due course.

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which regulations he has identified as primary candidates for abolition under the one in-one out rule for business regulations. [1065]

Mr Prisk: The 'one-in, one-out' rule will change the incentives for policy makers across Government, encouraging as much focus on identifying regulations to be repealed, simplified or replaced by alternative policy approaches, as on developing new regulation.

Responsible Departments will take forward the identification of regulations that can be removed or simplified. All relevant regulations are within scope.

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills by what mechanism he plans to implement his proposal to give the public the opportunity to challenge the worst regulations. [1068]

Mr Prisk: We are committed to giving the public the opportunity to challenge the worst regulations, thus putting power back in the hands of businesses and citizens, making regulations less complicated and boosting enterprise by cutting red tape. We are working to develop innovative and practical ways for individuals, business and others to have their say on regulation. I will make a statement to the House with more details in due course.

Credit Cards: Interest Rates

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills when he plans to implement proposals to enable regulatory bodies to *(a)* define and *(b)* prohibit excessive interest rates on credit and store cards. [858]

Mr Davey: The Government's proposals to prohibit excessive rates on credit and store cards are one of a number of consumer protection commitments included in the coalition agreement, including our plans to introduce a cooling off period for store cards.

I will be setting out detailed plans on how the Government will be taking these commitments forward shortly.

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1264]

Mr Davey: In March and April 2010 respectively, 97.5% and 93.2% of invoices were paid by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) within 10 days.

The results are published on the BIS website and can be accessed via the following link

http://www.bis.gov.uk/About/procurement/prompt-payment/bis-payment-performance

Departmental Manpower

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many full-time equivalent staff at each civil service grade are employed in the private office of each Minister in his Department. [123]

Mr Davey: Staff are currently allocated as follows although because the Department now has fewer Ministers these allocations are not yet final.

	SCS	*G7*	*SEO*	*HEO/FS*	*EO and below*	*Total*
Dr Vince Cable MP	1	1	1	2	1	6
David Willetts MP	—	1	—	3	1	5
Mark Prisk MP	—	1	—	2	3	6
John Hayes MP	—	—	1	—	3	4
Edward Davey MP	—	—	—	2	3	5
Baroness Wilcox	—	—	—	2	2	4

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many special advisers *(a)* he and *(b)* each named Minister in his Department (i) has appointed to date and (ii) plans to appoint. [315]

Mr Davey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column reference 99W.

Departmental Official Cars

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many Government *(a)* cars and *(b)* drivers are allocated to Ministers in his Department. [286]

Mr Davey: BIS Ministers inherited cars and drivers allocated to previous departmental Ministers.

The new Ministerial Code, published on 21 May, contains changes that affect ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. It states that

> "the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed".

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with Departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements. The Secretary of State will use a pool car and will not have an allocated car or driver. Arrangements are being made to put this into effect in an orderly way.

The Ministerial Code, published on 21 May, is available on the Cabinet Office website.

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to his Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front-line and *(b)* other staff employed by (i) his Department and (ii) its agencies. [628]

Mr Davey: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has at present no plans for compulsory redundancies and has therefore made no estimate of new costs. The forecast legacy costs of previous exit schemes (both compulsory and voluntary) is estimated at £6.1 million in 2010-11.

I have approached the chief executives of the Insolvency Service, Companies House, the National Measurement Office, the Intellectual Property Office and the Skills Funding Agency and they will respond to the hon. Member directly.

Letter from Gareth Jones:

I am replying on behalf of Companies House to your Parliamentary Question tabled 26 May 2010, UIN 628 to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Companies House is a Trading Fund and Executive Agency of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Companies House has not budgeted for any redundancy costs; however, as a Trading Fund any costs would be met by fees from our customers and would represent no cost to the public purse.

Letter from Stephen Speed, dated 27 May 2010:

The Secretary of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has asked me to reply to your question regarding what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to his Department of redundancy payments for (a) front line and (b) other staff employed by (i) his Department and (ii) its agencies.

The Insolvency Service Executive Agency of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills had no annual cost for redundancy payments for (a) front line and (b) other staff employed in the last financial year 2009/10.

Surplus staff were identified during 2009/10 but we were able to absorb them elsewhere within The Service by the release of temporary workers.

Letter from John Alty, dated 2 June 2010:

I am responding in respect of the Intellectual Property Office to your Parliamentary Question tabled 26 May 2010, to the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

The Intellectual Property Office (IPO) is a Trading Fund and Executive Agency of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). The IPO has not budgeted for any redundancy costs; however as a Trading Fund any costs would be met by fees from users and would represent no cost to the public purse.

Letter from Peter Mason, dated 1 June 2010:

I am responding in respect of the National Measurement Office to your Parliamentary Question tabled on 26 May to the Secretary of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, asking about estimates of the annual cost of redundancy payments for staff employed by the Department and its Agencies.

The cost to the Agency of any redundancy or other exit payments this year will be disclosed in its Annual Report and Accounts of 2010/11. As matters stand, however, we do not envisage having to make such payments during the current year.

Letter from Geoff Russell, dated 2 June 2010:

I am replying on behalf of the Skills Funding Agency to your Parliamentary Question tabled on 26 May, to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, concerning annual costs of redundancy payments for the Department and its agencies (UIN 628).

The Skills Funding Agency was set up as an agency of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills on 01 April 2010. As a new agency, we are currently looking at the implications of the recent announcements and the impact on the future shape of the organisation.

The cost to the agency of any redundancy and other exit payments this financial year will be disclosed in the accounts for 2010/11, which will be published online in 2011.

Higher Education: Finance

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the planned reduction in previously planned expenditure for 2010-11 is for each university in the North East. [101]

Mr Willetts: The Higher Education Funding Council for England announced provisional allocations to institutions for academic year 2010-11 on 18 March 2010. As in previous years, final allocations taking into account any further changes will be announced in July this year.

Higher Education: Student Numbers

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what estimate he has made of the likely change in the number of student places in universities in the West Midlands between academic years 2009-10 and 2010-11. [762]

Mr Willetts *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* The number of students in each institution will depend upon the recruitment decisions taken by individual institutions. However, we are making available funding for an additional 10,000 places in academic year 2010/11 which will be allocated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Local Enterprise Partnerships

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills pursuant to the answer of 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 43W, on One North East, (1) what arrangements he plans to put in place to establish local enterprise partnerships on a (i) local, (ii) sub-regional and (iii) regional basis; [1396]

(2) how many local economic partnerships he expects to be created in the North East region to replace One North East. [1397]

Mr Prisk: The Government will provide further detail on the future of the regional development agencies and how we propose to take forward our proposals for local enterprise partnerships shortly.

Motor Industry: Finance

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what recent discussions he has had with Ford on the provision of Government loans and guarantees to that company; [1359]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with GM on the provision of Government loans and guarantees to that company; [1360]

(3) what recent discussions he has had with Nissan on the provision of Government loans and guarantees to that company. [1361]

Mr Prisk: I have spoken to Ford, General Motors/Vauxhall and Nissan in the past week about a range of issues. Government are reviewing commitments made since 1 January 2010, including to these three companies. Where projects are good value for money and consistent with Government's priorities, they will go ahead. We have asked HM Treasury to fast track a decision to give clarity as soon as possible to the companies and their work forces.

Post Offices

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many Post Office branches closed between 1997 and 2010; and what his policy is on the future of the Post Office network. [1113]

Mr Davey: The Department does not hold the information requested on post office closures. I have asked David Smith, the Managing Director of Post Office Ltd., to respond directly to the hon. Member and a copy of his reply will be placed in the House Libraries.

As set out in "The Coalition: our programme for government" we will ensure that post offices are allowed to offer a wide range of services in order to sustain the network, and we will be working with Post Office Ltd. to develop new sources of revenue, including considering the case for a Post Office Bank.

Regional Development Agencies

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills by what mechanism he will assess whether a regional development agency is popular. [1064]

Mr Prisk: The Government will provide further detail on the future of the regional development agencies and how we propose to take forward our proposals for local enterprise partnerships shortly.

Dr Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what plans he has for the future operation of schemes *(a)* contracted and *(b)* commenced by regional development agencies. [1197]

Mr Prisk: The regional development agencies have been allocated budgets for 2010-11 and are continuing to deliver schemes in line with their priorities. The Government will provide further detail on the future of the regional development agencies and how we propose to take forward our proposals for local enterprise partnerships shortly.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what plans he has for the future of Advantage West Midlands; and if he will make a statement. [1444]

Mr Prisk: The Government will provide further detail on the future of the regional development agencies and how we propose to take forward our proposals for local enterprise partnerships shortly.

Summertime

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will bring forward proposals for the introduction of British Summer Time and Double British Summer Time for a trial period. [840]

Mr Davey: We are aware that there are a range of views on this subject. While the Government do not propose to change current arrangements, we continue to listen to representations we receive and consider any evidence presented to us.

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent assessment he has made of the merits of introducing British Summer Time and Double British Summer Time; and if he will make a statement. [841]

Mr Davey: The Government have no current plans to commission a review of the existing arrangements but will continue to listen to arguments for and against change.

Supermarkets: Competition

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills when he plans to *(a)* bring forward and *(b)* implement proposals for an Ombudsman in the Office of Fair Trading to enforce the Grocery Supply Chain Code of Practice. [1029]

Mr Davey: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Andrew George) and the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, column reference 44W.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 8 June 2010

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Bovine Tuberculosis: Disease Control

Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 2 June 2010, to Question 572, what timetable she has set for introducing badger control measures; and what scientific evidence she plans to take into account in considering the authorisation of a cull. [1163]

Mr Paice: A timetable for introducing a badger control policy has not yet been set as we are looking at all the evidence including the full range of scientific evidence and considering all the relevant issues to develop a comprehensive and balanced package of measures to tackle TB in cattle.

Cattle: Animal Welfare

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on the practice of factory farming of dairy cows. [1456]

Mr Paice: The welfare of livestock, including cows, is protected by the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 and the Animal Welfare Act 2006. There are codes of recommendations published on the DEFRA website which farmers are required by law to have access to, and be familiar with, which encourage high standards of husbandry. Enforcement action can be taken against farmers who do not comply with this legislation.

The Government welcome innovative and entrepreneurial efforts by dairy farmers to improve their global competitiveness, while protecting the environment and meeting animal welfare standards. All dairy cattle, in whatever system they are kept, are protected by comprehensive animal welfare legislation in England. It is important to recognise that poor welfare can occur in both intensive and extensive systems, and the most significant influence on the welfare of livestock is the stock-keeper, not the system in which it is reared.

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of invoices from suppliers to her Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1278]

Richard Benyon: The information is as follows:

	Percentage
(a) March 2010	99.6
(b) April 2010	99.78

Environmental Stewardship Scheme

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to promote the use of environmental stewardship schemes to protect biodiversity in upland areas. [1292]

Mr Paice: Environmental stewardship provides funding for farmers to deliver effective environmental land management. From this year, this includes a new strand called Uplands Entry Level Stewardship (Uplands ELS), targeted specifically at the conditions and type of farming in the severely disadvantaged areas of the English uplands. First agreements commence on 1 July 2010. Both Uplands ELS, and Stewardship as a whole, have specific objectives around biodiversity conservation, and Natural England has recently produced information on how to get the greatest biodiversity benefits from land management choices under stewardship as part of their entry level stewardship training and information work.

Fisheries: Northern Ireland

Ms Ritchie: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions her Department has had with the Northern Ireland Executive on the forthcoming fisheries negotiating round in the Agriculture and Fisheries Council. [1022]

Richard Benyon: My officials met with their Northern Irish counterparts and representatives of the UK fishing industry as recently as 4 June to discuss plans for the forthcoming negotiations, exploring in particular, the consequences of the new format for the scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)—based on working towards maximum sustainable yield—the first instalment of which is expected later this month.

In the light of this advice, we will then decide, with colleagues from all the devolved administrations, what the 2011 priority stocks on which we will focus our attention should be for the UK. It is clear that for Northern Ireland, these will include Irish Sea nephrops, a critical stock for their fleet.

Flood Control

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what additional resources she intends to allocate for the extension of flood defences following the recommendations of the Pitt Report. [1072]

Richard Benyon: We are currently working through the detail of the policies set out in the coalition agreement and other issues in the DEFRA portfolio, which includes funding for flood defences. We will keep the DEFRA website updated as work progresses.

Floods: Pendle

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what options her Department is considering for flood prevention in Pendle. [1030]

Richard Benyon: The Environment Agency is currently producing the Burnley, Nelson and Colne Strategy which will look at managing flood risk in these urban districts.

The strategy will go out for consultation in July.

Floods: Worcestershire

Harriett Baldwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) whether she plans to maintain agreed levels of funding for flood defence schemes in Upton-upon-Severn, Uckinghall, Kempsey, Pershore and Powick; and if she will make a statement; [740]

(2) if she will visit Tenbury Wells to discuss the provision of flood defences; if she will review the Government's formula for funding flood defences to assist the town to meet the criteria for funding; and if she will make a statement. [741]

Richard Benyon: We are currently working through the detail of the policies set out in the coalition agreement and other issues in DEFRA's portfolio, which include flooding risk management. We will keep DEFRA's website updated as work progresses.

In my role as Minister I hope to have the opportunity to visit many parts of the country, including inland areas which have faced, or may in the future face, flooding problems.

Food: Procurement

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will assess the merits of bringing forward proposals to prohibit the provision of seafood produced from endangered species in public sector organisations; and if she will bring forward proposals for a *(a)* mechanism and *(b)* timetable for increasing the use of demonstrably sustainable fish. [959]

Richard Benyon: DEFRA and HM Revenue and Customs enforce strict controls on the import and marketing of animals and animal products from species classified as endangered under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

The Government support moves to ensure that seafood procured by the public sector is from sustainable sources and avoids seafood from endangered species. The public sector must lead by example on this and DEFRA is looking into how this can be achieved.

Advice and guidance in sustainable sourcing of food, including fish, for the public sector, for example by reference to the Marine Stewardship Council's Eco-label scheme and equivalent certification schemes that meet the UN FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, is already available in the PSFPI catering service and food procurement toolkit, which is available on the DEFRA website. Public sector procurement guidance also refers to the IUCN red list as being definitive on endangered species.

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will bring forward proposals to set standards of animal welfare for the procurement of food and meals by the public sector; and if she will make a statement. [1126]

Mr Paice: The Government support moves to raise animal welfare standards both domestically and internationally, and our livestock industry already has some of the highest standards for farm animal welfare in the world.

The public sector must lead by example on this and DEFRA is taking forward the commitment in the coalition agreement to ensure that, food procured by Government Departments, and eventually the whole public sector, meets British standards of production wherever this can be achieved without increasing overall cost.

Forestry Commission

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for the Forestry Commission. [994]

Mr Paice: The Queen's Speech announced the Government's intention to bring forward a Bill to reform public bodies. DEFRA, along with other sponsor departments, is carrying out a critical examination of the number and cost of its arm's length bodies. The role of the Forestry Commission is being considered as part of that review.

Hazardous Substances: Waste Disposal

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will hold a public inquiry into the alleged role of UK-based *(a)* firms and *(b)* nationals in the dumping of toxic waste off Côte d'Ivoire in 2006. [881]

Richard Benyon: We have no plans for a public inquiry.

WALES

Departmental Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what her estimate is of the cost to the public purse of proposed reductions in numbers of non-front line staff in her Department and its agencies. [498]

Mrs Gillan: Nil. It is envisaged that any reductions could be achieved through a process of natural wastage.

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what her most recent estimate is of the annual cost to her Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff. [645]

Mrs Gillan: My department has not made any redundancy payments.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans she has to consult trade unions in her Department concerning deficit reduction plans. [615]

Mrs Gillan: Should the need arise, we will apply the principles set out in the Ministry of Justice's managing organisational change framework.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Conditional Fee Arrangements

Mr Buckland: To ask the Attorney-General if he will undertake a review of the effects on the civil justice system of the operation of conditional fee agreements. [838]

Mr Djanogly: I have been asked to reply.

Conditional fee agreements or CFAs have played a role in giving people access to justice. However, the Government are aware of some concerns around their operation. Lord Justice Jackson conducted a comprehensive review of civil litigation costs which also covered the operation of CFAs. His report: "Review of Civil Litigation Costs: Final Report," published on 14 January 2010, has recommended significant changes to the operation of CFAs. We are considering Lord Justice Jackson's proposals carefully to assess their impact before determining what reforms might be necessary to the operation of CFAs to ensure proportionate access to justice.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Helen Goodman: To ask the Attorney-General how many special advisers *(a)* he and *(b)* the Solicitor-General (i) has appointed to date and (ii) plans to appoint. [321]

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensioners: Poverty

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what his most recent estimate is of the number of pensioners living in poverty in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Coventry; [1181]

(2) what steps he plans to take to reduce the numbers of pensioners living in poverty in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Coventry. [1182]

Steve Webb: The most commonly used measure of poverty relates to those with incomes below 60% of contemporary median income, after housing costs.

The latest figures for the UK are published in the Households Below Average Income series, and show that in 2008-09 there were 1.8 million pensioners in poverty (16% of all pensioners). Figures are quoted to the nearest 100,000 and percentages are quoted to the nearest whole percentage point.

Estimates of poverty only allow a breakdown of the overall numbers in poverty at Government Office Region level. Therefore, information is available for the West Midlands Government Office Region, but not available for the city of Coventry.

Three-year averages are used to report regional statistics as single-year estimates are subject to volatility. The latest information relates to the period 2006-07 to 2008-09 in which there were around 200,000 pensioners in poverty (16 per cent) in the West Midlands Government Office Region (again, figures are quoted to the nearest 100,000 and percentages are quoted to the nearest whole percentage point).

This Government will restore the earnings link for the basic state pension from April 2011, with a 'triple guarantee' that pensions are raised by the highest of earnings, prices or 2.5%.

We will help prevent people from falling into poverty in later life by simplifying the rules and regulations relating to pensions to help reinvigorate occupational pensions. We will encourage companies to offer high-quality pensions to all employees and will work with businesses and the industry to support auto enrolment.

DEFENCE

Aircraft Carriers

Mr Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Minister for Defence Procurement has examined the break clauses on the aircraft carrier contract. [1363]

Peter Luff: Work has been conducted across the Department to understand the MOD's commitments and liabilities for equipment programmes, including the Queen Elizabeth Class Aircraft Carriers. Ministers have been briefed on the outcome of this work as part of normal briefing.

We are now in the process of carrying out a Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), within which all aspects of the defence programme will be examined. This will ensure that the armed forces have what they need in order to do what we ask of them and that the defence budget is spent as efficiently, effectively and economically as possible.

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what requests he has received from the Health and Safety Executive Nuclear Installations Inspectorate for information on changes to the organisational structure of the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE); and what estimate he has made of the effect on the number of AWE posts with responsibility for monitoring and enforcing safety or environmental performance of those changes. [963]

Peter Luff: I have not received, nor would I expect to receive, any such requests in respect of regulatory matters between the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII) and AWE plc. Ministry of Defence (MOD) Officials are, however, kept informed of AWE plc's interfaces with regulators, including the NII and the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator (DNSR).

The NII and DNSR have carried out a joint assessment of organisational changes that have recently been proposed by AWE plc. The NII and DNSR have indicated jointly to AWE plc that, subject to ongoing dialogue and regulatory oversight, they have no objection to the implementation of these changes. No separate MOD estimate has been made of the effect on the numbers of AWE plc personnel required, nor is one needed.

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what account he plans to take of environmental impact assessment regulations in implementing proposals for a new hydrodynamics facility, project Hydrus, at Atomic Weapons Establishment Aldermaston. [961]

Peter Luff: The Department will take full account of these regulations in implementing proposals for project Hydrus.

The regulations allow for individual defence environmental impact assessment exemption directions to be sought in order to safeguard national security. In cases where exemptions are granted, it is our practice to supply, in place of a statutory environmental statement (ES), a defence exempt environmental appraisal with the relevant planning documents. In this way, only information considered sensitive and prejudicial to national defence is not published; all other information normally included in an ES is included with the application to the local planning authority.

China: Military Aid

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the extent is of the contacts between the Royal Navy and the People's Liberation Army Navy of the People's Republic of China. [1016]

Nick Harvey: In recent years there have been a number of high level visits between the respective Chiefs of Navies and their Senior Commanders, underpinned by successful working level visits. Such activities generate greater knowledge of each others' intentions, culture and ethos, which promote mutual trust and reduce the risk of misunderstanding. The UK has recently welcomed China's participation in the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) group, which manages the plethora of multi-national and national counter-piracy activity in the Gulf of Aden. Naval ship visits also play an important part in the development of navy-to-navy relations.

Departmental Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on external consultations in each of the last five years. [665]

Mr Robathan: Over the last five years, the Ministry of Defence has on average conducted* four external consultations per year on a variety of Defence-related topics. Information about the cost of conducting these consultations is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many non-UK citizens are employed as special advisers in his Department. [1372]

Dr Fox: One.

France

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many drivers provided by his Department were involved in transporting the Minister for Veterans to France and to his constituency on 29 and 30 May 2010. [1150]

Mr Robathan *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* One driver was used to transport the Minster for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans to join commemorations of the 70th anniversary of Dunkirk. However, in accordance with the EC regulations and working time regulations on the number of hours that a driver can work within a 24 hour period, one additional driver was used in the UK to complete the return journey to the Minister's constituency.

Hebrides Missile Range

Mr MacNeil: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will offer QinetiQ an incentive to generate business at the Hebrides Range. [1171]

Peter Luff *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* The Long Term Partnering Agreement (LTPA) with QinetiQ, which covers the operation of the Hebrides Range and other facilities, already provides for commercial usage by third parties. Nonetheless, it is recognised that further, appropriate, incentivisation could help QinetiQ to attract more work of this kind. However, we must also ensure that in doing so we comply with our EU Treaty obligations and avoid any state aid. These are complex issues, but my officials are working to develop an incentive regime for all LTPA facilities, which would meet these criteria.

Mr MacNeil: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how revenue arising from new business at the Hebrides Range will be divided between his Department and QinetiQ. [1184]

Peter Luff *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* It has not yet been possible to set in place a legally compliant regime to attract new commercial business to facilities covered by the Long Term Partnering Agreement (LTPA) with QinetiQ, including the Hebrides Range. The LTPA provides for third party usage of facilities and contains complex gain-share provisions covering the attribution of revenues between the Ministry of Defence, the owners of the sites in question, and QinetiQ. However, I am withholding the precise details of these arrangements as disclosure could damage QinetiQ's commercial interests.

Hercules Aircraft

Mr Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how long RAF Brize Norton was closed as a consequence of the incident on a Hercules aircraft on 6 May 2010; and how many flights were *(a)* diverted to RAF Lyneham and *(b)* cancelled. [1176]

Nick Harvey: As a consequence of a landing incident involving a Hercules C-130 aircraft, RAF Brize Norton was closed from 1813 hrs on 6 May 2010 until 16.50 hrs on 7 May 2010.

During this period two flights were diverted to RAF Lyneham, and three flights to other airfields.

One operational flight was cancelled as a result of the airfield being unavailable, although this task was absorbed into a subsequent flight. 11 training flights from RAF Brize Norton were also cancelled. This small backlog of training has now been recovered.

Mr Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effects on the Afghanistan Airbridge of the incident involving a Hercules aircraft at RAF Brize Norton on 6 May 2010; and if he will make a statement. [1177]

Nick Harvey: There was only minor disruption to the operation of the Afghanistan Airbridge following the incident involving a Hercules C-130 aircraft at RAF Brize Norton on 6 May 2010. All scheduled dispatch and recovery of personnel and equipment was achieved within required time scales.

Nuclear Submarines

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what operational safety reviews are in place for the UK's nuclear submarine fleet; and for what reason such reviews did not detect the safety valves faults on HMS Tireless and HMS Turbulent; [624]

(2) for what reason standard operational procedures did not detect the reported faults with the safety valves on the HMS Tireless and HMS Turbulent; and if he will make a statement. [707]

Peter Luff: The problem referred to was the failure to remove hull valve blanks fitted as part of the Trafalgar class maintenance process. The valves themselves were not faulty.

The UK's nuclear submarines operate within strict safety management arrangements. The nuclear safety elements of these are regulated by the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator (DNSR) who investigated this issue working with other interested parties including the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the potential effects of a malfunctioning safety valve on board a vessel of the UK's nuclear submarine fleet on active service. [625]

Peter Luff: The problem referred to was the failure to remove hull valve blanks fitted as part of the Trafalgar class maintenance process. The valves themselves were not faulty.

The relief valves provide a relief path in the event of over-pressurization of certain secondary, non-nuclear elements of the propulsion system. Hull valve blanks would have blocked this relief path. In practice, however, the likelihood of an event occurring that would require the operation of the relief valves is small during normal operation. This is because the relief system in question is a back up to other system components and safeguards that were operating correctly.

Quick Reaction Alert

Mr Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the RAF Typhoon to take over responsibility for Quick Reaction Alert from the RAF Tornado. [660]

Nick Harvey: Typhoon already undertakes Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) duties at RAF Coningsby. On current plans Typhoon will begin to take up QRA duties at RAF Leuchars, in conjunction with Tornado F3, from late 2010 and will take over complete responsibility in April 2011 when Tornado F3 retires from service.

Mr Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the RAF received notification from any other national agency of the flight path of the Russian Blackjack bombers intercepted on 10 March 2010. [661]

Nick Harvey: The detection and identification of aircraft within the NATO Air Policing Area for which the UK is responsible is carried out by the Royal Air Force Air Surveillance and Control System. The system draws on data from a range of RAF and Royal Navy assets as well as from the civilian Air Traffic Control centres and from those NATO allies with responsibility for adjacent Air Policing Areas.

The Russian aircraft detected on 10 March 2010 did not file any flightplan with civil air traffic authorities.

Mr Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions *(a)* RAF Typhoons and *(b)* RAF Tornados have been deployed over Scotland in a Quick Reaction Alert capacity in the last 12 months. [662]

Nick Harvey: In the last 12 months, from 1 June 2009, RAF Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) aircraft were launched on 15 separate days. Not every launch resulted in an interception, as some incidents were resolved before this occurred.

For the requested period no aircraft was intercepted or escorted over Scotland. QRA aircraft were launched for Russian Military aircraft in the NATO Air Policing Area for which the UK has responsibility, but they remained in international airspace at all times.

I am withholding the specific type of RAF aircraft involved for reasons of national security.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Anguilla

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much he has agreed to allow the Government of Anguilla to borrow in the next 12 months. [1103]

Mr Bellingham: We are working closely with the Government of Anguilla as they prepare their 2010 budget to be implemented by the end of June, and a three year plan to return public finances to sustainability.

Anguilla and Turks and Caicos Islands

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the economic stability of *(a)* Anguilla and *(b)* the Turks and Caicos Islands. [1104]

Mr Bellingham: The downturn in the global economy has had a severe impact in both Anguilla and the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI). Public finances have also suffered as both territories have relied heavily on tourism and construction for a large part of their revenue base. Between 2008 and 2009 Government revenues fell by 28% in Anguilla and by around 33% in the TCI. This sharp downturn in Government revenues has put pressure on public finances and—as in other jurisdictions—there has been a need to reduce public expenditure. The Governments of the TCI and Anguilla are aware of the need to take action to put their public finances on a sustainable footing. We are working closely with both to address these challenges, including funding revenue studies in both Territories, and an expenditure study in Anguilla.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) continues to monitor the economic and financial position of the Overseas Territories. Officials from the FCO and the Department for International Development undertook a joint mission to the TCI in May to assess the situation. The FCO will send a similar mission to Anguilla in June.

Ascension Island

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial assistance he plans to provide to Ascension Island. [1105]

Mr Bellingham: There is no plan to provide budgetary aid to Ascension Island.

There is no settled community on Ascension Island as there is no Right of Abode. It would not be appropriate for the Island to receive budgetary aid.

British Overseas Territories: Biodiversity

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made a recent assessment of threats to biodiversity in *(a)* the Falkland Islands, *(b)* Ascension Island, *(c)* the British Indian Ocean Territory and *(d)* British Antarctic. [1106]

Mr Bellingham: Responsibility for environmental issues in the Falkland Islands and Ascension Island has been devolved to their respective territory governments, who assess and evaluate their own biodiversity priorities.

In the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), the BIOT Commissioner's scientific/environmental adviser travels to the territory annually and reports on environmental issues there, including threats to biodiversity if appropriate. In February 2010, a scientific expedition team travelled with him to undertake environmental monitoring for improved conservation management. This was funded by the Overseas Territories Environment Programme.

The threats to biodiversity in the Antarctic were addressed in the comprehensive Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research report on "Antarctic Climate Change and the Environment" published in November 2009. Several of the lead authors and editors were from the British Antarctic Survey.

British Overseas Territories: Equality

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ensure that new constitutions for British Overseas Territories include effective equality clauses. [1383]

Mr Bellingham: The Government takes the protection of human rights very seriously. We will ensure that all new Overseas Territory constitutions contain a Bill of Rights, including a non-discrimination clause that reflects at a minimum the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Colombia: Human Rights

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on human rights in Colombia. [1095]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The human rights situation in Colombia is of significant concern. High levels of poverty and inequality, and the continued internal conflict fuelled by the cocaine trade, continue to undermine respect for human rights. Human rights defenders, including civil society activists, lawyers, trade unionists, journalists and religious leaders continue to suffer frequent violence and intimidation. We receive regular reports about human rights abuses committed by state security forces, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), illegal armed groups and criminal gangs. The high level of impunity exacerbates the problem.

The UK will continue to raise concerns with the Colombian government at a senior level and give support to those who are affected by the violence. We will also work with our EU and other international partners to ensure that human rights is core to the new government's policies when it is elected later this month. And in practical terms, subject to the review of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office programme budgets, we will continue to support projects on the ground that help improve human rights.

Cuba

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he plans to visit Cuba. [1099]

Mr Jeremy Browne: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no current plans to visit Cuba.

Cuba: EU External Relations

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the future of the EU Common Position on Cuba. [1100]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The EU's Common Position on Cuba will be evaluated by the Foreign Affairs Council on 14 June. While, like most EU member states, the UK would like to be in a position to have a more normal bilateral relationship between the EU and Cuba, we cannot support the end of the Common Position against the current background of human rights abuses in Cuba.

Cyprus: Peace Negotiations

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his most recent assessment is of the progress of settlement talks in Cyprus. [1107]

Mr Lidington: The Government support the continuing negotiations aimed at reaching an agreed settlement on the island for the benefit of all Cypriots. The two leaders in Cyprus held their first meeting since elections in the north of the island on 26 May and spoke again on 3 June. Further meetings are planned at both expert and leader level in the coming weeks. Both sides have agreed to negotiate within the UN parameters and resume from where the negotiations left off on 30 March. Discussions continue to take place in a constructive atmosphere and are currently focusing on property. We urge all sides to grasp this opportunity and build on the considerable convergences achieved in the talks to date to achieve an early solution.

Democratic Republic of Congo: Peacekeeping Operations

Dr Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken at *(a)* national and *(b)* international level to bring (i) stability and (ii) humanitarian aid to the Democratic Republic of the Congo following the expiry of the United Nations mandate; and if he will make a statement. [1135]

Mr Bellingham: The mandate for the UN Peacekeeping Mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (MONUSCO from June 2010, MONUC before) has recently been renewed until the end of June 2011. The UK lobbied strongly during the negotiations to ensure the UN peacekeeping force was given an effective mandate with protection of civilians as the highest priority. We are pleased with the outcome of the mandate.

Under the new mandate MONUC/MONUSCO, will continue to play an integral role in Security Sector Reform (SSR) in DRC. Reform of the Congolese security sector is essential to bringing peace and stability to DRC and we will continue to support this process.

The UK is a key contributor to the UN Humanitarian Pooled fund. This fund aims to tackle the most critical humanitarian needs in the DRC, and enable a rapid response to any unforeseen circumstances. The UK will contribute £30 million to the fund over 2010-11.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many special advisers *(a)* he and *(b)* each named Minister in his Department (i) has appointed to date and (ii) plans to appoint. [318]

Mr Lidington: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's response of 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many non-UK citizens are employed as special advisers in his Department. [1368]

Alistair Burt: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office's response of 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 51W.

Departmental Official Cars

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Government *(a)* cars and *(b)* drivers are allocated to Ministers in his Department. [296]

Mr Lidington: The Foreign Secretary uses a Government car but full details of his transport arrangements are not published for security reasons. Other Foreign Office Ministers currently use a combination of allocated and pool cars. These arrangements are subject to review. The new ministerial code, published on 21 May 2010, contains changes that affect ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. It states that

> "the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed".

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with Departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements. The ministerial code, published on 21 May 2010, is available on the Cabinet Office website.

Gibraltar: Equality

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that there is an equal age of consent in Gibraltar. [1384]

Mr Lidington: There is an ongoing Gibraltar court case launched by the Government of Gibraltar to examine the compatibility of Gibraltar's Age of Consent law with Gibraltar's Constitution.

On 6 April this year the UK responded to an invitation from the Supreme Court of Gibraltar for applications by interested parties to the case. The UK intervention will set out the international legal arguments that the distinction in Age of Consent (and other discriminatory provisions relating to sexual offences) are in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

The British Government takes seriously its obligations under ECHR which also extend to the Overseas Territories (OTs). We are committed to working with OT Governments to ensure we meet these obligations.

Honduras: Politics and Government

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the recognition of the government of Honduras. [1094]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The UK has a long-standing policy of recognising states and not governments.

Palestinians: International Assistance

Jo Swinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Israeli government in respect of British nationals who were part of the Free Gaza Movement

flotilla and who have subsequently been detained by Israeli forces; and what reports he has received on the level of access to lawyers afforded to those detained. [1142]

Alistair Burt: We are in regular touch with the Israeli Government, in Israel and in London.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke to the Israeli Foreign Minister on 1 June 2010 and I met the Israeli ambassador on 3 June 2010. We made the UK's position very clear. We pressed the Israelis to allow our staff immediate access to those detained, to ensure we could provide proper and timely consular assistance.

I understand those detained were not offered access to legal representation by the Israeli authorities. Our consular staff raised the issue of legal representation with those British nationals who they were able to meet in Beer'Sheva prison on 1 June 2010. The responses of British nationals detained there varied; some did not want to engage legal assistance, some asked us to contact the organisers' lawyers, and some asked us to provide lists of English speaking local lawyers. Our consul in Tel Aviv returned the next day with lists of English speaking local lawyers, however due to the speed with which the prisoners were transferred to Ben Gurion airport before they were deported, he was unable to provide this list to those who requested it. Should any British nationals require it, they can obtain the lists from our embassy in Tel Aviv or the embassy website.

Jo Swinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the destination of the aid carried by the Free Gaza Movement flotilla. [1143]

Alistair Burt: We are aware of media reports on this issue including that some items are likely to be withheld due to the restrictions in place on import of items to Gaza. We continue to monitor these developments.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear in his statement to the House on 2 June 2010, it is essential that there be unfettered access not only to meet the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza, but to enable the reconstruction of homes and livelihoods and permit trade to take place. We continue to press the Israeli Government to lift Gaza's closure. The Foreign Secretary is also discussing these issues with international partners, including during visits to European capitals this week.

Jo Swinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made an assessment of the merits of an international investigation into the actions of the Israeli government in relation to the Free Gaza Movement flotilla. [1144]

Alistair Burt: As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear in his statement to the House on 2 June 2010 we want to see a full credible, impartial and independent investigation into events surrounding the interception of boats in the "Free Gaza" flotilla. Our goal is a process that ensures full accountability for the events that occurred and commends the confidence of the international community, including international participation.

Pitcairn Islands: Children

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the level of child safety in Pitcairn. [1101]

Mr Bellingham: A Pitcairn Child Safety Review, commissioned by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development was completed by independent experts in June 2009. The review concluded that further work was needed to improve the management of the risks to child safety on Pitcairn. The Government are working to implement the recommendations made in the report. A further review is planned for 2011.

The UK Government take its responsibilities for child protection on Pitcairn very seriously. There is a significant community of professionals on Pitcairn, including a police officer, a trained social worker, a teacher and a doctor. An FCO official stationed on the island is the designated Children's officer. There are established policies and procedures in place for handling specific child protection concerns. All professionals receive child protection training before they go to the island, and most members of the island community have also attended human rights training and child protection training.

Russia: Corruption

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the incidence of corruption in the Russian Federation. [1112]

Mr Lidington: President Medvedev has highlighted corruption as a serious problem in Russia, affecting many areas of life. Russia slipped to 120th out of 183 countries in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business survey 2010. It ranks 147th on Transparency International's corruption index.

The Government welcome President Medvedev's focus on the need to strengthen the rule of law in Russia. Implementation of this agenda would significantly enhance Russia's ability to meet the standards it set itself when it joined organisations such as the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. We also welcome the work that Russia is doing on accession to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and joining the anti-bribery convention.

The UK regularly raises the issue of rule of law and the need for judicial reform with the Russian Government, both bilaterally and with the EU, and will continue to do so.

Turks and Caicos Islands: Elections

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects elections to be held in the Turks and Caicos Islands. [1102]

Mr Bellingham: We are giving careful consideration to the timing of elections in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

We hope to see elected government restored as soon as practicable, and we are working hard to ensure that key elements of good governance and sound public financial management are well embedded before elections take place.

UN Security Council

Mr David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on whether any new member of the United Nations Security Council should automatically have the veto. [516]

Mr Bellingham: We support reform of the UN Security Council, including expansion of the number of permanent members.

However, expanding the number of permanent members should not automatically increase the number of states with the right to veto.

Venezuela: Foreign Relations

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on relations with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. [1108]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The UK enjoys a constructive partnership with Venezuela in areas of mutual interest including tackling drug trafficking, climate change, education and the promotion of bilateral trade and investment. Our policy is to build on this relationship with mutual respect. The UK congratulates Venezuela as it celebrates the bicentenary of the foundation of the Republic.

Yemen: Politics and Government

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his most recent assessment is of the security situation in Yemen; and what steps his Department has taken together with the Yemeni Government to tackle international terrorism following the meeting in London on 27 January 2010. [1237]

Alistair Burt: The UK is concerned about the security situation in Yemen. The terrorist threat in Yemen is high and we judge that attacks are highly likely, as we make clear in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office travel advice.

However, terrorism is not the greatest or only threat facing Yemen today. We are particularly concerned about decreasing stability across the country and about the resultant increase in local conflict. Al Qaeda looks to exploit instability where it can—the root causes of which are often wider social, economic and political problems. Rising insecurity, conflict and extremism in Yemen will pose a threat to UK long-term interests of stability in the region and beyond, including energy security and global trade flows. Increased radicalisation directly threatens economic and security interests in the Gulf and could pose an indirect threat abroad.

Central therefore to the UK's approach to counter terrorism in Yemen is the reality that counter terrorism cannot be looked at in isolation. It is linked to Yemen's other security and daunting economic challenges.

The attempted assassination of the British ambassador to Yemen, Tim Torlot, on 26 April 2010 highlights the stark threat posed by terrorists in Yemen, who have no regard for the lives of the innocent Yemeni citizens caught up in such atrocities.

The Government of Yemen has committed publicly to combating terrorism both inside and outside of Yemen and has conducted successful operations, including against members of Al-Qaida in Yemen. The UK is committed to helping the Yemeni Government tackle terrorism in Yemen. Our bilateral support helps the Yemeni Government address the underlying economic and social causes of terror and radicalisation, and enhances their capacity to pursue and prosecute terrorists in Yemen. This includes through the provision of expert advice and through our increasing development programme.

We have also been working in concert with other international partners, including as part of the Friends of Yemen process, to support and encourage reform in Yemen.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1288]

Mr Paterson: In March 2010, the Department paid 97% of invoices from suppliers within 10 days. In April 2010, the Department paid 87% of invoices from suppliers within 10 days.

On 12 April, responsibility for policing and justice in Northern Ireland was devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive. During the time leading up to devolution, the Department had to refocus priorities and this led to a reduction in prompt payment performance. The Department is committed to the achievement of the target to pay 95% of suppliers within 10 days and will make every effort to ensure performance improves to meet the target.

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to his Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff employed by (i) his Department and (ii) its agencies. [642]

Mr Paterson: The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) is not currently anticipating any expenditure on redundancies in the Department or its agencies. If any redundancy or other exit payments are made throughout 2010-11 they will be disclosed in the resource accounts for 2010-11.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to consult trade unions in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies concerning deficit reduction plans. [612]

Mr Paterson: The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) is preparing a deficit reduction plan. Once plans are finalised, and if they affect staff, trade unions will of course be consulted.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Closed Circuit Television

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will estimate the number of crimes detected through the use of CCTV equipment in the last 12 months; and what types of crime were so detected. [1146]

James Brokenshire *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* This information is not held centrally.

Crime Prevention

Mr Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps her Department is taking to implement early intervention policies. [1290]

Nick Herbert: We will be working closely with the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education over the coming months to develop the early interventions that take place before a young person is caught up in the criminal justice system. We want to make sure that local interventions are effective in preventing offending and reoffending.

Forensic Science Service

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans she has for the Forensic Science Service. [996]

James Brokenshire: The Home Office is supporting the Forensic Science Service (FSS) Ltd in its implementation of a radical transformation plan that will enable it to compete effectively in the commercial market for forensic science services that exists in the United Kingdom. The FSS will continue to play a major role in providing robust and reliable forensic science to the criminal justice system.

Knives: Crime

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps she plans to take to reduce the incidence of knife crime. [1028]

James Brokenshire: We will introduce better technology and reduce bureaucracy to give police forces greater freedom to target their activities according to local need, including tackling knife crime. Hospitals will share non-confidential information with the police so they can target stop and search in gun and knife crime hot spots. We will also share information on which policing techniques and sentences are most effective at cutting crime across the criminal justice system.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport which Ministers in his Department have been issued with *(a)* a Blackberry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1435]

Hugh Robertson: All four Ministers at this Department have been issued with one Blackberry each.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in his Department. [1476]

Hugh Robertson: No cars or drivers are allocated to Ministers in the Department. Existing contracts were cancelled by the Secretary of State on his arrival, delivering net annual savings of £250,000.

Olympic Games 2012: Lancashire

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what recent assessment he has made of the likely effects of the London 2012 Olympics on the economy of *(a)* Pendle constituency and *(b)* Lancashire. [1137]

Hugh Robertson: I have not made a specific assessment of the effects of the games on the economies of the Pendle constituency or Lancashire. However, the North West stands to gain from the wide range of opportunities created by the games, through businesses winning games-related work and increased tourism. Locations across the UK, particularly those that have non-London games venues and those that are hosting international teams in pre-games training camps, will have the opportunity to create further economic benefits, including inward investment, through the international attention that will follow.

We are already seeing good progress in these areas, for example, 11 of the Olympic Delivery Authority's suppliers are businesses registered in Lancashire, and more are winning work in the supply chains of its contractors. The Old Trafford football stadium will be one of the key non-London venues hosting football matches. Additionally, 68 facilities in the region are included in the official London 2012 Pre-Games Training Camp Guide, and to date memoranda of understandings are in place with 17 of the Oceania National Olympic Committees, the National Olympic Committee of Thailand and Australia's swimming team, formalising their intentions to use facilities in the region in the run up to the games.

S4C: Finance

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport whether he has had recent discussions with S4C on voluntary reductions in its budget. [1136]

Mr Jeremy Hunt: I discussed funding reductions with S4C recently. The outcome was that it was mutually agreed that there would be a reduction of £2 million in S4C's budget from my department for the current year.

TRANSPORT

Departmental Public Expenditure

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent estimate he has made of the proportion of his Department's expenditure which is allocated to each region. [1085]

Mr Philip Hammond: Estimates of my Department's expenditure analysed by region have been provided in successive Annual Reports, which are lodged in the Library of the House and available on the Department for Transport's website. The most recent estimate available is contained within the 2008-09 Annual Report, which sets out outturn spend by region up to 2007-08 and planned spend for 2008-09 and 2009-10.

HM Treasury's Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses Publication for 2009, which is available on HM Treasury's website, sets out expenditure on transport by region for the public sector as a whole for successive years up to 2008-09.

The DfT Annual Report 2008-09 is available at:

http://www.dft.gov.uk/about/publications/apr/ar2009/arra.pdf

(Table A7, "Total spending country and region", page 230)

HM Treasury's Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses Publication for 2009 is available at:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/pesa_180609.pdf

(Table 9.8e, "Identifiable expenditure on economic affairs (of which: transport) by country and region, 2003-04 to 2008-09", page 134)

Northern Rail: Rolling Stock

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many additional rail carriages have been provided to Northern Rail as part of the High Level Output Specification Process, and how this compares with those allocated to other train operating companies. [1083]

Mrs Villiers: 18 carriages have been contracted to be operated by Northern Rail as part of the high level output specification process.

Carriages contracted to be operated by other operators are as follows:

	Number
London Midland	28
National Express East Anglia	188
Virgin West Coast	106
First Capital Connect	153
Chiltern Railways	8
Southeastern	48
Southern	60
First Great Western	30
East Midlands Trains	8

River Wear: Bridges

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans his Department has for funding a new bridge over the Wear in Sunderland. [905]

Norman Baker *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* The Department for Transport will consider the funding for local authority major transport schemes as part of the Government's spending review to be carried out by the autumn. Until then the Department can give no assurances on funding for any local authority scheme that is not yet in construction.

Safety Belts

George Hollingbery: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans to extend the requirement for the wearing of seat belts in coaches beyond the current age limit of 13 years; and if he will make a statement. [1373]

Mike Penning: Current regulations require all bus and coach passengers aged 14 years and above to use a seatbelt if available. Younger children must do so in a front seat. EC Directive 2003/20/EC requires us to consider how to extend these requirements in relation to all children aged three to 14 riding as passengers in buses and coaches.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1280]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: In March and April 2010 respectively, 96.5% and 90.5% of invoices were paid by the Department for International Development (DFID) within 10 days.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what his estimate is of the cost to the public purse of proposed reductions in numbers of non-front line staff in his Department and its agencies; [494]

(2) what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to his Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff. [640]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The Department for International Development (DFID) has initiated a programme to review our operating costs. Savings from this programme will be diverted into frontline departments to strengthen the delivery of our development programme.

It is our policy to minimise any costs involved by redeploying affected staff and by not replacing staff that retire or leave DFID. Since specific proposals have not yet been developed, it is not possible to estimate the impact on staff numbers or potential costs.

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) each of its agencies in the latest year for which figures are available; and what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to the public purse of employing staff of each type in his Department. [540]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: On 31 March 2010 the Department for International Development (DFID) employs 1819 frontline members of staff and 518 members of staff performing a range of corporate service functions, including HR, finance, IT, procurement, security, estates and

office services. Staff costs for frontline activities in the 2009-10 financial year were £98 million. Staff costs for the corporate service functions for the same period were £28 million.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which of his Department's development awareness raising projects in Scotland have been abolished in the last 12 months; and what estimate his Department has made of the level of saving to the public purse. [1232]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: In May 2010 Department for International Development (DFID) funding to one development awareness project in Scotland was cancelled. This project, run by the Scottish Development Education Centre, is titled "First Steps to Lasting Change: Targeting the Staff of the Early Education and Childcare Courses at Three FE Colleges in Edinburgh". This project aims to address the lack of awareness of global issues among early year education and child care staff.

This decision to cancel this funding followed an initial review of those areas of expenditure where the link between project activities and poverty reduction in the developing world was least demonstrated. An estimate of funds saved by terminating this project is £121,095. These funds will be redirected to front line poverty reduction in developing countries.

Overseas Aid

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will take steps to ensure the continuation of the Governance and Transparency Fund to encourage transparent and accountable government in the developing world. [1228]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: We have no plans to close the Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF).

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether the My Aid project for the allocation of UK aid represents Government policy. [1230]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The commitment to "create new mechanisms to give British people a direct say in how an element of the aid budget is spent" was laid out in "The Coalition: Our Programme for Government." Further details are being developed and will be shared with Parliament in due course.

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will make representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ensure that no expenditure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence is not reclassified as overseas aid. [1233]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: All UK aid spending must meet the definition of Official Development Assistance agreed by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The Government are committed to ensuring that this is the case as set out in "The Coalition: Our Programme for Government".

Overseas Aid: Public Consultation

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what mechanism he plans to introduce for direct public involvement in determining the allocation of his Department's aid budget; and if he will make a statement. [890]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The commitment to "create new mechanisms to give British people a direct say in how an element of the aid budget is spent" was laid out in "The Coalition: Our Programme for Government." Further details are being developed and will be shared with Parliament in due course.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans he has to consult trade unions in his Department concerning deficit reduction plans. [610]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: Consistent with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Informing and Consulting Employee, it is the Department for International Development's (DFID's) normal practice to consult and communicate with staff and their representatives. There are a number of mechanisms through which we do this, including departmental Whitley council meetings, frequent meetings between DFID's HR director's and the chair of the Trade Union side and regular meetings senior managers hold with their staff.

We also carry out meaningful consultation with staff and their representatives on specific change proposals. When we have any specific proposals we will engage and consult.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Departmental Manpower

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers are employed by his Department; and at what Civil Service pay grade in each such case. [1267]

Gregory Barker: The information is as follows:

(a) I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

(b) There were 10 press officers in DECC as at 3 June 2010, all of them permanent full-time staff. These comprised one senior civil service pay band 1, two grade 7s, three senior information officers and four information officers.

Renewable Energy: Waste

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether he plans to encourage the use of energy from waste through anaerobic digestion; and if he will make a statement. [855]

Gregory Barker: The Government are committed to maximising the potential of anaerobic digestion from waste, to contribute to climate change, energy security, waste management and wider sustainability objectives.

Biogas produced from waste, through a range of anaerobic digestion processes, can be used locally or injected into the national gas grid, to provide heat and power for industry and homes, or a fuel for transport. Increased uptake of these innovative forms of renewable energy is a win for clean energy, green jobs and waste reduction.

However, anaerobic digestion is currently undeveloped in the UK and decisive leadership from Government, together with collaborative working with industry and other stakeholders, is required to rapidly ramp up deployment and build a strong industry.

I am working with Ministers from DEFRA and other Government Departments to determine an action plan for increasing use of anaerobic digestion in the UK, and expect to announce further details later this summer.

HEALTH

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1270]

Mr Simon Burns: In March and April 2010 respectively, 96.9% and 94.1% of invoices were paid by the Department within 10 days.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the cost to the public purse of proposed reductions in numbers of non-front line staff in his Department and its agencies. [492]

Mr Simon Burns: No estimate of the cost to proposed reductions in numbers of non-front line staff has yet been made by the Department or its Agency, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

The civil service wide recruitment freeze announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 24 May 2010, will help the Department to minimise the need for reductions.

Since 31 March 2010 there has been only one Executive Agency of the Department: the MHRA.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when and in what form he plans to publish a list of all items of expenditure by his Department over £25,000. [277]

Mr Simon Burns: The Prime Minister has written to Cabinet Ministers[1] reiterating transparency commitments made in the Coalition Programme for Government, and setting out a timetable for achieving them. In particular, all new items of central Government spending over £25,000 will be published online in an open format from November 2010.

[1]www.number10.gov.uk/news/statements-and-articles/2010/05/letter-to-government-departments-on-opening-up-data-51204

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to his Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff employed by (i) his Department and (ii) its agencies. [638]

Mr Simon Burns: No estimate of the cost of future reductions has yet been made by the Department. We do, however, have a standard, nominal budget of £2.3 million for unavoidable redundancy in the financial year 2010-11.

Since 31 March 2010 there has been only one Executive agency of the Department of Health: the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

General Practitioners

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects his Department's proposal to give general practitioners authority over commissioning to be implemented; what steps he plans to take to implement that proposal; and if he will make a statement. [866]

Mr Simon Burns: The "Coalition: Our Programme for Government" document indicates this Government's intention to strengthen the power of general practitioners as patients' expert guides through the health system by enabling them to commission care on their behalf. We will bring forward more detailed proposals in due course.

General Practitioners: Passports

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance his Department has issued to *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* other NHS staff on the level of fees charged for the signing of passport applications for patients. [1170]

Mr Simon Burns: None. The countersigning of passports is not part of the work that general practitioners (GPs) or other national health service staff are required to do as part of their NHS responsibilities. Should a GP (or other NHS staff) countersign an application it is a private matter between the doctor and the applicant. Where a charge is made for this service this is purely a private matter, not covered by any national terms and conditions.

Health Centres: Christchurch

Mr Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken since his appointment to ensure that his Department's interest in the former health centre at Saxon Square, Christchurch, is sold at the earliest opportunity. [1406]

Mr Simon Burns: Discussions are continuing with the landlord in order to achieve an early disposal of the Department's interest in the property.

Marie Stopes International

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what payments his Department has made to Marie Stopes International for *(a)* abortion, *(b)* family planning and *(c)* other reproductive health services in

the last 12 months; how much he plans to allocate to Marie Stopes International for those purposes in each of the next three years; and if he will make a statement. [235]

Anne Milton: No direct payments have been made by the Department to Marie Stopes International (MSI) in the past 12 months and no direct funding to this organisation is planned in this or future financial years. The national health service funds abortions undertaken by MSI under contract to individual primary care trusts. However, information on these contracts is commercially sensitive and not collected centrally.

NHS

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the future of *(a)* National Health Service and *(b)* his Department's IT systems. [682]

Mr Simon Burns: The Government will seek to achieve a more open market in national health service information technology (IT), complemented by a similar change in information provision, and underpinned by a framework of nationally agreed technical and data standards that ensure interoperability. We aim significantly to improve local ownership of solutions, but recognise that any movement from the current national infrastructure must ensure continued value for money and maintain the benefits of national procurement.

Plans are in place to upgrade the Department's standard IT hardware and software, the infrastructure on which systems operate, and the bespoke business applications used to process information. Any future plans will emphasise the need to achieve value for money on all investments made, and to further the commitment to lowering the Department's carbon footprint.

NHS: Finance

Mr David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department plans to publish the report it commissioned from McKinsey on the fiscal future of the NHS. [1078]

Mr Simon Burns: The McKinsey report on national health service productivity was published on the Department's website on 2 June 2010:

www.dh.gov.uk/en/FreedomOfInformation/Freedomofinformationpublicationschemefeedback/FOIreleases/DH_116520

NHS: West Midlands

Harriett Baldwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on requests from West Midlands Strategic Health Authority that primary care trusts in the West Mercia form a cluster. [743]

Mr Simon Burns: The Government have agreed that funding for the national health service should increase in real terms in each year of the Parliament. In order to ensure that the taxpayers receive value for money, the NHS must focus on delivering efficiency savings and reducing management costs is an important part of this. Regional and local proposals to do this should be discussed with those affected.

We are advised that individual primary care trusts (PCTs) in the West Midlands believe they are not best able to deliver efficiencies by operating alone. The West Midlands Strategic Health Authority (SHA) has therefore introduced a new model of working in which it has created five clusters in which the 17 PCTs will operate; delivering efficiency savings and reduced management costs through close collaborative working.

We understand that the SHA is clear that this development is not a precursor to PCT mergers. Individual PCTs remain responsible and accountable for their own performance for the overall health of their population and for commissioning ervices for their population.

Prescription Drugs

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the provision of specific drugs which the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence indicates do not represent value for money in circumstances where a GP believes they should be prescribed; and if he will make a statement. [1226]

Mr Simon Burns: This is a matter for individual primary care trusts.

Royal Liverpool University Hospital

Mrs Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to provide additional cancer services on the Royal Liverpool University hospital site. [1407]

Mr Simon Burns: The Government have pledged that, in future, all service changes must be led by clinicians and patients, not be driven from the top down.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has outlined new, strengthened criteria that he expects decisions on national health service service changes to meet. The local NHS has been asked to consider the impact of this criteria in their area and local communities are establishing how this work will be taken forward.

We are advised that there have been local discussions between organisations on Merseyside regarding the development of a cancer centre at the Royal Liverpool University hospital site. These proposals are at a very early stage and the Mersey and Cheshire Cancer Network, together with the Liverpool primary care trust (PCT) are currently developing these proposals. If the proposals were agreed by the eight commissioning PCTs, a public consultation exercise would follow.

Mrs Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects the contracts in relation to the replacement for the Royal Liverpool University hospital to be signed; and if he will make a statement; [1408]

(2) when he most recently discussed with Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust the proposals for replacing the Royal Liverpool University hospital; and if he will make a statement. [1409]

Mr Simon Burns: As with all significant spending commitments made between 1 January 2010 and the election on 6 May, the proposed new hospital scheme for Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals

NHS Trust will be subject to the Government's review of such approvals to ensure they are consistent with the Government's priorities and good value for money. The Secretary of State has not discussed the proposed new hospital scheme with the Trust.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to consult trade unions in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies concerning deficit reduction plans. [608]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department and its agency the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) have well-established and constructive industrial relations. Our Partnership Agreement was signed again by both management and unions in 2009. This partnership approach commits the Department to involving unions at every stage of any change process—working together to solve difficulties and to promote best practice in all matters.

Regular dialogue with unions remains underway and the Department will continue to engage and consult unions about any deficit reduction plans.

Since 31 March 2010 there has been only one Executive Agency of the Department: the MHRA.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Apprentices

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he plans to take to encourage people to undertake apprenticeships. [1117]

Mr Hayes: The Government are committed to increasing the number of apprenticeships, in particular, advanced apprenticeships that confer technician status. We know that the demand from young people and adults for good quality employer-owned apprenticeships is high. To meet this demand and to build an advanced economy we need advanced skills. The Government's decision to redeploy £150 million of our savings for 2010-11, creating an additional 50,000 places, demonstrates our commitment to high-quality skills. We are investing in our future and training the next generation, as well as developing the existing workforce, which is vital as we emerge from recession.

Business: Closures

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many limited liability companies ceased operations in the last financial year. [1017]

Mr Davey: Companies House does not record how many limited liability companies cease trading. There were, however, 509,711 companies dissolved in the United Kingdom in the financial year 2009/10. This was an increase from previous years due to Companies House taking action to dissolve companies which had not filed their statutory documents for many years.

During 2009/10 there were however 365,649 new companies incorporated. Therefore, there was only a small fall in the total number of companies on the register.

Companies Act 2006

Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what plans he has to review the operation of the Companies Act 2006. [1129]

Mr Davey: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has begun an evaluation of the impact of the major provisions of the Companies Act 2006, to assess the extent to which the original policy objectives have been achieved, to validate the estimated costs and benefits, and to identify any areas where the provisions are not working effectively in practice. We will make the results of this evaluation public later in 2010.

Company Accounts

Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills when he plans to bring forward proposals to reintroduce the Operating and Financial Review; and if he will make a statement. [1130]

Mr Davey: The Government's commitment is to reinstate an Operating and Financial Review to ensure that directors' social and environmental duties have to be covered in company reporting, and investigate further ways of improving corporate accountability and transparency. We intend to consult on this issue this summer with a view to publishing our proposals by the end of the year.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills when and in what form he plans to publish a list of all items of expenditure by his Department over £25,000. [274]

Mr Davey: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has written to Cabinet Ministers reiterating transparency commitments made in the Coalition Programme for Government, and setting out a timetable for achieving them. In particular, all new items of central government spending over £25,000 will be published online in an open format from November 2010.

Further Education: Finance

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how much funding he plans to allocate to further education in *(a)* 2010-11 and *(b)* 2011-12. [1160]

Mr Hayes: The funding levels for further education in 2010-11 were published as part of the Skills Investment Strategy in November 2009. A copy was placed in the Library of the House. On 24 May this year, as part of the Treasury announcements on the £6.2 billion of savings to tackle the deficit, the Chancellor announced a £200 million reduction in the Train to Gain budget, with those savings reinvested into additional apprenticeship places and new investment in FE capital projects. The

Secretary of State will write to the Skills Funding Agency reflecting these updated priorities and the impact on funding shortly.

Funding for future years will be determined as part of the spending review process.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what in-year changes he plans to make to his Department's funding for each further education institution in the West Midlands in 2010-11. [1450]

Mr Hayes: As part of the £6.2 billion savings announcement on 24 May 2010, £200 million will be redeployed from the Train to Gain programme in 2010-11 financial year. £150 million will be used to support additional apprenticeship places and £50 million for increased capital investment in further education (FE) colleges.

FE colleges and training organisations will be able to redeploy funding previously intended for Train to Gain in 2010/11 academic year to provide additional apprenticeship places for those aged 19+.

The Skills Funding Agency is now looking to implement this change, but it is not possible at this time to provide information on the impact it may have on individual institutions in the west midlands.

Further Education: Manpower

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what estimate he has made of the change in the number of staff in further education colleges in the West Midlands between academic years 2009-10 and 2010-11. [1447]

Mr Hayes: The Department has made no estimate of changes in FE college staff numbers in the west midlands between the academic years 2009-10 and 2010-11.

FE colleges were established as self-governing, independent organisations following the enactment of the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992. As such, they are responsible for their own terms and conditions, pay and work force planning matters.

Information about staff working at further education colleges is collected by Lifelong Learning UK, the relevant Sector Skill Council, through the annual Staff Individualised Record (SIR) survey.

The most recent SIR data for 2008-09 showed 33,427 people working in west midlands further education colleges. The previous SIR report for 2007-08 showed a work force of 30,894.

JUSTICE

Corruption: Public Service

Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will publish the UK Foreign Bribery Strategy; and if he will make a statement. [853]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: The document referred to was published by the previous Administration on 19 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 13WS.

Departmental Electronic Equipment

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many *(a)* plasma and *(b)* LCD televisions there are in ministerial offices in his Department. [394]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: There are five LCD and no plasma televisions in offices currently occupied by Ministers in the Ministry of Justice.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what his estimate is of the cost to the public purse of proposed reductions in numbers of non-front line staff in his Department and its agencies. [495]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: The savings to be achieved in 2010-11 from the Emergency Budget were predicated on tighter recruitment controls and natural attrition.

The Ministry of Justice expects shortly to engage in the Government's spending review, as part of which work force plans will be developed. Estimates of the cost to the public purse for any reductions are not yet available.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of the *(a)* implementation of penalty clauses and payments in its contracts and *(b)* potential legal action arising from the deferral and cancellation of contracts and projects under his Department's plans to achieve cost savings; and whether those estimates are included in the total cost savings to be achieved by his Department. [564]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: Over the past three weeks the Ministry of Justice director generals and their staff have reviewed all current spending plans in line with priorities. Each area of the Department is contributing to the delivery of these savings (including arm's length bodies). We are still working through the implications of these savings. At this time we can not release further information in case it impacts on these negotiations and/or breaches commercial sensitivity.

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to his Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff employed by (i) his Department and (ii) its agencies. [641]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: Wherever possible, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) seeks to achieve headcount reductions by means of natural wastage, recruitment controls and re-deployment of staff to avoid impacting services to the public.

Between 31 March 2009 and 31 March 2010, 16 people from across the Ministry of Justice, comprising headquarters and executive agencies (HM Courts Service, the National Offender Management Service, the Tribunals Service and the Office of the Public Guardian) were made redundant or faced compulsory severance. The overall

cost was £1.4 million[1], an average of £87,500 per staff member. Redundancy packages vary based on grade and length of service.

The MoJ also operated a voluntary early departure scheme in the last financial year. The future costs of this scheme are currently being finalised and will be published in the MoJ's annual resource accounts prior to the summer recess in the "provisions" note to the accounts. Staff are offered early departure on the basis of a clear business case that the departure will deliver long term savings and efficiencies.

It is not possible to clearly distinguish front line staff from other staff as many staff in local offices, courts and tribunals across England and Wales work in both public facing and back office roles.

[1] These figures are unaudited and are subject to change following the National Audit Office's inspection of MoJ Accounts for 2009-10.

Electoral Commission

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the cost to the public purse of the Electoral Commission was in the last 12 months for which figures are available; what assessment he has made of the value for money of such expenditure; and if he will consider the merits of abolishing the Commission. [534]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The net operating cost, from audited accounts, for the Electoral Commission for 2008-09, was £22,471,000 of which £1,957,000 was Policy Development Grants to qualifying political parties. This cost was required for the planning for and carrying out of functions and duties imposed on the Commission.

I have not made a value for money assessment of Electoral Commission expenditure. It is the role of the Speaker's Committee to examine the Commission's annual estimates of income and expenditure and to satisfy themselves that they are consistent with the economical, efficient and effective discharge of the Commission's statutory functions. In doing so, the Speaker's Committee must have regard to annual reports from the Comptroller and Auditor General into how the Commission uses its resources. The Government have set out a major programme of political reform and will be considering the implications for the delivery of elections.

Electoral Register

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice with reference to the answer of 4 March 2009, *Official Report*, column 1707W, on the electoral register, what the estimated cost is of contacting by *(a)* email and *(b)* letter all electoral registration officers to find out what electoral registration qualifications they hold. [178]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have not made an estimate of the cost of contacting Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) by email although it would be met within staff and resource costs. The cost of sending a letter to all EROs would be £123.87 based on the cost of a second class stamp to 387 EROs for letters weighing up to 100g.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he has made of the effect of levels of expenditure on electoral registration measures on levels of registration. [183]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Electoral Commission have informed me that they will be publishing their report into the cost of electoral administration covering the 2007-08 and 2008-09 financial years early in June 2010. They also inform me that there has been no assessment yet made of the effect of expenditure on electoral registration on the level of registration. I understand that once the Commission has collected this year's information it intends to look in more detail at any relationship between the levels of expenditure on electoral registration and registration levels.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he has made of the adequacy of resources provided by local authorities to electoral registration. [246]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have not yet made such an assessment. The Government have announced their intention to speed up the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration in Great Britain and any consideration of issues relating to registration will be in that context.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much *(a)* central and *(b)* local government authorities spent on advertising to promote voter registration in each year for which figures are available. [699]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

(a) Central Government do not have responsibility for promoting voter registration. However, under section 69 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, local authorities are under a duty to encourage participation by electors in the electoral process. To support this duty, Government have made funding available to local authorities under an electoral Participation Fund. The figures paid to local authorities for activity in support of participation, including advertising, from the Fund in each of the last three financial years are as follows:

	£
2007-08	170,000
2008-09	500,000
2009-10	150,000

(b) as set out in answer to *(a)*, local authorities are under a duty under Section 69 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 to encourage participation by electors in the electoral process. The amount spent by local authorities in fulfilling this role is not collected centrally.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice which local authority electoral registration departments use bar coding on their electoral registration forms. [700]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

Whether or not individual Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) use bar codes to assist them with the handling of these electoral registration forms is a matter for individual ERO's to determine. The Government do not collect data on the use of bar coding for this purpose.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the use of telephones to confirm continued entitlement to electoral registration; and which local authorities use telephones for this purpose. [725]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have not made an assessment of the use of telephones to support electoral registration. The Electoral Commission has informed me that it will publish some information relating to canvass responses by telephone following their next assessment of Electoral Registration Officers' performance. The expected date of publication of the Commission's next such assessment is spring 2011.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what estimate he has made of total expenditure by local authority registration officers in each of the last 10 years. [729]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have not made such an estimate. However, as part of its work in developing Performance Standards for electoral services, the Electoral Commission launched its financial information survey across Great Britain on 10 September 2007. Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers were asked to complete the survey and return it by 31 July 2008, and again in July 2009. I understand that the Commission has published its report "The Cost of Electoral Administration in Great Britain", a report into the cost of electoral administration, covering the 2007-08 and 2008-09 financial years. The report is now available on the Commission's website at:

http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards/financial-information

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will assess the merits of ring-fencing funds allocated by his Department to local government for voter registration purposes. [731]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are clear that local government needs increased flexibility to take decisions locally and have announced that over £1.7 billion of grants will cease to be ring-fenced in 2010-11. This step will enable local authorities to make the radical change needed to prioritise resources and improve efficiency while protecting essential frontline services. This represents a significant boost to the financial autonomy of local councils.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what reasons his Department has identified for variations in levels of voter registration in different local authority areas with similar socio-economic characteristics. [733]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have not made such an assessment. The Electoral Commission's report published in March 2010, "The Completeness and Accuracy of Electoral Registers in Great Britain", considers local and regional variations in registration levels. The report notes that the highest concentrations of under-registration are most likely to be in metropolitan areas, smaller towns and cities with large student population and coastal areas with significant population turnover and high levels of social deprivation.

The Electoral Commission found that under-registration and inaccuracy are closely associated with the social groups most likely to move home: young people, private sector tenants and BME residents were cited in particular. However, the Commission's Report does not draw broad conclusions.

Law Centres

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has for the future of *(a)* community legal advice centres and *(b)* community legal advice networks; and if he will make a statement. [851]

Mr Djanogly: The Legal Services Research Centre has recently completed an evaluation of Community Legal Advice Centres and Networks (referred to as CLACs and CLANs) which is due to be published shortly. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Legal Services Commission (LSC) will work together to consider the implications of the evaluation on the future of CLACS and CLANs.

In the meantime, the LSC is continuing to tender for CLA services in the areas announced in April 2008. When existing CLAC and CLAN contracts come to an end, these contracts will either be extended or subject to re-tender as appropriate. At present, the LSC is not seeking to develop any new CLACs or CLANs beyond those already announced. Decisions on the future of CLACs and CLANs will be informed by the results of the evaluation.

Rape: Disclosure of Information

Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether the policy proposal in the Coalition agreement: our programme for government to give anonymity to defendants in rape trials is to apply to defendants who have been charged with rape only or charged with other sexual offences. [618]

Mr Blunt: The Government recognise that there is an argument to be made for defendant anonymity in sexual offence cases other than rape. We shall look carefully at this as we consider how best to give effect to our policy on defendant anonymity in rape cases.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has to consult trade unions in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies concerning deficit reduction plans. [611]

Mr Blunt: A schedule of meetings is being established in the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and its agencies to consult the recognised trade unions concerning deficit reduction plans.

Young Offender Institutions

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many incidents of segregation have been recorded in each young offender institution in each year since 2006. [461]

Mr Blunt: The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost by asking every young offender institution to analyse its records.

Prisoners may be held in segregation for reasons of good order and discipline or for their own protection. They may also be segregated to await adjudication or, if the prisoner is 18 or over, as a punishment of cellular confinement for offences against prison discipline.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many strip searches have been recorded in each young offender institution in each year since 2006. [462]

Mr Blunt: Full searches (previously known as strip-searches) may be carried out in order to detect items of contraband secreted on the person. NOMS' National Security Framework permits establishments to full search young people (15 to 17-year-olds) and young adults (18 to 21-year-olds) held in young offender institutions (YOIs), both on a routine and intelligence-led basis. Records of full searches conducted in YOIs are not held centrally. To provide the information requested would involve requesting and collating information from all YOIs which could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many control and restraint incidents were recorded at each young offender institution in each year since 2006. [463]

Mr Blunt: The information requested is not available centrally prior to January 2010 and could be provided only at disproportionate cost by asking each young offender institution to analyse its records. A new system of collation came into force in January 2010 and the table below sets out control and restraint incidents at each young offender institution in England and Wales from January 2010 to March 2010.

Table 1: Incidents of control and restraint in 21 young offender institutions in England and Wales from 1 January to 31 March 2010

Establishment	January	February	March	Grand total
Ashfield	7	18	10	35
Aylesbury	24	56	11	91
Brinsford	13	12	13	38
Castington	0	0	0	0
Cookham Wood	26	27	32	85
Deerbolt	16	17	12	45
Feltham	43	53	49	145
Glen Parva	32	28	42	102
Hindley	46	46	48	140
Huntercombe	23	10	20	53
Lancaster Farms	17	21	25	63
Northallerton	5	5	5	15
Portland	6	8	10	24
Reading	9	16	21	46
Rochester	18	13	6	37
Stoke Heath	7	18	5	30
Swinfen Hall	9	10	14	33
Thorn Cross	5	5	2	12
Warren Hill	37	26	36	99
Werrington	30	16	12	58
Wetherby	25	21	0	46
Grand total	398	426	373	1,197

Notes:
1 These figures have been drawn from live administrative data systems which may be amended at any time. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system.
2. The number of incidents of control and restraint reported from January 2010 to March 2010 may change should further incidents be reported.

Control and restraint (C&R) is a system of techniques used by a team of three officers as a last resort in order to bring a violent or refractory prisoner under control. The techniques are applied by trained officers for as short a time as possible and only used after all other means of de-escalating the incident have been repeatedly tried and failed.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Pay

Mr Watson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what salary he receives as Deputy Prime Minister. [648]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am drawing the same salary as other Cabinet Ministers, £68,827 per annum. All Cabinet Ministers have agreed to take a salary of 5% less than previously paid and to freeze it for the duration of the Parliament.

Departmental Public Appointments

Helen Goodman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many special advisers he *(a)* has appointed to date and *(b)* plans to appoint. [322]

Mr Watson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments he has made since his appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [375]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Members to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the estimated cost is of setting up his office; what the estimated cost is of running his office in its first 12 months; and how many special advisers he has. [106]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The costs of my office will be published when finalised. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Mr Watson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he plans to publish his ministerial diary. [138]

Mr Harper: As was the case with previous governments, Ministers and officials have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals on a range of subjects. Information on my official meetings with external organisations will be published in accordance with the Ministerial Code.

General Election 2010

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister in which local authority areas the chief executive was the returning officer for the parliamentary constituency of that local authority area in the 6 May 2010 general election. [844]

Mr Harper: In England and Wales the majority of the Returning Officer's duties at parliamentary elections, including the conduct of the election, are carried out by the Acting Returning Officer, who is an electoral registration officer (ERO). The ERO is usually the chief executive of a district or London borough council in England or of a county or county borough council in Wales, although the council may appoint any of its officers to be the ERO. Details of the full-time employment of those individuals in England and Wales who served as Acting Returning Officers are not held by the Government.

In Scotland, Returning Officers for parliamentary elections are officers of local authorities. For the 6 May 2010 general election all Returning Officers were local authority chief executive. The relevant local authority areas were: Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Argyll and Bute, Clackmannanshire, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Dumfries and Galloway, Dundee City, East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Lothian, East Renfrewshire, The City of Edinburgh, Falkirk, Fife, Glasgow City, Highland, Inverclyde, Midlothian, Moray, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Orkney Islands, Perth and Kinross, Renfrewshire, Scottish Borders, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, Stirling, West Dunbartonshire and West Lothian. In Northern Ireland the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland is the Returning Officer for each constituency in Northern Ireland in the parliamentary general election.

Norman Lamb

Mr Watson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether his Chief Parliamentary and Political Adviser has been allocated *(a)* a ministerial car, *(b)* a ministerial salary, *(c)* secretarial support, *(d)* a private office and *(e)* a 10 Downing street security pass; and if he will make a statement. [98]

The Deputy Prime Minister: My Chief Parliamentary and Political Adviser does not have an allocated car and driver and does not receive a ministerial salary in this capacity. As a Government Whip he receives a whip's salary, he has use of the Government car pool service when needed and has access to staff in the Chief Whip's office as appropriate. For reasons of security, the Government do not comment on who has security passes to Government buildings.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Council Housing: Construction

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on the setting of local authority housebuilding projections in local plans. [993]

Robert Neill: A letter to local authority leaders from the Secretary of State, dated 27 May 2010, set out the Government's commitment to abolishing regional strategies and confirmed that in future housing supply issues will rest with local planning authorities without the framework for regional numbers or plans. The policy change should be regarded as a material consideration in planning decisions, including on local plans. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Natascha Engel: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on the provision of funding for all local authority new build housing schemes announced by his Department in *(a)* September 2009 and *(b)* January 2010. [1466]

Andrew Stunell: The Homes and Communities Agency will fund through to completion those schemes for which they have entered into a grant agreement with the local authority. Decisions on all other schemes will be made after the Emergency Budget on 22 June.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what representations he has received from local authorities and their representative bodies on the review of the local authority new build programme. [1502]

Andrew Stunell: There is no review of the local authority new build programme. However, the Homes and Communities Agency will not enter into any new or further commitments against its uncommitted budgets until after the Budget in June.

Council Tax

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his most recent estimate is of the cost to the Exchequer of proposals to freeze council tax in England for one year; and if he will make a statement. [1062]

Robert Neill: The Government are committed to a freeze in council tax for at least one year and to seek to freeze it for a further year, in partnership with local authorities. Work is ongoing to estimate the cost of such a freeze and we will make further announcements in due course.

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1274]

Robert Neill: In March 2010 Communities and Local Government paid 92.35% of invoices within 10 days and in April 2010 paid 90.89% of invoices within 10 days.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many full-time equivalent staff at each civil service grade are employed in the private office of each Minister in his Department. [129]

Robert Neill: The number of staff in each office is set out in the following table. In total this is two fewer than the arrangements inherited from the last Government.

	Pay Band 2 (Admin Officer)	*Pay Band 3 (Executive Officer)*	*Pay Band 4 (Higher Executive Officer)*	*Pay Band 6 (Team Leader)*	*Senior civil service Pay Band 1 (Deputy Director)*
Right hon. Eric Pickles MP (Secretary of State)	1	2	3	1	1
Greg Clark MP (Minister of State)	1	1	2	1	0
Grant Shapps MP (Minister of State)	1	0	3	1	0
Andrew Stunell MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State)	1	2	1	0	0
Bob Neill MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State)	1	2	1	0	0
Baroness Hanham (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State)	1	2	1	0	0

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many *(a)* front-line and *(b)* other staff were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) each of its agencies in the latest year for which figures are available; and what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to the public purse of employing staff of each type at each of those bodies. [530]

Robert Neill: Communities and Local Government does not hold data for its arm's length bodies centrally. Our three Executive agencies have however provided data directly. There would be a disproportionate cost in trying to obtain any further information.

Available data give the following breakdown for the calendar year 2009-10 (provisional). In accordance with HM Treasury guidance a number of staff are funded from programme budgets. These staff are classified as being front-line.

	2009-10 (provisional)			
	Front line staff (FTE)	*Front line pay cost (£000)*	*Other staff (FTE)*	*Other pay cost (£000)*
Communities and Local Government (CLG)	286.19	20,477	1,880.54	96,731
Planning Inspectorate (PINS)	714	35,538	0	0
Fire Service College (FSC)	210	9,282	0	0
QEII Conference Centre	48	2,410	0	0

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many special advisers *(a)* he and *(b)* each named Minister in his Department (i) has appointed to date and (ii) plans to appoint. [311]

Robert Neill: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Departmental Official Cars

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many Government *(a)* cars and *(b)* drivers are allocated to Ministers in his Department. [288]

Robert Neill: The arrangements inherited from the last Government for Communities and Local Government are: *(a)* six cars and *(b)* six drivers allocated to departmental Ministers. This is supplemented by the use of pool cars as needed. These are the interim arrangements.

The new ministerial code, published on 21 May 2010, contains changes that affect Ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. It states that

"the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed".

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with Departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements.

The ministerial code, published on 21 May 2010, is available on the Cabinet Office website.

Departmental Public Appointments

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments he has made since his appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [378]

Robert Neill: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when and in what form he plans to publish a list of all items of expenditure by his Department over £25,000. [268]

Robert Neill: The Department will publish on its website the contract name, name of successful contractor, contract value and agreed Contract Terms of all departmental contract awards valued over £25,000 by 1 September 2010.

Fire Services

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he plans to announce his decision on the relocation of Gloucestershire's fire control operations to the Regional Centre in Taunton; and if he will consult local stakeholders before making such a decision. [965]

Robert Neill: The previous Government's FiReControl project has been subject to delays and increasing costs.

We are looking closely at this project to establish what we can do to improve the situation. We are committed to ensuring value-for-money for the taxpayer, improving resilience and stopping the forced regionalisation of the fire service.

We will carefully consider the implications of any decisions before announcing the next steps.

Green Belt

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on the Green Belt, with particular reference to applications being made to develop land designated as Green Belt; and if he will make a statement. [972]

Robert Neill *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* Policy on the Green Belt is currently set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2, Green Belts (PPG2), published in 1995. PPG2 establishes a presumption against inappropriate development on Green Belt. If a proposal for such development is received, the local planning authority has to consider whether any harm to the Green Belt would be outweighed by other considerations, and whether very special circumstances exist to justify planning permission.

In the Coalition Agreement the Government stated that it will publish and present to Parliament a simple and consolidated national planning framework covering all forms of development. Announcements on the future of planning policy will be made in due course. However, the Agreement also undertakes to ensure that the protection of Green Belt by local planning authorities is maintained.

Finally, I have already announced the Government's intention to rapidly abolish regional spatial strategies and return focus on planning and housing to local councils. Given that the regional spatial strategies have themselves been a source of 'top down' pressure to remove Green Belt protection their removal will strengthen the position of local authorities in protecting Green Belt.

Housing Associations

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will make it his policy to rationalise the number of social housing associations; and if he will make a statement. [957]

Grant Shapps: Housing associations are independent organisations responsible for their own aims, performance and management.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will bring forward proposals to reduce the salary levels of senior officials running social housing associations; and if he will make a statement. [958]

Grant Shapps: As independent organisations, it is up to the board of each housing association to determine the level of remuneration to award its executives. However, given that many associations receive public funding through the National Affordable Housing Programme in order to deliver new affordable housing, there is a public interest in associations performing their functions efficiently and economically.

The Government believe that transparency and public scrutiny are key to ensuring that pay decisions are fully justifiable. Housing associations are required to disclose publicly the remuneration paid to their highest paid director (which is typically the chief executive) and the total cost of their directors. The Government believe that associations should make available as much information as is needed to reassure their tenants and the public that they are managing their resources as efficiently as possible.

Housing: Construction

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many homes with *(a)* three or four and *(b)* five bedrooms he expects to be built in each region in each of the next five years. [1172]

Andrew Stunell *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* Statistics on the proportion of new-build completions each year that are houses and flats, split by number of bedrooms, are published on the CLG website in live table 254 at the following link:

http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/table254.xls

Estimates have not been made by the Government of the number of new homes of each type that will be started or completed in future years.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) if he will take steps to remove regional housing targets in the West Midlands in advance of the introduction of primary legislation on regional spatial strategies; [1498]

(2) what timetable he has set for the abolition of regional spatial strategies in the West Midlands; and if he will make a statement. [1499]

Greg Clark: The Government are absolutely committed to abolishing Regional Strategies, including regional housing targets. In advance of legislation, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to all local authority leaders and the Planning Inspectorate confirming the Government's intention and that letter can be used as a material consideration in decisions on applications and local development frameworks. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Housing: Regeneration

Dr Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on funding of Pathfinder housing areas; and if he will make a statement. [1010]

Andrew Stunell: The Government are committed to a range of housing programmes including initiatives to improve the quality of homes, improve access to housing and bring empty homes into use. The Housing Market Renewal programme was included in the £6.2 billion of savings from Government spending in 2010-11 announced on 24 May, reducing the current capital programme budget announced in December 2009 by £50 million. This reduction is subject to consultation. Budgets for 2010-11 will be confirmed after the Emergency Budget is completed on June 22.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what assessment he has made of the effects on his Department's funding for Housing Market Renewal areas of changes in public expenditure in 2010 announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 24 May 2010. [1505]

Andrew Stunell: The Housing Market Renewal programme was included in the £6.2 billion of savings from Government spending in 2010-11 announced on 24 May. The current capital budget of £286 million announced in December 2009 has been reduced by £50 million. The mechanism by which this reduction is achieved will be subject to consultation. Individual allocations for 2010-11 will be confirmed after the emergency Budget is completed on June 22.

Housing: South East

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether he plans to respond to the South East Regional Select Committee's First Report of Session 2009-10, on Housing in the South East. [205]

Andrew Stunell *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* Yes, the Government will be responding to this report in the near future.

Local Development Frameworks

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what guidance from his Department is in effect in respect of on-going *(a)* examinations in public of local development framework plans and *(b)* core strategy hearings. [967]

Robert Neill: General guidance on the assessment of and procedures for examining local development frameworks which include core strategies is set out by the Planning Inspectorate. This can be found online at:

http://www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/pins/appeals/local_dev/index.htm

In addition my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to all local authority leaders and the Planning Inspectorate confirming the Government's intention to abolish regional strategies and housing targets and saying that he expects them to have regard to his letter as a material consideration in decisions on applications and local development frameworks. A copy of the letter has been placed in the House Library.

Local Government Finance

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he expects the review of local government finance to *(a)* commence and *(b)* conclude. [1067]

Robert Neill: The coalition Government are fully committed to a review of local government finance and we will make a further announcement in due course. But our first priority must be to sort out the public finances and to get on with our agreed programme of delivering radical devolution and greater financial autonomy to local government.

Local Government: Pay

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what information his Department holds on the number of employees of each local authority who received an annual salary of £100,000 or above in the most recent year for which figures are available. [1312]

Robert Neill: The information requested is not held centrally. Our town hall transparency proposals will ensure that senior local government salaries are published in an open and standardised format for public scrutiny.

Local Government: Public Consultation

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in what circumstances those resident in a local authority area will be able to initiate a local referendum. [1074]

Andrew Stunell: As we made clear in our Programme for Government, published on 20 May, we will give residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue. The Government intend to include the necessary statutory provisions as part of legislation to devolve greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities control over housing and planning decisions which was announced in the Queen's Speech for this parliamentary session.

Local Government: Reorganisation

Mr Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what costs his Department incurred in contesting each judicial review of local government reorganisation for *(a)* Devon, *(b)* Norfolk and *(c)* Suffolk. [1467]

Grant Shapps: The current costs incurred by the Department for legal proceedings in relation to local government reorganisation in Devon, Norfolk and Suffolk are set out in the following table:

Challenge against the Boundary Committee where the Secretary of State has been named as an interested party brought by:	*Legal costs to Department (£)*
Breckland district council and others	62,450
East Devon district council	31,820
Suffolk Coastal and others	45,875
King's Lynn and others	6,833

In addition, Devon and Norfolk county councils have challenged the decision of the Secretary of State in relation to unitary councils for Exeter and Norwich cities. The High Court has yet to hand down judgment in this challenge and hence the Department's legal costs arising from it are yet to be determined. However, to date the Department has incurred costs of £62,065 on this challenge.

The Government introduced a Bill into the House of Lords on 26 May which will stop the restructuring of councils in Devon, Norfolk and Suffolk. This will save the taxpayer £40 million in unnecessary restructuring costs.

Local Government: Third Sector

Dr Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what assessment he has made of the effect of mid-year reductions in local authority budgets on contracts with the voluntary and charitable sector. [1246]

Robert Neill: The contribution which local authorities are being asked to make this year to enable the Government to take immediate action to tackle the United Kingdom's unprecedented deficit should not impact on the delivery of essential front-line services. It will be for individual councils to make decisions about where savings are found. We have retained formula grant funding at the level approved by Parliament for 2010-11 (£29 billion), and have also gone further by lifting restrictions on how local government spends its money, by de-ringfencing more grants. This gives councils the maximum flexibility to focus budgets on those services which local people most want to see.

Non-domestic Rates

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he expects small business rate relief to become automatic; and if he will make a statement. [863]

Robert Neill: "The Coalition: our programme for government" sets out our commitment to find a practical way to make small business rate relief automatic. We are considering options and will make an announcement about how we propose to proceed in due course.

Non-domestic Rates: Ports

Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the cost of cancelling the demand for retrospective business rates made upon newly separately-rated port companies. [736]

Robert Neill: I will write to the hon. Member with an answer when the data are available and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Laura Sandys: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what representations his Department has received on retrospective business rates on firms in ports in the last 12 months. [1149]

Robert Neill: A number of representations have been received, predominantly from MPs on behalf of their constituents and the ports lobby group itself. Most of these centre around the request for Government to cancel the backdated liability incurred.

Having considered these representations my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State issued regulations suspending the collection of such backdated rates in 2010-11 and consistent with the coalition agreement, the Government are urgently exploring ways to remove certain backdated rates liabilities.

I also met with the ports lobby group on 3 June 2010, to discuss their concerns in person.

Ordnance Survey

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has for the future ownership of the Ordnance Survey; and if he will make a statement. [511]

Robert Neill: Ordnance Survey is Great Britain's national mapping agency and its data underpin the delivery of many vital public services. I am not currently considering changes to the ownership.

Planning Permission: Appeals

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will issue guidance to planning inspectors on the award of costs in respect of large planning appeals. [969]

Robert Neill: Guidance to planning inspectors on the awarding of costs is contained within the Communities and Local Government Circular 03/2009 'Costs awards in appeals and other planning proceedings' published on 6 April 2009.

Regional Planning and Development

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he plans to publish guidance on the effects of the abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategies and transitional arrangements which should apply; and what guidance he expects local planning authorities to apply in making decisions on large strategic applications before such guidance is published. [966]

Robert Neill: We are absolutely committed to abolishing Regional Strategies. We are keen to move in advance of legislation and are currently considering revoking Regional Strategies ahead of taking legislation through Parliament. We will make a statement in due course.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to all local authority leaders and the Planning Inspectorate confirming the Government's intention and saying that he expects them to have regard to his letter as a material consideration in decisions on applications and local development frameworks. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on what date he expects regional spatial strategies to cease to be effective; and what function such strategies will have prior to that date. [992]

Robert Neill: We are absolutely committed to abolishing regional strategies, including regional housing targets. We are keen to move in advance of legislation and are currently considering revoking regional strategies ahead of taking legislation through Parliament. We will make a statement in due course.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to all local authority leaders and the Planning Inspectorate confirming the Government's intention and saying that he expects them to have regard to his letter as a material consideration in decisions on applications and local development frameworks. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what timetable he has planned for the abolition of regional spatial strategies and the return of decision-making powers on housing and planning to local councils. [1027]

Robert Neill: We are absolutely committed to abolishing regional strategies, including regional housing targets and will introduce legislation in the first session to do so. We are keen to move in advance of legislation and are currently considering revoking regional strategies. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to all local authority leaders and the Planning Inspectorate confirming the Government's intention and that letter can be used as a material consideration in planning decisions. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Social Rented Housing

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many cooperative housing units are registered in each region. [1173]

Andrew Stunell *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* The number of housing units either owned or managed by cooperatives registered as a provider of social housing with the Tenant Services Authority at 31 March 2009 is as follows:

Region	*Stock owned by co-ops (number)*	*Percentage of total co-op owned stock*
London	4,643	39.5
South East	1,904	16.2
South West	20	0.2
East Midlands	711	6.0
East of England	318	2.7
West Midlands	1,080	9.2
Yorkshire and The Humber	144	1.2
North East	569	4.8
North West	2,380	20.2
Outside England	0	0.0
Total	11,769	100.0

Social leased housing and non-social housing owned by small associations (owning/managing fewer than 1,000 units/bed spaces) are not included in these stock totals. Figures for the year to 31 March 2010 are expected to be published in August.

Social Rented Housing: Finance

Natascha Engel: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on the funding by his Department of programmes for houses for social rent. [1465]

Andrew Stunell: Protecting spending on social housing remains a Government priority. That is why, when we announced £6.2 billion of savings to tackle the deficit, we made available £170 million to safeguard delivery of around 4,000 otherwise unfunded social rented homes.

Social Rented Housing: Lambeth

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has for capital allocations to the Decent Homes programme of *(a)* Lambeth Living and *(b)* United Residents Housing arm's length management organisation in 2011-12. [1091]

Andrew Stunell: Neither the Lambeth Living ALMO nor the United Residents Housing ALMO has yet received a high enough rating after inspection by the Audit Commission to access additional funding for its decent homes programme.

Funding for the Decent Homes programme will be decided in the context of the Government's spending review. Allocations to specific ALMOs will be decided once the outcome of the review is known.

Social Rented Housing: Standards

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has for the future of his Department's Decent Homes programme. [1090]

Andrew Stunell: Future funding for the Decent Homes programme will be decided in the context of the Government's spending review.

Travellers: Caravan Sites

Mr Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what guidance he plans to issue to planning inspectors in respect of the treatment of appeals against planning decisions regarding housing on traveller encampments taken in accordance with requirements of regional spatial strategies in the period prior to abolition of such strategies. [1260]

Robert Neill: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has now written to all local planning authorities and the Planning Inspectorate setting out our intention to abolish regional strategies and return decision-making powers on housing (including the provision of Travellers' sites) and planning to local councils. That letter will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and appeals and the development of plans for Traveller sites.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Government Departments: Reviews

Andrew Miller: To ask the Leader of the House what reviews are being undertaken by the Government; for what purpose in each such case; and to what estimated timescale. [1374]

Sir George Young: The Coalition Agreement sets out in detail the Government's future plans, including the key reviews it will be undertaking. Individual Departments will bring forward detailed information about these reviews in due course.

PRIME MINISTER

Crimes of Violence: Females

Jo Swinson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will appoint a Minister with responsibility for co-ordinating the work of the Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence to tackle violence against women overseas. [1362]

The Prime Minister: The Government are committed to tackling violence against women internationally, building on the work we are already doing bilaterally with partner countries, and with the United Nations. The machinery of government is kept under review.

EDUCATION

British Educational Communications and Technology Agency

Ed Balls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the *(a)* cost and *(b)* savings to the Exchequer arising from the abolition of the British Education Communications and Technology Agency in (i) 2010-11, (ii) 2011-12 and (iii) 2012-13. [1198]

Mr Gibb *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* We expect that the closure of BECTA will save £10 million in 2010-11 after all costs have been met, and the savings in subsequent years will be £65 million per year.

Building Schools for the Future Programme

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent discussions he has had with local authorities on the future of the Building Schools for the Future programme. [756]

Mr Gibb: The Department is reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that when we build schools for the future, we do so in a more cost-effective and efficient fashion.

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what his plans are for future funding of the Building Schools for the Future programme in *(a)* Houghton and Sunderland South constituency and *(b)* the North East; [906]

(2) how much funding he plans to allocate to the Building Schools for the Future project at Hetton School. [907]

Mr Gibb *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* The Department is reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that when we build schools for the future, we do so in a more cost-effective and efficient fashion.

Building Schools for the Future Programme: Durham

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what his plans are for the future of Durham county council's Building Schools for the Future programme; and if he will make a statement; [110]

(2) which private finance initiative projects for which his Department is responsible he expects to be cancelled consequent on the chief secretary to the Treasury's announcement of 24 May 2010. [233]

Mr Gibb: The Department is reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that when we build schools for the future, we do so in a more cost-effective and efficient fashion.

Building Schools for the Future Programme: Gateshead

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much funding from the Building Schools for the Future programme he plans to allocate to Gateshead. [880]

Mr Gibb: The Department is reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that when we build schools for the future, we do so in a more cost-effective and efficient fashion.

Building Schools for the Future Programme: Nottinghamshire

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what capital funding his Department has allocated to the rebuilding of Selby Park primary school in the next four years; [2]

(2) what funding his Department has allocated for *(a)* new school building and *(b)* school rebuilding projects in Nottinghamshire in each of the next four years. [34]

Mr Gibb: The Department is reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that when we build schools for the future, we do so in a more cost-effective and efficient fashion.

Building Schools for the Future Programme: Telford

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his plans are for funding of the school rebuilding programme relating to *(a)* Wrockwardine Wood, *(b)* Phoenix, *(c)* Lord Silkin and *(d)* Sutherland Secondary School in Telford; and if he will make a statement. [745]

Mr Gibb: The Department is reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that when we build schools for the future, we do so in a more cost-effective and efficient fashion.

Departmental Internet

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how much his Department has spent on the creation of the www.scienceandmaths.net website; [35]

(2) how much his Department has spent promoting the www.scienceandmaths.net website *(a)* on the radio, *(b)* on television, *(c)* on billboard posters, *(d)* online and *(e)* by other means. [263]

Michael Gove: The creation of the website originally cost £42,706.67 in 2007-08. Up to 31 March 2010, further production enhancements to the site, in response to young people and sector feedback, cost £137,000. In total, £179,706.67 has been spent on creating the website.

Table A outlines the media costs used to promote the value of science and maths qualifications as a whole, as well as www.scienceandmaths.net website.

There is no ongoing expenditure committed to promoting the website post-March 2010, there has been no spend on outdoor advertising and all costs are exclusive of VAT.

Table A: Media costs

£

Media	*2007-08*	*2008-09*	*2009-10*
Radio	285,075	374,138	463,950
Television	—	497,222	540,459
Online (digital)	—	245,997	370,000
Other			
Cinema	[1]71,395.77	[1]1,094,582.94	[1]1,024,342.47
PR	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Press advertorials	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Collateral	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Digital partnerships	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Total	356,470.77	2,221,939.94	2,398,751.47

[1] Represents a brace.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* front-line and *(b)* other staff were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) each of its agencies in the latest year for which figures are available; and what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to the public purse of employing staff of each type at each of those bodies. [533]

Michael Gove: The Department for Education does not have any agencies, nor does it directly employ what is described as front-line staff.

The number of staff employed by the Department is available on the website of the Office for National Statistics:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=2899&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=422

The most recently published data in relation to the cost of employing staff in the Department are published in the 2008-09 Resource Accounts which is available at:

http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=HC+448

The Department's 2009-10 Resource Accounts will be published in mid-July 2010.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of the *(a)* implementation of penalty clauses and payments in its contracts and *(b)* potential legal action arising from the deferral and cancellation of contracts and projects under his Department's plans to achieve cost savings; and whether those estimates are included in the total cost savings to be achieved by his Department. [569]

Michael Gove: My officials are liaising with the Office of Government Commerce who are undertaking work to review major projects and support the renegotiation of contracts on behalf of central Government to seek efficiencies in the region of £1.7 billion. The analysis of contingent liabilities, in order to achieve maximum actual savings, is a core part of the review methodology and OGC will be taking into account the potential costs of deferment or cancellation. The Department is also currently undertaking an analysis of the remaining relevant contracts which will take into account all exit costs associated with early termination of contracts and cancellation of ongoing procurements.

Teaching Methods

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent discussions he has had with local authorities on the implementation of the one-to-one tuition scheme. [757]

Mr Gibb: The Secretary of State has not held any discussions directly with local authorities on the subject of one-to-one tuition. He has, however, confirmed that he will protect front-line spending for schools, and the £256 million allocated to schools and local authorities for one-to-one tuition in 2010-11 is included within that category. The Department has handed £47 million back

to the Treasury as part of the Government's broader drive to secure public sector savings over the course of the financial year 2010-11. These savings have been made from centrally held funding for one-to-one tuition which had not yet been allocated and for which no spending plans had been announced.

Departmental officials have continued to work closely with local authority officers responsible for the implementation of one-to-one tuition locally.

TREASURY

Budget Deficit

19. **Mr Hollobone:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to reduce the level of the budget deficit. [936]

Justine Greening: The Treasury has received a number of budget representations from various sources, some of which make reference to the budget deficit.

The Coalition Agreement states that "deficit reduction, and continuing to ensure economic recovery, is the most urgent issue facing Britain".

The Chancellor has announced the first step in tackling the deficit, setting out details of how to save over £6 billion from spending during this financial year. This is the fastest and most collegiate spending review in recent history.

At the emergency Budget on 22 June, the Chancellor will set out a comprehensive plan to accelerate reduction of the UK's deficit over the course of this Parliament.

Economic Growth

20. **Eric Ollerenshaw:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to increase economic growth. [937]

Mr Gauke: The Government are taking action to support enterprise and create a fair, competitive, and efficient tax system in order to deliver the private-sector led recovery that will be the foundation of future growth. Fundamental to this strategy will be tackling the budget deficit and providing a stable macroeconomic environment that will underpin private-sector investment and growth.

Further details of the action Government will take to secure future growth will be included in the Emergency Budget on 22 June.

21. **Elizabeth Truss:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to increase economic growth. [938]

Mr Gauke: The Government are taking action to support enterprise and create a fair, competitive, and efficient tax system in order to deliver the private-sector led recovery that will be the foundation of future growth. Fundamental to this strategy will be tackling the budget deficit and providing a stable macroeconomic environment that will underpin private-sector investment and growth.

Further details of the action Government will take to secure future growth will be included in the Emergency Budget on 22 June.

22. **Matthew Hancock:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to increase economic growth. [939]

Mr Gauke: The Government are taking action to support enterprise and create a fair, competitive, and efficient tax system in order to deliver the private-sector led recovery that will be the foundation of future growth. Fundamental to this strategy will be tackling the budget deficit and providing a stable macroeconomic environment that will underpin private-sector investment and growth.

Further details of the action Government will take to secure future growth will be included in the Emergency Budget on 22 June.

24. **Mark Pritchard:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on his policy on capital gains tax. [941]

Mr Gauke: We have received a number of representations on the proposals to reform capital gains tax. We will take all factors into consideration when making tax policy and further details will be provided at Budget.

Devolved Administrations

23. **Roger Williams:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the mechanism for the provision of funding from the Exchequer to the devolved administrations; and if he will make a statement. [940]

Danny Alexander: The Government recognise the concerns expressed by the Holtham Commission on Welsh funding, the House of Lords Select Committee report on the Barnett formula and other commentators on the system of devolution funding.

However, as set out in the coalition programme for government, at this time the priority must be to reduce the deficit and therefore any change to the system must await the stabilisation of the public finances.

Credit Unions

25. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to provide financial assistance to community-based credit unions. [942]

Justine Greening: The Government have made it clear that the role of social enterprises, charities and co-operatives will be enhanced. The provision of financial assistance is a matter for Ministers with responsibility for community-based credit unions in their own areas.

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10-days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1252]

Justine Greening: The percentage of Treasury invoices paid within 10-days of receipt from suppliers was 92.2% for March 2010 and 95.2% for April 2010 against a target set by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills of 90%.

Excise Duties: Beer

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many changes there have been to the level of duty in sales of beer in the last 30 months; and what the total percentage change has been. [955]

Justine Greening: The rate of duty on beer has been changed four times in the past 30 months, a 26% increase in total.

Members: Correspondence

Mr Baron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when his Department plans to respond to the letter of 28 April 2010 from the then hon. Member for Billericay regarding his constituent Mr Welford. [1006]

Justine Greening: The Treasury hopes to be in a position to respond to the hon. Member shortly and apologises for the delay in doing so.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 9 June 2010

WALES

Departmental Manpower

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers are employed by her Department; and at what civil service pay grade in each such case. [1283]

Mrs Gillan: I have not yet appointed a special adviser. There are three staff in the communications branch—one grade 6, one senior information officer and one information officer.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in her Department. [1491]

Mrs Gillan: The Wales Office inherited three cars allocated to its Ministers. In London we have two Toyota Prius, manufactured in Japan, and in Cardiff we have a Jaguar manufactured in the UK. These arrangements are changing following the publication of the new ministerial code which contains changes that affect ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. The code states that

"the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed".

Cabinet Office has provided clarification on how the code should be interpreted. The expectation is that Ministers not in the Cabinet will use the pool service and that Cabinet Ministers who have an allocated car will wish to consider how that car might be utilised by other Ministers within the Department before calls are made on the Government Car Service Pool.

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with Departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements.

TRANSPORT

Boats: Licensing

Mr Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review the financial interests of the individuals reviewing the Boatmasters regulations for the Marine and Coastguard Agency; and if he will make a statement. [410]

Mike Penning: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) is in the process of reviewing the results of an initial informal consultation on required changes to the Boatmasters regulations. In addition to the written comments received, an MCA chaired group, the Boatmasters' Licences sub-group of the Domestic Passenger Ship Steering Group (DPSSG) has also commented extensively on the proposals. As this group is informal it is not necessary to review their financial interests; however, I am happy to receive representation from my hon. Friend should he have any concerns in this regard.

All comments are being actively considered by the MCA and this will result in a second informal consultation prior to a final public consultation before any amending regulations are laid.

Bus Services: Regulation

Mr Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is on local authority regulation of local bus services. [R] [1365]

Norman Baker: The coalition agreement makes it clear that we will encourage joint working between bus operators and local authorities in England. The Local Transport Act 2008 introduced a number of new bus regulations in England and the related guidance has been published in full. I intend to wait for the outcome of the Competition Commission inquiry into the local bus market in Great Britain outside London before deciding on the need for any further regulatory reform of bus provision.

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1276]

Norman Baker: The percentage of invoices from suppliers to the Department for Transport and its agencies paid within 10 days of receipt was:

(a) March 2010: 89.40%

(b) April 2010: 87.01%

The central Department and its agencies are working towards further improving their prompt payment figures.

The Department for Transport is made up of a central Department and seven Executive agencies, as follows:

Highways Agency (HA)

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)

Driving Standards Agency (DSA)

Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)

Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA)

Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA)

Government Car and Despatch Agency (GCDA).

This response covers all eight entities.

Departmental Contracts

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of the *(a)* implementation of penalty clauses and payments in its contracts and *(b)* potential legal action arising from the deferral and cancellation of contracts and projects under his Department's plans to achieve cost savings; and whether those estimates are included in the total cost savings to be achieved by his Department. [568]

Mr Philip Hammond: I have agreed to contribute £683 million to the £6 billion of in-year budget reductions sought in the emergency Budget.

For Department for Transport's (DFT's) direct spend, the reductions have been targeted at improving efficiency within non-contractualised spend and re-negotiating contracts with suppliers, and deferring a small number of lower priority schemes which are not contractualised for construction. The reductions will be achieved through a range of measures including a recruitment freeze, reduction in discretionary spend, and a freeze on major new IT spending.

I therefore do not expect costs under penalty clauses or legal action arising from deferral or cancellation of contracts to be incurred.

The remainder of DFT's budget is distributed in grants to Network Rail, Transport for London and local government. The proposed reductions to these grants are subject to consultations with those organisations and regulators, and it will be for them to determine how reductions will be achieved. I would expect that similar efficiencies can be driven from these large organisations as can be found by the Department.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many special advisers *(a)* he and *(b)* each other Minister in his Department (i) has appointed to date and (ii) plans to appoint. [310]

Mr Philip Hammond: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Railways: Construction

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will include the East Midlands, Sheffield and Leeds in his proposals for a high speed rail network. [1168]

Mr Philip Hammond: The Government's vision is of a truly national high speed rail network. Ministers are reviewing the options for linking the UK's major conurbations. No final decisions on the shape of the network will be taken until full public consultation has taken place.

Woodhead Tunnel

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that the Woodhead tunnels be maintained in a manner which ensures their suitability for future rail use. [1297]

Mrs Villiers: Ministers are currently reviewing a wide range of departmental policy. Policy on disused rail lines is being considered as part of this review. The Woodhead tunnels are currently owned and maintained by National Grid.

HEALTH

NHS: Training

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on funding the provision of e-learning materials in the NHS, with particular reference to the e-Learning for Health programme. [1525]

Anne Milton: The Department is working with Medical Education England and the professional boards to review strategy for technology-enhanced learning.

This review will consider the funding provision of e-learning materials in the national health service, with particular reference to the e-Learning for Healthcare programme.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Manpower

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers are employed by her Department; and at what Civil Service pay grade in each such case. [1277]

Richard Benyon: With regard to special advisers, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

The Department currently employs 18.5 full-time equivalent press officers within core DEFRA and 2.5 full-time equivalent press officers within its executive agencies. Details on their civil service pay grades are shown in the following table.

Grade	*Total number of press officers*
Core DEFRA	
Grade 5	1
Grade 7	3
SIO	5.5
IO	9
Animal Health Agency	
HEO	1
Rural Payment Agency	
SEO	0.5
Food and Environment Research Agency	
SIO	1

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate, Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science and the Veterinary Laboratories Agency do not employ press officers.

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which Ministers in her Department have been issued with *(a)* a BlackBerry,

(b) an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1431]

Richard Benyon: The Secretary Of State and all DEFRA Ministers have been issued with a BlackBerry. None of the other devices listed in the question has been issued to DEFRA Ministers.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in her Department. [1480]

Richard Benyon: Under the interim arrangements inherited from Ministers in the previous Government (see my answer to the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Mr Watson) 7 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 15W), DEFRA temporarily retains two allocated cars. One is a Toyota Prius T Spirit; the other a Honda Civic ES Hybrid. Both are manufactured in Japan.

Noise: Pollution Control

Mr Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on tackling noise pollution; and if she will make a statement. [1307]

Richard Benyon: The Noise Policy Statement for England provides a wide framework aimed at enabling noise management decisions to be made that ensure noise levels do not place an unacceptable burden on society. The statement sets out a vision to

"promote good health and a good quality of life, through the effective management of noise within the context of government policy on sustainable development."

Additionally, the Environmental Noise Directive (END) Noise Action Plans for 23 agglomerations (large urban areas) and major roads and major railways (outside agglomerations), in England (www.defra.gov.uk/environment/quality/noise/), set out the principles of managing environmental noise.

They also describe the process to be followed by the Highways Agency, local highways authorities, and the railway industry, to determine what, if any, further noise management measures might be undertaken (in the context of Government policy on sustainable development), in areas found to most affected by environmental noise. The plans also describe the process for identifying and managing quiet areas, with the aim of preserving environmental noise quality where it is considered good.

Local authorities also have a statutory duty under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to inspect their areas periodically for existing and potential statutory nuisances from noise, and to take reasonably practicable steps to investigate complaints of noise nuisance within their areas. Once satisfied that a statutory nuisance exists or may occur or recur, a local authority must issue an abatement notice requiring that the noise be ceased or abated within a specified timescale. Local authorities also have powers under the Noise Act 1996 (as amended) to take enforcement action against night noise emitted between 11pm and 7am from licensed or domestic premises that exceeds the permitted level, which may be in the form of a fixed penalty notice.

Poultry: Animal Welfare

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects the prohibition of the trimming of beaks of laying hens to take effect; and if she will make a statement. [1127]

Mr Paice: The previous Government consulted on the proposed amendments to the Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007, to remove the total ban on beak trimming allowing for the routine beak trimming of day-old chicks intended for laying to be carried out using the infra-red technique only. It closed on the 14 April and responses are currently being considered.

I will be discussing this matter with DEFRA officials shortly.

JUSTICE

Defamation

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will *(a)* review the law on libel and *(b)* lay formal proposals for reform to provide that it shall not prevent media in the UK from reporting court proceedings elsewhere in the EU, in particular where this concerns UK (a) firms and (b) nationals. [883]

Mr Djanogly: We are committed to reviewing the law on defamation with a view to ensuring that freedom of speech and academic debate are protected and that a fair balance is struck between freedom of expression and the protection of reputation.

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1257]

Mr Djanogly: The Ministry of Justice paid 94% of valid supplier invoices within 10 days of receipt in March 2010, and 95% of valid supplier invoices within 10 days of receipt in April 2010.

The MoJ has been collecting performance data for the MoJ and its agencies since November 2008. The data have been reported to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and are reproduced in the following table:

Month	*Percentage of invoices in 10 days*
2008	
November	64
December	59
2009	
January	55
February	67

Month	Percentage of invoices in 10 days
March	66
April	82
May	92
June	88
July	89
August	88
September	92
October	92
November	93
December	92
2010	
January	89
February	93
March	94
April	95

Electoral Register

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what financial recompense chief executives of local authorities receive for assuming responsibility for electoral matters in respect of *(a)* local and *(b)* general elections. [726]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

In England and Wales, under section 8 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, each local authority must appoint an to be electoral registration officer, responsible for maintaining the electoral register in the local authority area. Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, each local authority in the UK must also appoint a returning officer for local elections in that area. Local authority chief executives are often appointed as electoral registration officer and returning officer for their local authority.

Under section 36 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, all expenditure properly incurred by a returning officer in administering local authority elections must be paid by the local authority (in so far as it does not exceed any scale fixed by the local authority).

In England and Wales, the Representation of the People Act 1983 provides for the duties of a returning officer in respect of the conduct of a UK parliamentary election to be discharged by the electoral registration officer for the constituency as "acting returning officer".

The amounts which returning officers receive for the services rendered and expenses incurred in administering UK parliamentary elections are paid from the Consolidated Fund under section 29 of the Representation of the People Act 1983. The overall maximum amount which a returning officer is entitled to recover is set out in the Parliamentary Elections (Returning Officer's Charges) Order 2010. This order also sets out the maximum amount a returning officer may recover in respect of specified services and expenses.

The order provides different amounts for when a parliamentary election is conducted on its own, or when a parliamentary general election is taken together with the ordinary day of election of councillors in some constituencies in 2010. The fee which each acting returning officer may receive for his services is set out under column 2 of the table contained in schedule 1 (in the case of a parliamentary election conducted on its own) and schedule 2 (in the case when a parliamentary general election is taken together with the ordinary day of election of councillors in some constituencies in 2010) to the order.

Prison Service: Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether he plans to reduce staffing levels in prisons in financial year 2010-11; and if he will make a statement. [1225]

Mr Blunt: Staffing levels in prisons and young offender institutions in England and Wales are set on the basis of the delivery plan and budget that is agreed between the governor and the regional manager with responsibility for custodial services; it is subject to ongoing review. There are no plans to reduce staffing levels outside of this arrangement.

In line with the announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 24 May 2010, a recruitment freeze has been imposed on all external recruitment to posts within the civil service. Steps have been taken not to undermine the delivery of prison services and the recruitment of key staff, such as prison officers, will continue as necessary.

Rape: Disclosure of Information

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans the Government has to grant anonymity to defendants in rape cases. [753]

Mr Blunt: The Government will come forward with proposals on defendant anonymity in rape cases once all the options have been carefully considered.

Rape: Lancashire

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what proportion of contested prosecutions for rape in Lancashire police force area have resulted in a conviction in each of the last five years. [1121]

Mr Blunt: The proportion of defendants tried at the Crown court in the Lancashire police force area for rape, who pleaded not guilty and who were found guilty, from 2004 to 2008 (latest available) is given in the following table.

Court proceedings data for 2009 are planned for publication in October 2010.

Number of defendants tried at the Crown court for rape[1, 2] who pleaded not guilty, who were found guilty of rape, Lancashire police force area, 2004-08[3, 4]

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total tried who pleaded not guilty (number)	32	48	29	46	47
Found guilty (number)	8	12	10	13	21
Conviction rate (percentage)[5]	25	25	34	28	45

[1] Includes: Rape and attempted rape of a female or male.
[2] Includes: Conspiracies, charges of participation in offences as accessories after the fact and charges of participation in offences by impeding the apprehension or prosecution of the offender.
[3] The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.
[4] Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.
[5] Proportion of defendants tried who pleaded not guilty at the Crown court who were found guilty.
Note:
As can be seen in the table, the conviction rate is based on data totals of less than 100. Conviction rates at this level can be easily affected, either up or down, by relatively minor alterations in the base data used.
Source:
Justice Statistics Analytical Services in the Ministry of Justice

Third Parties (Rights against Insurers) Act 2010

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice when he plans to make a commencement order to bring into force the Third Parties (Rights against Insurers) Act 2010. [987]

Mr Djanogly: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable) announced on 2 June that all regulation inherited from the last Government, including this Act, will be reviewed. No commencement date will be set until the review has been completed.

Youth Justice: Per Capita Costs

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the average cost to the public purse of processing a case of a child through the criminal justice system from arrest to sentence was in *(a)* the youth court and *(b)* the Crown Court in the latest period for which figures are available. [415]

Mr Djanogly: The work of the Ministry of Justice spans criminal, civil and family justice, as well as democracy and rights. HM Courts Service forms only a part of the wider criminal justice system, which includes the Crown Prosecution Service, the Metropolitan Police and HM Prison Service. This answer is provided from a Her Majesty's Courts Service (HMCS) point of view only.

It is not currently possible to identify separately and disaggregate youth court related costs. The costs to HMCS for processing children's cases in *(a)* the youth courts and *(b)* the crown court cannot currently be separately identified as the time taken to conclude cases involving children is not available.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Borders: Personal Records

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate she has made of the cost to the public purse of adapting the e-Borders system to take account of the use of non-biometric passports. [748]

Damian Green: There are not expected to be any cost impacts to the public purse.

There will be no need to adapt the e-Borders system which is designed to work with all types of travel documents.

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the likely effects on the operation of e-border and wider border control checks of the ending of the biometric passport scheme. [749]

Damian Green: The assessment of the UK Border Agency is that halting work on the next generation of biometric passports will have no impact on the operation of e-borders or the wider checks at ports and airports.

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of invoices from suppliers to her Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1259]

Nick Herbert: The Home Department has invested in process improvement through the creation of a professional Shared Service Centre and Procurement Centre of Excellence and upgraded Procure to Pay systems. The Department has put firm focus on paying its suppliers on time on receipt of a compliant invoice. It has worked closely with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills reporting on both its legislative obligations of 30 days as well as the 10 day commitment for all suppliers.

The Home Department's and UKBA's performance information for paying suppliers within 10 days of receipt of a compliant invoice in March and April 2010 is:

	Percentage w/terms—compliant invoices	*Total invoices paid*	*Total compliant invoices paid*	*Compliant invoices paid within terms*
March 2010				
Home Office	92	2,819	2,166	1,998
UKBA	88	5,391	3,773	3,318
Total	90	8,210	5,939	5,316
April 2010				
Home Office	85	2,240	1,535	1,308
UKBA	84	4,760	3,319	2,778
Total	84	7,000	4,854	4,086

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate she has made of the cost to her Department of the *(a)* implementation of penalty clauses and payments in its contracts and *(b)* potential legal action arising from the deferral and

cancellation of contracts and projects under her Department's plans to achieve cost savings; and whether those estimates are included in the total cost savings to be achieved by her Department. [565]

Nick Herbert: Work is presently underway in the Home Office to manage the process of any contract re-negotiation with suppliers, due to change in scope, deferral or cancellation of programmes. The actual costs and net savings are therefore subject to commercial negotiation. Eventual final costs and charges will be included in the final net savings and reported accordingly.

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what her most recent estimate is of the annual cost to her Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front-line and *(b)* other staff employed by (i) her Department and (ii) its agencies. [639]

Nick Herbert: We do not yet know the full extent of early releases (voluntary or compulsory) that may be required in 2010-11. Furthermore, until we have clarity about the outcome of the legal challenge to the Civil Service Compensation Scheme by the Public and Commercial Services Union, we will not be able to make reliable calculations of any early release costs.

Deportation: Offenders

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign national prisoners were *(a)* released from prison and *(b)* removed from the UK in each of the last five years. [1115]

Damian Green: The number of foreign national prisoners who were discharged from prison having completed determinate sentences for each year from 2004 to 2008 is as follows;

	Number
2004	7,100
2005	7,400
2006	7,700
2007	8,100
2008	9,500
2009	N/A

These figures have been rounded to the nearest 100. They refer to the number of discharges on completion of sentence for each year, and will include prisoners who have been removed or deported. Data for 2009 are not yet available.

Published figures for the UK Border Agency on the number of foreign national prisoners removed or deported from 2007 to 2009 are;

	Number
2004	N/A
2005	N/A
2006	N/A
2007	4,200
2008[1]	5,395
2009[1]	5,535

[1] These figures are based on provisional management information and as per all removals and voluntary departures figures are subject to change. They have not been quality assured under National Statistics protocols, and are not identified separately in the published statistics on removals and voluntary departures. The figures include notified, assisted and other forms of voluntary departures. All cases are considered for an exclusion order by the UK Border Agency where there is a legal framework to do so

Management Information prior to 2007 is not available.

Published information from 2008 onwards is available from the Control of Immigration: Quarterly Statistical Summary Statistical bulletins; available in the Library of the House and on the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics website at:

http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html

Detention Centres: Children

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children were detained in immigration removal centres on the latest date for which figures are available. [888]

Damian Green: As at 31 March 2010, there were 30 people detained solely under Immigration Act powers recorded as being less than 18 years of age.

This information is available in tables 3.5 to 3.8 of the Control of Immigration: Quarterly Statistical Summary, United Kingdom, January to March 2010 published on 27 May 2010 available in the Library of the House and the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics website at:

http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html

I recently announced a review into the detention of children for asylum purposes so it can be brought to an end this summer. We have already ended the detention of children at Dungavel.

Entry Clearances: Pakistan

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people resident in Islamabad applied for *(a)* visitor visas and *(b)* permanent settlement in each year since 1997. [1120]

Damian Green: The UK Border Agency (UKBA) cannot break down its records of visa applications by city of residence except at disproportionate cost.

Identity Cards

Paul Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of her Department's staff who have been employed in administering the identity cards programme she estimates will be *(a)* redeployed to other work and *(b)* made redundant; and if she will make a statement. [471]

Damian Green *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* There will be a reduction in staff numbers as a result of the cancellation of identity cards. This is in addition to the other efficiency savings IPS is making to contribute to budget reductions across government. We will begin communicating with staff and union representatives about how this will happen during the coming weeks.

We will also be working very closely with suppliers to manage any impacts on them. Last week we informed 60 temporary staff based in Durham that their contracts will be ended three months early (in June). They have no entitlement to redundancy or redeployment.

Our aim is, as far as possible, to redeploy permanent staff affected and take all action possible to avoid compulsory redundancies.

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate she has made of the cost to the public purse of cancelling contracts with companies undertaking work for her Department on the *(a)* development of the next generation biometric passport and *(b)* development and delivery of the identity card system; [747]

(2) what estimate she has been made of the annual *(a)* saving to the public purse consequent on ending the identity register and *(b)* cost to the public purse of the cancellation of contracts in respect of the identity register projects including cancellation fees to contractors. [750]

Damian Green: The estimated exchequer savings from cancelling ID cards and the National Identity Register are £86 million and further savings in the region of £134 million will be realised by halting the introduction of fingerprint biometric passports.

The cost implications of terminating and amending certain National Identity Service contracts are currently a matter of commercial negotiation with suppliers, to protect taxpayers' interests. It is therefore not possible to give the cost of cancelling those contracts at this time.

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether those persons who have received an identity card will be able to continue using it for its stated purposes until its expiry date; and if she will make a statement; [1004]

(2) whether persons who applied voluntarily to receive identity cards are to be reimbursed the application fee. [1005]

Damian Green *[holding answer 8 June 2010]:* For the time being, identity cards remain valid until the date of expiry on the card. However, the Identity Documents Bill which was laid before Parliament on 26 May 2010 proposes the scrapping of ID Cards and the National Identity Register. Cards would remain valid for one month after Royal Assent. The Identity and Passport Service is writing to each cardholder informing them of progress and contact details for further advice. Card refunds or credit for a future passport application will not be offered.

Passports: Fingerprints

Meg Hillier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether she plans to include fingerprint information in British passports from 2012; and if she will make a statement. [1242]

Damian Green: The programme of work in place to deliver fingerprints in passports in 2012 has been halted. This includes the enhancements to the electronic security of the passport chip required to include finger images and the establishment of a capability to enrol passport applicants' fingerprints.

Police: Finance

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations she has received from *(a)* the Association of Police Authorities, *(b)* police authorities and *(c)* organisations representing the police on the revised police funding settlement announced on 27 May 2010. [1023]

Nick Herbert: No representations have been received to date. However, a consultation period will begin once the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) Amending Report 2010-11 has been laid.

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding her Department intends to provide to police authorities in respect of the requirement upon them to publish detailed monthly local crime statistics. [1071]

Nick Herbert: Greater transparency across Government is at the heart of our approach to accountability for public services. This is why we will make sure that, from January 2011, crime data are published at a level that allows the public to see what is happening on their streets. We will be working with police forces and authorities to ensure that this is done in a way that offers value for money for Government, the police service and the public.

Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Scheme

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 13W, on work permits, how many work cards *(a)* have been allocated and *(b)* are planned to be allocated to each (i) county and (ii) region under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme in 2010. [1400]

Damian Green: The quota for the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme for 2010 is 21,250. All work cards have been allocated by the United Kingdom Border Agency to the nine contracted Operators, according to their agreed share of the full quota.

Operators are responsible for issuing the cards to workers.

Information on the number of work cards allocated and planned to be allocated by county is not recorded centrally. Information on the number of cards issued by Operators to workers with a specific start date by region is as follows:

Region	*Card issued to workers with start dates 1 January 2010 to 31 May 2010*	*Cards issued to workers with start dates 1 June 2010 onwards*	*Total*
Anglia	1,805	540	2,345
Central	1,335	65	1,400
Midlands	1,325	40	1,365

Region	Card issued to workers with start dates 1 January 2010 to 31 May 2010	Cards issued to workers with start dates 1 June 2010 onwards	Total
North East	640	120	760
North West	385	65	450
Northern Ireland	40	5	45
Not stated	190	0	190
Scotland	2,030	415	2,445
South East	2,495	490	2,985
South West	2,875	305	3,180
Wales	10	0	10
Total	13,130	2,045	15,175

The figures quoted are not provided under National Statistics protocols and have been derived from local management information and are therefore provisional and subject to change. Figures are rounded to the nearest five.

The number of work cards allocated may not equate to the number of individuals working in the UK under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme. Not all cards allocated are used, and some cards are issued as replacements for lost or spoiled cards.

Sexual Offences: Registration

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will consider the merits of broadening the definition of sexual offences in Schedule 3 to the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to include murder where there was clear sexual motive; and if she will make a statement. [1455]

James Brokenshire: It is essential that the police and other agencies effectively manage dangerous offenders including those convicted of sexually motivated murders once released back into the community.

The UK has one of the most robust systems for managing sex offenders in the world. The scope of the legislative framework is regularly kept under review including the need to add new categories of offence and new types of notification requirements.

Those receiving mandatory sentences for murder are subject to licence conditions after release from prison which could include requirements similar to those under the notification regime. In addition persons posing a risk after release can be actively managed by police and other agencies under local multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA).

Where there is evidence that a person convicted of murder poses a risk of serious sexual harm to the public, in addition to the restriction of the life licence, the police can apply for a sexual offences prevention order.

This Government are committed to ensuring that these arrangements are protecting our communities and will work with colleagues across Government to ensure that the most effective policy and legislation are in place.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans she has to consult trade unions in *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies concerning deficit reduction plans. [609]

Nick Herbert: The Home Office and its agencies are fully committed to making the savings required in the Government's deficit reduction plan.

The Department is drawing up detailed plans on how the savings will be made, and how this will affect staff.

Staff are being kept informed of changes through a variety of methods.

Where there is a requirement to consult and in circumstances where consultation is deemed to be the best approach, irrespective of obligation, the Home Office and its agencies will consult with the relevant recognised trade unions on areas where the plans will have a significant impact on staff.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1266]

Chris Grayling: The percentage of supplier invoices paid within 10 days of receipt is as follows:

	Percentage
March 2010	97
April 2010	95

Departmental Official Hospitality

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what budget his Department has allocated for entertainment, including alcohol, in each of the next three years. [1324]

Chris Grayling: The Department does not allocate a budget for the provision of entertainment or alcohol. All expenditure is made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Treasury guidance 'Managing Public Money'.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of the *(a)* implementation of penalty clauses and payments in its contracts and *(b)* potential legal action arising from the deferral and cancellation of contracts and projects under his Department's plans to achieve cost savings; and whether those estimates are included in the total cost savings to be achieved by his Department. [559]

Chris Grayling: DWP expects to minimise costs resulting from any deferral or cancellation of contracts and projects. Any estimate would be speculative at this stage and therefore none have been included within our plans for cost savings.

Departmental contracts include break clauses allowing the authority the right to terminate at any time by giving an agreed period of notice. This period of notice may vary from contract to contract dependant upon the goods or service being supplied. Any costs incurred by the Department would be deducted from reported savings.

In the event of procurement projects being deferred or cancelled, the Department would only pay those reasonable costs that had been agreed at the outset of a competition. The Department does not generally make any such agreement. Reported savings would reflect any costs incurred.

Employers' Liability

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he plans to respond to the consultation on Accessing compensation: supporting people who need to trace employer's liability insurance. [986]

Chris Grayling: The public consultation closed on 5 May 2010. We are currently considering the replies we received and we will publish our response to the consultation in due course.

Future Jobs Fund

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many young people have been employed through the Future Jobs Fund in each constituency since its inception. [1019]

Chris Grayling: The Information requested is not available.

Housing Benefit

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on the payment of housing benefit to tenants; and what plans he has to renew the effectiveness of the scheme under which such payments are made. [1033]

Steve Webb: Housing benefit in the private rented sector is normally paid to the customer but there are circumstances in which payment is made to the landlord.

If the customer has rent arrears of eight weeks or more the local authority should make payments to the landlord unless it is in the customer's overriding interest not to do so.

For customers whose benefit is assessed according to the local housing allowance rules, the local authority can make payments to the landlord if it considers the customer should be safeguarded because they are unable or unlikely to manage their rental payments.

Other customers in the private rented sector and those who have tenancies with registered social landlords can choose to have their benefit paid to the landlord. The local authority can also decide to make payment to the landlord if they consider it to be in the customer's best interests.

For local authority tenants housing benefit takes the form of a rebate against their rent account.

A review of the first two years' operation of the local housing allowance arrangements is being undertaken to monitor the impact of the local housing allowance at a national level. The review aims to cover a range of issues including direct payment to tenants.

Social Security Benefits: Disabled

Robert Flello: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for the future of *(a)* incapacity benefit and *(b)* employment and support allowance; and if he will take steps to ensure that claimants with debilitating conditions are not disadvantaged by changes in the welfare system. [83]

Chris Grayling: A key priority for the new Government will be to help as many of the 2.2 million claimants of the old incapacity benefits as possible back into the work place. We support the view of many independent representative groups that, where possible, people are better off in work.

The Department plans to begin the reassessment of people receiving incapacity benefit in October 2010 and transfer cases to either employment and support allowance or jobseeker's allowance.

The Work Capability Assessment is carried out by a health care professional and delivers an evaluation of the extent to which a claimant is capable of work. We are aware that some people need much more support to manage their conditions and get help to find work, and moving them to employment and support allowance is the best way to do that. We know this is a big undertaking and are working on plans to make the change happen as smoothly as possible for all claimants.

A Department-led review of the Work Capability Assessment engaged with medical and other experts alongside a range of representative groups including the Disability Benefits Consortium, RNIB, Mind and the National Autistic Society among others.

We are committed to an annual, independent review of the Work Capability Assessment for the first five years.

Social Security Benefits: Fraud

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much his Department budgeted for advertising tackling benefit fraud in each of the last three financial years. [1035]

Chris Grayling: The information is in the table:

Budgeted expenditure for advertising tackling benefit fraud

	£ million
2007-08	6.5
2008-09	6.0
2009-10	5.0

Note:
Includes media costs, PR, production and research costs. It excludes VAT.

We are currently reviewing all advertising expenditure and requests for further funding will be submitted to HM Treasury for approval.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to consult trade unions in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies concerning deficit reduction plans. [617]

Chris Grayling: My officials met with departmental trade union side on 25 May 2010 to discuss the planned reductions in Government spending. These plans form part of the Government's wider deficit reduction programme. As and when the detailed proposals become available, departmental officials will continue to consult with our trade unions at the appropriate level.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Chen Guangcheng

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department had had discussions with the Government of China on the case of Chen Guangcheng; and if he will make a statement. [79]

Mr Jeremy Browne: We have raised our concerns about the case of Chen Guangcheng with the Chinese authorities on three occasions since 2006. One of these occasions was during the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue in January 2009, together with the cases of other human rights defenders. The Chinese responded with details of the charges brought against him and of his unsuccessful appeal.

We are proposing that this case should next be raised at the EU/China Human Rights Dialogue on 29/30 June 2010 where Chen Guangcheng should be included on the individual case list. We will continue to monitor this case and raise it when appropriate.

Defence

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements he has in place to supply the foreign policy component of the Strategic Defence Review. [1014]

Alistair Burt: The foundation of the Strategic Defence and Security Review will be an assessment of Britain's place in the world, of the threats and opportunities facing Britain, and how we best defend ourselves against those threats and exploit those opportunities. That assessment will be agreed by the National Security Council, and it will determine the broad range of capabilities which we need. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will continue to supply foreign policy input throughout the review.

Departmental Electronic Equipment

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* plasma and *(b)* LCD televisions there are in ministerial offices in his Department. [390]

Mr Lidington: There are 13 LCD televisions in Foreign and Commonwealth Office ministerial offices. This constitutes 16 rooms and includes all the Private Offices of all the Ministers and offices of Special Advisers. There are no plasma televisions.

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Ministers in his Department have been issued with *(a)* a BlackBerry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1429]

Alistair Burt: At the current time my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has been issued with one official BlackBerry and also has use of an in-car phone.

My hon. Friends the Under-Secretary of State (Mr Bellingham), the Minister of State (Mr Browne), the Minister for Europe (Mr Lidington) and I each have one official BlackBerry.

My noble Friend Lord Howell does not have an official mobile telephone.

No other mobile phones or personal digital assistants have been issued.

Departmental Public Appointments

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments he has made since his appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [370]

Alistair Burt: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's response of 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Embassies: Buildings

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he plans to sell property owned by his Department which is used as British embassies and residences overseas; and if he will make a statement. [506]

Alistair Burt: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) constantly reviews its global Estate in the light of changing operational needs to optimise the use of its property assets. As a consequence the FCO regularly acquires and disposes of its property assets. In 2009 the Treasury set the FCO an asset sales target of £25 million for the financial years 2010-11.

Between 2010-11 and 2013-14 we have identified 106 potentially redundant properties for disposal with a total book value of £71.09 million. This comprises four office buildings, six residences, 86 units of staff accommodation, four plots of land, three amenity complexes and three ancillary buildings. At present we have sold £848,000 with a further £9.8 million awaiting completion. In order to maximise the price received for the sale of our assets, it is not our policy to provide exact details of our sales programme, nor the price we expect to receive in advance of formal marketing.

We will continue to keep our property portfolio under review, ensuring it provides value for money, fitness for purpose, and security for our staff.

Details of sales completed are reported quarterly to the Foreign Affairs Committee. Book value for each property is based on value as assessed by independent Chartered Surveyors commissioned to undertake the rolling programme of revaluations.

Linda Carty

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consular contact his Department maintains with Linda Carty in Mountain View Unit, Gatesville, Texas; what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of her legal representation; and if he will make a statement. [1461]

Alistair Burt: Our consulate general in Houston remains in close contact with Ms Carty and continues to provide her with consular assistance. A consular official last visited Ms Carty on 6 May 2010 and plans to visit her again this month.

The choice of counsel is up to Ms Carty. But we do work hard to ensure British prisoners abroad are aware of the range of legal options available to them, and to put prisoners potentially facing death sentences in touch with the non-governmental organisation Reprieve, who look to ensure that they are defended effectively.

This must be an extremely difficult time for Ms Carty and her family. We have been providing consular assistance ever since we learned of her case, in August 2002. We continue to support her and her family. We have made our concerns about her case known throughout the legal process, most recently submitting a supporting brief to the US Supreme Court on her behalf.

Middle East: Armed Conflict

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate his Department has made of the number of resolutions of the UN Security Council of which the Government of Israel is in breach; and if he will make a statement. [1191]

Alistair Burt *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* We have made no such estimate. The UK will continue to impress upon the Israeli Government the need to act in line with their international obligations.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made this clear in his statement on 2 June 2010.

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise at the UN Security Council the matter of the restrictions placed by the Government of Israel on access for humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials into Gaza; and if he will make a statement. [1194]

Alistair Burt: As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear in his statement to the House on 2 June 2010, the situation in Gaza is unacceptable and unsustainable, and is a cause of public concern here in the United Kingdom and around the world.

The UK supports the UN Security Council statement of 31 May which underlined the need for sustained and regular flow of goods and people to Gaza as well as uninpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza.

We will also continue to impress on the Israeli Government the importance of UN Security Council resolution 1860, which calls for sustained delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Mordechai Vanunu

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Israeli government on the incarceration of Mordechai Vanunu. [1302]

Alistair Burt: We are aware of the circumstances surrounding Mr Vanunu's detention in Israel and continue to monitor his case closely.

Nuclear Weapons

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his contribution of 26 May 2010, *Official Report*, column 181, whether he plans to establish procedures to allow the international community to verify the stated magnitude of UK nuclear warheads. [1521]

Alistair Burt: We have no plans to establish procedures to allow the international community to verify the UK's nuclear warhead stockpile. The UK has made this announcement in order to be more open, but we have to limit access to military sites in order to protect our national security interests and to adhere to safety and security measures.

The UK recognises the importance of an effective verification regime to achieving the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons, and has been pursuing internationally acclaimed research with Norway and the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre, a non-governmental organization, on the verification of nuclear warhead dismantlement.

Somalia: Piracy

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment his Department has made of the level of security of UK maritime operations in the Gulf of Aden; and if he will make a statement. [1236]

Alistair Burt: The Government monitors the maritime security situation in areas that present a risk to critical UK trade routes, including the Gulf of Aden. There is a continued risk of pirate attack to those transiting the region, and we are aware of other maritime activity including smuggling and drug trafficking. The threat level in the area increased from the end of 2008 and early 2009 when pirate activity in the Gulf of Aden increased. The Ministry of Defence has conducted maritime security operations in the region since 2001 through the Combined Maritime Force and offers shipping advice to international shipping transiting through the region via the UK Maritime Trade Operation. Moreover, specific North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, EU, and Combined

Maritime Force counter piracy operations have been effectively coordinating shipping activity along an internationally recommended transit corridor since mid-2009. As a result of these operations, combined with increased shipping industry adherence to UN endorsed best management practices, the number of successful attacks has significantly reduced with only three on vessels following this guidance since 2008. The Government are concerned, however, by the recent spread of pirate activity into the wider Indian Ocean. The multi-national operations are currently considering options on how best to address this.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many special advisers *(a)* he and *(b)* the Minister of State (i) has appointed to date and (ii) plans to appoint. [324]

Mr Paterson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how many *(a)* front-line and *(b)* other staff were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) each of its agencies in the latest year for which figures are available; and what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to the public purse of employing staff of each type at each of those bodies. [531]

John Penrose: In the financial year 2009-10, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and its agency, The Royal Parks, employed a total of 580 full-time equivalent staff (455 at the DCMS, 125 at The Royal Parks) at an annual cost of £31,709,234.

The DCMS does not differentiate between front line and other staff.

Departmental Official Residences

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport whether any domestic properties in the gift of the Government have been allocated to the use of Ministers in his Department. [1790]

John Penrose: No domestic properties in the gift of the Government have been allocated to Ministers at DCMS.

Departmental Public Appointments

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how many special advisers *(a)* he and *(b)* each named Minister in his Department (i) has appointed to date and (ii) plans to appoint. [307]

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments he has made since his appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [377]

Hugh Robertson: I refer the hon. Members to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Gambling: Greater London

Mr Lammy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how many gambling licences were in effect in *(a)* Tottenham constituency and *(b)* Greater London (i) in September 2007 and (ii) on the most recent date for which figures are available; and in respect of which location the licence was issued in each case. [1229]

John Penrose: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Under the Gambling Act 2005, local authorities are required to maintain public registers showing the permissions that they have granted.

EDUCATION

Children's Commissioner for England

Ed Balls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for the future of the post of Children's Commissioner. [1218]

Sarah Teather: The Government believe it is vital that the voices of children and young people are heard, and will consider how the post of the Children's Commissioner can help achieve this most effectively.

Pupil Premium

Ed Balls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he plans to make an announcement on his plans for a pupil premium. [1299]

Mr Gibb *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* The Government published the document "The Coalition: our Programme for Government" on 20 May 2010, which set out our intention for a pupil premium to support disadvantaged children. The pupil premium will target extra funding specifically at deprived pupils to enable them to receive the support they need to reach their potential. We will publish our proposals with details of how we plan to distribute the pupil premium in due course.

Pupils: Per Capita Costs

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the *(a)* per capita and *(b)* per pupil funding level in the (i) primary and (ii) secondary sector was in each local education authority in each of the last five years. [719]

Mr Gibb: School funding is allocated based upon pupil numbers, not population numbers, and so the Department for Education does not have funding figures on a per capita basis.

Since 2006-07, the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) has been the main source of school funding. As the DSG is distributed by the Department through a single guaranteed unit of funding per pupil for each local authority, a primary/secondary split on a central to local government basis is not available.

Per pupil funding figures for 2005-06 to 2009-10 for all local authorities in England are provided as follows. These include the DSG and other grants, are for all funded pupils aged three-19 and are in real terms:

Local authority revenue funding per pupil

£

	2005-06 (baseline)	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Barking and Dagenham	4,960	4,960	5,240	5,270	5,390
Barnet	4,810	4,990	5,130	5,200	5,340
Barnsley	4,160	4,300	4,480	4,480	4,650
Bath and North East Somerset	4,120	4,240	4,370	4,430	4,570
Bedfordshire	4,090	4,210	4,350	4,410	—
Bedford Borough	—	—	—	—	4,680
Central Bedfordshire	—	—	—	—	4,470
Bexley	4,400	4,510	4,670	4,720	4,820
Birmingham	4,830	5,000	5,180	5,240	5,370
Blackburn with Darwen	4,700	4,860	5,020	5,040	5,180
Blackpool	4,310	4,430	4,590	4,620	4,760
Bolton	4,280	4,410	4,590	4,600	4,710
Bournemouth	4,040	4,150	4,290	4,300	4,450
Bracknell Forest	4,180	4,310	4,470	4,500	4,650
Bradford	4,450	4,640	4,830	4,870	5,010
Brent	5,210	5,350	5,590	5,700	5,830
Brighton and Hove	4,360	4,480	4,640	4,660	4,780
Bristol, City of	4,710	4,890	5,050	5,050	5,130
Bromley	4,240	4,350	4,510	4,590	4,730
Buckinghamshire	4,200	4,310	4,450	4,510	4,640
Bury	4,140	4,240	4,390	4,430	4,560
Calderdale	4,250	4,380	4,530	4,570	4,700
Cambridgeshire	3,950	4,080	4,210	4,280	4,410
Camden	6,580	6,700	6,900	6,910	7,070
Cheshire	4,100	4,200	4,350	4,430	—
Cheshire East	—	—	—	—	4,450
Cheshire West and Chester	—	—	—	—	4,660
Cornwall	3,980	4,120	4,280	4,340	4,500
Coventry	4,470	4,620	4,790	4,790	4,920
Croydon	4,490	4,660	4,860	4,910	5,050
Cumbria	4,190	4,290	4,430	4,430	4,570
Darlington	4,270	4,360	4,540	4,550	4,680
Derby	4,270	4,440	4,610	4,660	4,790
Derbyshire	4,050	4,170	4,320	4,450	4,590
Devon	3,940	4,070	4,220	4,280	4,400
Doncaster	4,330	4,450	4,600	4,630	4,750
Dorset	4,070	4,160	4,310	4,350	4,480
Dudley	4,170	4,290	4,460	4,510	4,640
Durham	4,360	4,480	4,640	4,730	4,900
Ealing	5,200	5,350	5,540	5,620	5,790

Local authority revenue funding per pupil

£

	2005-06 (baseline)	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
East Riding of Yorkshire	3,960	4,060	4,210	4,270	4,410
East Sussex	4,230	4,330	4,530	4,560	4,700
Enfield	4,770	4,910	5,080	5,100	5,210
Essex	4,130	4,250	4,400	4,450	4,560
Gateshead	4,490	4,570	4,720	4,740	4,880
Gloucestershire	3,990	4,110	4,260	4,370	4,480
Greenwich	5,660	5,930	6,130	6,260	6,430
Hackney	6,510	6,920	7,070	7,250	7,470
Halton	4,680	4,780	4,960	4,960	5,070
Hammersmith and Fulham	6,050	6,330	6,550	6,490	6,630
Hampshire	3,960	4,070	4,220	4,320	4,430
Haringey	5,570	5,640	5,850	5,940	6,020
Harrow	4,590	4,800	4,970	5,170	5,200
Hartlepool	4,480	4,600	4,780	4,830	4,910
Havering	4,370	4,460	4,600	4,670	4,800
Herefordshire	3,950	4,100	4,270	4,320	4,450
Hertfordshire	4,160	4,250	4,400	4,500	4,620
Hillingdon	4,620	4,800	4,940	4,990	5,120
Hounslow	5,010	5,180	5,340	5,380	5,490
Isle of Wight	4,310	4,520	4,680	4,660	4,810
Islington	6,140	6,430	6,710	6,660	6,810
Kensington and Chelsea	6,420	6,490	6,610	6,530	6,700
Kent	4,200	4,310	4,460	4,520	4,650
Kingston upon Hull, City of	4,500	4,650	4,820	4,870	5,020
Kingston upon Thames	4,560	4,670	4,790	4,850	4,960
Kirklees	4,250	4,380	4,550	4,650	4,800
Knowsley	4,610	4,800	5,040	5,080	5,310
Lambeth	6,190	6,400	6,620	6,780	7,020
Lancashire	4,210	4,320	4,480	4,520	4,660
Leeds	4,310	4,410	4,560	4,610	4,730
Leicester	4,490	4,660	4,870	4,860	5,040
Leicestershire	3,830	3,920	4,050	4,150	4,270
Lewisham	5,910	6,140	6,310	6,330	6,480
Lincolnshire	4,120	4,230	4,380	4,410	4,530
Liverpool	4,710	4,880	5,080	5,140	5,340
Luton	4,540	4,740	4,920	4,960	5,120
Manchester	4,970	5,150	5,410	5,430	5,570
Medway	4,280	4,420	4,560	4,600	4,710
Merton	4,550	4,820	4,970	5,010	5,130
Middlesbrough	4,690	4,850	5,040	4,960	5,150
Milton Keynes	4,310	4,480	4,630	4,710	4,850
Newcastle upon Tyne	4,480	4,620	4,800	4,840	4,950
Newham	5,370	5,650	5,870	5,970	6,140
Norfolk	4,110	4,210	4,360	4,410	4,540
North East Lincolnshire	4,430	4,560	4,780	4,850	5,050
North Lincolnshire	4,130	4,240	4,390	4,420	4,540
North Somerset	4,040	4,120	4,260	4,310	4,450
North Tyneside	4,290	4,360	4,490	4,520	4,660
North Yorkshire	4,120	4,230	4,370	4,440	4,580
Northamptonshire	4,020	4,130	4,280	4,360	4,460
Northumberland	4,130	4,230	4,380	4,400	4,510
Nottingham	4,980	5,110	5,330	5,330	5,430
Nottinghamshire	4,060	4,150	4,330	4,390	4,500

Local authority revenue funding per pupil

£

	2005-06 (baseline)	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Oldham	4,460	4,610	4,790	4,820	4,970
Oxfordshire	4,100	4,220	4,370	4,410	4,520
Peterborough	4,410	4,550	4,700	4,790	4,920
Plymouth	4,200	4,350	4,510	4,540	4,670
Poole	3,990	4,090	4,230	4,250	4,370
Portsmouth	4,300	4,430	4,600	4,650	4,800
Reading	4,450	4,720	4,920	4,870	5,030
Redbridge	4,400	4,580	4,770	4,820	4,960
Redcar and Cleveland	4,410	4,510	4,670	4,750	4,930
Richmond upon Thames	4,440	4,560	4,690	4,750	4,880
Rochdale	4,540	4,680	4,860	4,900	5,050
Rotherham	4,450	4,530	4,700	4,730	4,860
Rutland	4,210	4,310	4,440	4,400	4,530
Salford	4,700	4,860	5,060	5,050	5,220
Sandwell	4,520	4,710	4,900	4,890	4,980
Sefton	4,370	4,420	4,570	4,590	4,740
Sheffield	4,200	4,390	4,570	4,650	4,780
Shropshire	3,980	4,070	4,220	4,240	4,370
Slough	4,740	4,900	5,070	5,130	5,270
Solihull	3,910	4,100	4,210	4,270	4,420
Somerset	3,990	4,080	4,230	4,350	4,480
South Gloucestershire	3,880	3,970	4,110	4,150	4,230
South Tyneside	4,560	4,640	4,820	4,910	5,090
Southampton	4,350	4,530	4,700	4,750	4,850
Southend-on-Sea	4,350	4,460	4,590	4,640	4,800
Southwark	6,000	6,440	6,640	6,650	6,770
St Helens	4,390	4,440	4,630	4,640	4,810
Staffordshire	3,990	4,080	4,230	4,290	4,420
Stockport	4,080	4,180	4,320	4,410	4,560
Stockton-on-Tees	4,400	4,470	4,640	4,620	4,760
Stoke-on-Trent	4,480	4,620	4,770	4,800	4,930
Suffolk	3,970	4,100	4,260	4,320	4,470
Sunderland	4,390	4,470	4,630	4,680	4,820
Surrey	4,090	4,240	4,370	4,450	4,580
Sutton	4,580	4,590	4,740	4,810	4,950
Swindon	3,970	4,110	4,250	4,310	4,430
Tameside	4,230	4,360	4,520	4,560	4,660
Telford and Wrekin	4,160	4,300	4,510	4,510	4,650
Thurrock	4,290	4,500	4,670	4,700	4,860
Torbay	4,170	4,280	4,440	4,460	4,580
Tower Hamlets	6,680	7,020	7,280	7,350	7,540
Trafford	4,110	4,200	4,340	4,410	4,560
Wakefield	4,190	4,350	4,510	4,550	4,630
Walsall	4,350	4,510	4,690	4,700	4,810
Waltham Forest	4,970	5,180	5,340	5,330	5,490
Wandsworth	5,440	5,650	5,880	5,980	6,190
Warrington	3,990	4,090	4,250	4,320	4,450
Warwickshire	4,010	4,130	4,270	4,320	4,450
West Berkshire	4,250	4,390	4,530	4,570	4,700
West Sussex	4,060	4,170	4,310	4,370	4,470
Westminster	5,540	6,040	6,310	6,260	6,370
Wigan	4,220	4,300	4,470	4,510	4,640
Wiltshire	3,910	4,060	4,200	4,250	4,390
Windsor and Maidenhead	4,280	4,420	4,580	4,630	4,770
Wirral	4,340	4,420	4,610	4,630	4,770

Local authority revenue funding per pupil

£

	2005-06 (baseline)	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Wokingham	4,000	4,160	4,320	4,360	4,520
Wolverhampton	4,510	4,670	4,860	4,940	5,100
Worcestershire	3,970	4,080	4,210	4,300	4,430
York	4,050	4,120	4,280	4,360	4,500

Notes:

1. This covers funding through the Dedicated Schools Grant, School Standards Grant, School Standards Grant (Personalisation) and Standards Fund as well as funding from the Learning and Skills Council; it excludes grants which are not allocated at LA level.
2. Price Base: Real term figures using 31 March 2010 GDP Deflators at 2008-09 prices.
3. These figures are for all funded pupils aged three-19.
4. Rounding: Per pupil figures are rounded to the nearest £10.
5. Figures exclude Isles of Scilly and City of London.
6. From 2009-10 due to Local Government re-organisation, Bedfordshire split to become Bedford borough and Central Bedfordshire and Cheshire became Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester.

Seaham School of Technology

Grahame M. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will ensure that planned funding for Seaham School of Technology under the Building Schools for the Future programme is maintained. [876]

Mr Gibb: The Department is reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that when we build schools for the future, we do so in a more cost-effective and efficient fashion.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to consult trade unions in his Department on cost reduction plans. [603]

Michael Gove: Officials and Ministers meet regularly with the recognised trade unions to discuss a variety of issues including Machinery of Government changes. I hold meetings with the recognised trade unions on a six-monthly basis and informal meetings are taking place with the Department's Head of Employee Relations and the Trade Union Side Chair.

The trade unions met the permanent secretary on 24 May to discuss current plans and another meeting has been offered before the start of the summer recess.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Departmental Manpower

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers are employed by his Department at each Civil Service pay grade. [1273]

Robert Neill: With regard to special advisers, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

The total number of press officers and their civil service pay grades are set out in the following table:

Pay grade	Number of officers
Information officer	7
Senior information officer	8
Grade 7	4
Grade 6	1

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government which Ministers in his Department have been issued with *(a)* a BlackBerry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1436]

Robert Neill: Since the arrival of the new Government, this Department has issued a total of five BlackBerrys to the following Ministers:

Mr Eric Pickles;

Mr Andrew Stunell;

Mr Bob Neill;

Baroness Hanham; and

Mr Grant Shapps.

To date no other mobile device has been issued to CLG ministers.

Derelict Land and Green Belt

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he plans to publish separate guidance on the preservation of green belts in local plans; and against what criteria local authorities should make decisions affecting the Green Belt before such guidance is published. [968]

Robert Neill: Policy on Green Belt is currently set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2, "Green Belts" (PPG2), published in 1995. Local planning authorities must have regard to PPG2 when preparing local plans. PPG2 also establishes a presumption against inappropriate development on green belt. If a proposal for such development is received, the local planning authority should consider whether any harm to the green belt would be outweighed by other considerations, and whether very special circumstances exist to justify planning permission.

In the Coalition Agreement the Government stated that they will publish and present to Parliament a simple and consolidated national planning framework covering all forms of development. Announcements on the future of planning policy will be made in due course. However, the agreement also undertakes to ensure that the protection of green belt by local planning authorities is maintained.

We have also effectively suspended the operation of regional spatial strategies and their associated housing targets, which created top-down pressure to review green belt boundaries. We will now move to formally abolish RSS.

Local Government Finance

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with reference to the speech by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 24 May 2010 on spending announcements, for which local authority in England *(a)* what is the amount in pounds sterling of the authority's aggregate external finance which is liable to be reduced and *(b)* what percentage of aggregate external finance this represents in the case of each such local authority. [1523]

Robert Neill: An announcement on the specific grant streams that will be reduced in 2010-11 will be made shortly.

Local Government Finance: North East

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government by how much and in what proportion he expects to amend the grant from his Department to each local authority in the North East in order to contribute to the projected reduction in his Department's expenditure in 2010-11. [1394]

Robert Neill: An announcement on the specific grant streams that will be reduced in 2010-11 will be made shortly.

Local Government: Public Consultation

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what mechanism will be used to enable people in a local authority area to veto a proposed rise in council tax above a defined level. [1631]

Robert Neill: We will give residents the power to veto excessive council tax rises that go above a set threshold. We will set out our proposals on the threshold and the mechanism for initiating a referendum in a consultation document later this year.

Mayors

Chris Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he expects each planned city referendum on elected mayoral authorities to take place. [1069]

Robert Neill: We are committed to implementing as soon as practicable our programme for Government which we published on 20 May, including our commitment that we will create directly elected mayors in the 12 largest cities in England, subject to confirmatory referendums.

Ordnance Survey

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has for the future ownership of Ordnance Survey. [995]

Robert Neill: Ordnance Survey is Great Britain's national mapping agency and its data underpin the delivery of many vital public services. I am not considering changes to the ownership of Ordnance Survey.

Planning Obligations

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether he plans to review the operation of section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. [1760]

Robert Neill: The Government are currently consulting on a policy document concerning the operation of section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, which closes on 21 June 2010. Announcements on the future of the related Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will be made in due course.

Second Homes and Holiday Accommodation

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will review the *(a)* planning and *(b)* taxation rules in respect of (i) second and (ii) holiday homes to control the prevalence of such properties. [991]

Robert Neill: My Department has no current plans to review the *(a)* planning *(b)* taxation rules in respect of (i) second homes and (ii) holiday homes.

Standards Board for England

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what timetable he has set for his plans to abolish the Standards Board for England. [1469]

Robert Neill: We will implement our commitment in our Programme for Government to abolish the Standards Board regime as soon as practicable, and hence intend to include provisions in the Bill which will devolve greater powers to councils, announced in the Queen's Speech for this parliamentary session, to repeal the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 which established the Standards Board for England.

PRIME MINISTER

Sovereignty

Chris Leslie: To ask the Prime Minister which Minister is responsible for examining the case for a UK Sovereignty Bill. [1077]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Hague) is the Minister responsible.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Manpower

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers are employed by his Department; and at what Civil Service pay grade in each such case. [1285]

David Mundell: In terms of special advisers, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W, to the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman). The Scotland Office currently has two permanent Press Office staff; one at the former Grade 7 level and one equivalent to Higher Executive Officer level.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

National Grid

Dr Whiteford: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate his Department has made of the distribution losses of electricity over the National Grid in each of the last five years. [718]

Charles Hendry: According to Ofgem, the estimated losses over the electricity distribution network for the last five years were as follows:

	Percentage
2004-05	5
2005-06	5.1
2006-07	4.9
2007-08	5.2
2008-09	5.3

Ofgem sets an output-based incentive in order to encourage Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) to manage losses both through low-loss technology but also through network operations or network users as well as incentivising them to identify ways to tackle the issue of theft.

National Grid estimates that the proportion of electricity generated lost over the GB transmission network is 2% of the total energy transferred across the network.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan: Peacekeeping Operations

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what definition his Department uses of a successful completion of the armed forces' operations in Afghanistan. [1501]

Dr Fox: We will have successfully completed our military operations when Afghanistan is stable enough to manage its own internal and external security without the support of the international community. Only when Afghanistan can prevent itself from reverting to a base from which terrorists can threaten us will our mission be complete and our troops will be able to come home.

Armed Forces: Recruitment

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have been recruited into the *(a)* Royal Air Force, *(b)* Royal Navy and *(c)* Army in (i) England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Northern Ireland and (iv) Wales in each of the last five years. [668]

Mr Robathan: The numbers of personnel recruited into the armed forces in each of the last five years are as follows:

Royal Air Force

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
England	1,338	1,585	2,541	3,882	3,712
Scotland	104	134	207	300	287
Northern Ireland	22	28	36	25	30
Wales	56	50	116	242	209

Royal Navy/Royal Marines

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
England	3,251	3,265	3,345	3,581	3,579
Scotland	314	287	277	330	284
Northern Ireland	204	163	180	204	206
Wales	42	57	48	47	49
Centrally recruited	54	42	85	98	56

Notes:
1. Officers are recruited through six Regional Officer Careers Liaison Centres (OCLC) in Rosyth, Peterborough, Plymouth, London, Manchester and Belfast. Candidates will normally be sent to the OCLC nearest to them, therefore officer candidates from Wales would normally be processed through OCLC Manchester and cannot, therefore be separated from the candidates from England processed through that OCLC.
2. 'Centrally recruited' refers to specialist officer candidates who are processed centrally i.e. doctors, dentists, chaplains and QARNNS officer.

Army—Other Ranks

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
England	n/a	9,761	9,823	10,664	10,036
Scotland	n/a	1,022	754	840	1,148
Northern Ireland	n/a	246	256	293	316
Wales	n/a	944	894	917	871

n/a = Not Available

Army—Officers

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Total	752	707	712	713	645

Due to the way Army Officers are recruited, data are only available as a total and not by country.

Chiefs of Staff

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost to the public purse was of travel by the *(a)* Chief of the General Staff and *(b)* Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff in the last 12 months. [1044]

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost to the public purse was of travel by the *(a)* Chief of the Air Staff and *(b)* First Sea Lord in the last 12 months. [1040]

Mr Robathan: I will write to the hon. Members with the information requested.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the Government grant to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission; and if he will make a statement. [1046]

Mr Robathan: The Ministry of Defence has no plans to change the long-standing arrangement whereby the United Kingdom funds 78% of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission costs, which is proportionate to the number of war casualties the United Kingdom sustained during what are considered the war years. This year's United Kingdom funding is in excess of £42 million.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission have already outlined their requirements for their next three-year financial cycle, including a number of proposals for additional projects. These will be developed and considered in conjunction with the Commission and the contributing nations, with a view to reaching an agreed budget later this year.

We remain committed to ensuring that those who died during the two world wars, and the men and women who have died while serving in HM armed forces in subsequent years, continue to be commemorated with the same honour and dignity as hitherto and which they so richly deserve.

Defence

Mr Carswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the names are of those participating in the strategic defence review; and when he expects that review to be completed. [1092]

Dr Fox: Within the Ministry of Defence (MOD), a team of about 30 people, the final membership of which will be determined soon, is being established to coordinate the Defence contribution to the Strategic Defence Spending Review (SDSR). A wide range of personnel across the MOD and armed forces will participate in developing that contribution. The SDSR will run in parallel and underpin the spending review. These will report in a coordinated way towards the end of this year.

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the likely effect on the *(a)* number of and *(b)* number of hours worked by officials of his Department of the proposal to hold a strategic defence review in every Parliament. [1153]

Dr Fox: This will be part of the Department's core work and is not separately identifiable.

Defence Support Group

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for future ownership arrangements of the Defence Support Group. [1390]

Peter Luff: Defence activity is being reviewed in the context of the Strategic Defence and Security Review and the Spending Review. It would be premature to speculate about the impact of these reviews on any aspect of defence activity, including the Defence Support Group, at this stage.

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1262]

Mr Robathan: Performance figures for March and April 2010, against the Government's agreed 10-day payment target, are shown in the following table:

2010	*Percentage of invoices paid within 10 days of receipt*
March	97.98
April	98.67

The figures provided represent invoices processed by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) Financial Management Shared Service Centre and the four MOD trading funds:

Defence Science and Technology Laboratory

Meteorological Office

Defence Support Group

UK Hydrographic Office.

Departmental Electronic Equipment

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* plasma and *(b)* LCD televisions there are in ministerial offices in his Department. [385]

Dr Fox: There are six plasma televisions in ministerial offices in the Ministry of Defence. This is the same as the number inherited from the previous Government.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many full-time equivalent staff at each civil service grade are employed in the private office of each Minister in his Department. [127]

Dr Fox: 18 full-time equivalent civil service staff are currently employed in the Ministry of Defence's (MOD) six ministerial offices. The following shows the breakdown of each MOD civil service grade employed in the private office of each Minister.

Secretary of State for Defence

SCS PB1

B1

B2

C1

D

Minister of State for the Armed Forces

B2

C1

D

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans

B2

C2

D

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for Defence Equipment, Support and Technology

B2

C1 x 2

D

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for International Security Strategy

C1

C2

D

The composition of the private offices of the Under-Secretary of State and Lords spokesman on defence is yet to be finalised. There are also two military officers at OF4 rank and one at OF5 in the Ministers' private offices.

Departmental Official Cars

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Government *(a)* cars and *(b)* drivers are allocated to Ministers in his Department. [290]

Dr Fox: None. I am driven and protected by the Metropolitan police. Junior Defence Ministers draw on the Ministry of Defence pool of drivers and cars as the Department has dispensed with the individual drivers allocated to Ministers in the previous Government.

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the effect on his Department's expenditure on official cars for *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* service personnel in 2010-11 of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement on Government spending on 24 May 2010. [1165]

Mr Robathan: The Government are committed to saving at least 25% of the running costs of Defence. This includes reductions in the cost of official transport and business travel.

Total Defence expenditure in 2010-11, however, is not affected by the announcement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 24 May 2010, and any savings made are being recycled within Defence. This will apply to any expenditure that might be saved in respect to official cars.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when and in what form he plans to publish a list of all items of expenditure by his Department over £25,000. [270]

Dr Fox: The Prime Minister has written to Cabinet Ministers reiterating transparency commitments made in the coalition programme for government, and setting out a timetable for achieving them. In particular, all new items of central Government spending over £25,000 will be published online in an open format from November 2010.

France

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the cost to the public purse was of *(a)* accommodation and *(b)* travel of the Veterans Minister's visit to France on 29 and 30 May 2010; and what the cost to the public purse was in respect of officials of his Department of (i) accommodation, (ii) travel and (iii) wages; [1151]

(2) what the cost to the public purse was of *(a)* accommodation, *(b)* subsistence and *(c)* wages of drivers deployed in respect of the Minister for Veterans' visit to France on the weekend of 29 May 2010. [1152]

Mr Robathan: The net additional cost to the public purse for my attendance as Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans at the commemorations of the 70th anniversary of Dunkirk was approximately £810, using the most cost effective and efficient methods. This is broken down as follows:

	Cost		£
Item	*Minister*	*Officials*	*Total*
Accommodation	0	88	88
Subsistence	12	48	60
Drivers' wages	0	433	433
Travel	(ferry) 179	[1]—	[2]229
	(fuel) 50	[1]—	[2]—
Total	241	569	810

[1] Included in ferry and fuel costs
[2] Indicates brace

Low Flying

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in respect of how many wind farm developments *(a)* in North Carmarthenshire and *(b)* nationally his Department has made an agreement with the developer providing that low-flying aircraft activity (i) may and (ii) may not take place in the vicinity of the development. [964]

Mr Robathan: Wind farm developers do not control the airspace within which their equipment is sited and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) does not have to approach them for authority to operate low-flying aircraft in the vicinity of the wind farms.

If a proposed development raises potential low-flying concerns, MOD will always do everything practical to work with the developers to find mutually acceptable solutions wherever possible. That said, military aircraft do not usually operate in close proximity to wind farms and will always maintain the appropriate minimum separation distance.

Since 2001 the Department has objected to 14 wind farm planning applications on the basis of low-flying concerns, none of which fall within North Carmarthenshire. It is not possible to identify from available records the number of cases where low-flying concerns have been overcome as a result of mitigation discussions.

Met Office

Phil Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much his Department spent on *(a)* rail, *(b)* road and *(c)* air travel by staff of the Met Office in the last 12 months; [1052]

(2) how much his Department spent on air travel of each class for Met Office staff in the last 12 months. [1054]

Mr Robathan: The Met Office is a global provider of weather and climate services with customers located across the UK and overseas. It provides vital operational support to the armed forces, as well as to emergency responders during periods of severe weather and other environmental incidents. As the UK's National Meteorological Service, the Met Office also has a number of international obligations placed upon it by the World Meteorological Organization.

In meeting the needs of its customers during 2009-10, the Met Office spent £463,662, £786,539 and £692,838 on rail, road and air travel respectively. Of that spent on air travel, details held centrally show that £593,879 was for economy class, £59,031 for business class and £315 for first-class travel. Where first-class was flown, this was the only option available. Details of other flights are not held centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the Met Office; and if he will make a statement. [1057]

Mr Robathan: Defence activity is being reviewed in the context of the strategic defence and security review and the spending review. It would be premature to speculate about any impact on the Met Office at this stage.

Met Office and United Kingdom Hydrographic Office

Grahame M. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff at the *(a)* Met Office and *(b)* Hydrographic Office earn more than £100,000. [1041]

Mr Robathan: Details of the remuneration of the Met Office's and United Kingdom Hydrographic Office's Executive Directors are published in their annual report and accounts. These show that in 2008-09, three members of the UKHO Executive and four members of the Met Office Executive were paid more than £100,000. Outside of the Executive, no staff are paid more than £100,000.

Grahame M. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the remuneration and benefit arrangements are of the non-executive directors of the *(a)* Met Office and *(b)* Hydrographic Office. [1042]

Mr Robathan: Details of the remuneration and benefits for the non-executive directors of the Met Office and UK Hydrographic Office are published annually in the respective Trading Fund annual report and accounts.

Ian Lavery: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on hotel accommodation for staff of the *(a)* Met Office and *(b)* Hydrographic Office in the last 12 months. [1051]

Mr Robathan: During the financial year 2009-10 the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office spent £550,000 on hotel accommodation and the Met Office £560,000.

Phil Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff at the *(a)* Met Office and *(b)* Hydrographic Office are entitled to use official cars. [1053]

Mr Robathan: No one at the Met Office is automatically entitled to use an official car. However the Met Office has 10 pool cars which are available for use by any member of staff, when necessary, in order to minimise transport costs.

The United Kingdom Hydrographic Office has one pool car which is available for use by the 15 members of the Executive Committee and main board; and by others at the discretion of the chief executive. Overseas visitors also make use of this facility when available in order to minimise transport costs.

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the remuneration and benefits arrangements are of the chief executive of the *(a)* Met Office and *(b)* Hydrographic Office; and if he will make a statement. [1055]

Mr Robathan: Details around the remuneration and benefits for the chief executives of the Met Office and UK Hydrographic Office are published annually in the respective agency annual report and accounts.

Military Aircraft: Procurement

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what aircraft will replace the Nimrod R1. [1462]

Peter Luff: On 22 March 2010 the Ministry of Defence made an announcement that the Nimrod R1 would be replaced by US Air Force Rivet Joint RC-135 aircraft and associated ground systems. Following the new Government's announcement to audit all spending decisions taken since 1 January this year, this decision is currently under review. Furthermore, as part of the Strategic Defence and Security Review work has been set in hand to review all major equipment and support contracts to ensure the future programme is coherent with future defence needs and can be afforded.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the US Administration on the purchase of the RC-135 Rivet Joint aircraft. [1463]

Peter Luff: I have not met the US Administration to discuss the purchase of the Rivet Joint system. However, officials of both countries are in regular communication.

United Kingdom Hydrographic Office

Ian Mearns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on air travel of each class by staff at the Hydrographic Office. [1038]

Mr Robathan: Air costs information is not collected by class of travel; an analysis by class cannot therefore be provided without incurring disproportionate cost. However, current United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO) policy requires the use of economy class unless approved by the chief executive. During the period 1 June 2009 to 31 May 2010, a total of £807,300 was expended on air travel reflecting the international focus of UKHO business activity.

Ian Lavery: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on *(a)* rail, *(b)* road and *(c)* air travel by staff of the Hydrographic Office in the last 12 months. [1043]

Mr Robathan: Expenditure during the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010 was:

Transport type	*Cost (£000)*
Rail	78.3
Road	189.6
Air	811.5

Road travel covers mileage payments made for the use of private vehicles on official business, car hire and taxis.

Mr Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the Hydrographic Office; and if he will make a statement. [1056]

Mr Robathan: A review of the arrangements for delivering charting and navigational services by the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office was initiated earlier this year. This work will be aligned with the Strategic Defence and Security Review. It would be premature to speculate about the outcome of the review at this stage.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority

Mr Winnick: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what senior posts, at what salary bands, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has advertised in the last two months; [1309]

(2) what the annual salary of the Chief Executive of IPSA is; and to what other remuneration he is entitled; [1325]

(3) what information he has received from IPSA on *(a)* the number of days each week the Chair is contracted to the Authority, *(b)* the functions the Chair undertakes, *(c)* the (i) salary he receives and (ii) other remuneration he is eligible for; and whether (1) he and (2) Ministerial colleagues have discussed with the Chair of the IPSA the administrative mechanisms for processing claims of hon. Members; [1402]

(4) what information he has received from IPSA on *(a)* the number of staff it employs, *(b)* the number of its staff paid salaries of over £40,000 annually and *(c)* the number of staff eligible for bonus payments; [1403]

(5) what discussions he has had with the Chair of IPSA on the *(a)* arrangements and *(b)* venue for hon. Members to meet senior officers of the Authority to seek advice; and how many requests the Authority has received from hon. Members for such meetings; [1404]

(6) what discussions he has had with the Chair of IPSA on the Authority's policy on publishing on its website the details of each claim authorised for payment to hon. Members immediately upon approval. [1405]

Mr Harper: Questions about the internal workings of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority are a matter for the Authority itself. The Deputy Prime Minister has policy responsibility for IPSA.

Young People

John Robertson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will bring forward proposals to encourage the engagement of young people in the political process. [1352]

Mr Harper: The Government believe that many of the proposals in its constitutional and political reform agenda will help to encourage involvement by young people in our democracy.

The Electoral Commission has a statutory responsibility to run public awareness campaigns to promote voter registration and to provide information on electoral events. In pursuit of this, the Electoral Commission recently ran public awareness campaigns in the lead up to the general election to encourage people to register to vote. The campaign was targeted at groups less likely to be on the electoral register, particularly 18 to 24-year-olds and led to more than half a million electoral registration forms being downloaded from the Commission's website.

The campaign included work on social networking websites as well as advertising on television, radio and in the press. The Electoral Commission has also funded other organisations working to increase democratic participation among young people, through its partnership grants programme. These organisations include Barnardos, the Prince's Trust and UK Youth Parliament.

CABINET OFFICE

Non-departmental Public Bodies

14. **Brandon Lewis:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what mechanisms he plans to use to review the effectiveness of non-departmental public bodies. [1355]

Mr Maude: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier today.

Admiralty Arch

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office whether he plans to derive revenue for the public purse from the apartments in Admiralty Arch held by the Government. [622]

Mr Maude: There are no apartments in Admiralty Arch as this is only an office building.

Departmental Catering

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will place in the Library a copy of the menus for the canteen in 10 Downing Street for the week of 17 May 2010. [573]

Mr Maude: The Cabinet Office total facilities management provider contracted by the previous Government supplies food for catering facilities across the Cabinet Office estate. A copy of the Cabinet Office menu for the week beginning 17 May 2010 has been placed in the House Library.

Departmental Electronic Equipment

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many *(a)* plasma and *(b)* LCD televisions there are in ministerial offices in his Department. [382]

Mr Maude: There are three LCD televisions in ministerial offices in the Cabinet Office. These were all purchased before the current Government took office.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Helen Goodman: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many special advisers *(a)* he and *(b)* each other Minister assigned to responsibilities in his Department (i) has appointed to date and (ii) plans to appoint. [327]

Mr Maude: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has for the future of the *(a)* Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, *(b)* National School of Government and *(c)* Central Office of Information; and if he will make a statement. [18]

Mr Maude: I have no current plans.

Government Departments: Recruitment

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps he is taking to reduce Government expenditure on recruitment advertising. [26]

Mr Maude: The Government are committed to reducing expenditure on recruitment advertising across the Civil Service. We have implemented a recruitment freeze across the Civil Service, which tightly restricts external recruitment to the Fast Stream, business critical posts and other frontline posts that should save up to £145 million for 2010-11. We have also implemented restrictions on marketing and advertising spend, which includes recruitment campaigns, and are expected to deliver savings in the region of £160 million in 2010-11. These restrictions will take effect immediately across all government departments, agencies and NDPBs.

Ministerial Policy Advisers

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how many special advisers of each nationality are employed by Government departments; [1369]

(2) how many non-UK citizens are employed as special advisers by Government departments; [1370]

(3) what advice his Department issues to other Government department's on the employment of non-UK citizens as special advisers. [1371]

Mr Maude: The numbers of special advisers by each nationality, including non-UK citizens, employed as special advisers by Government departments is not held centrally.

Special Advisers as temporary civil servants are bound by the civil service nationality rules. A copy of the rules can be accessed at

http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/about/resources/nationality.aspx

TREASURY

Banks

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to establish an independent commission on the separation of retail and investment banking; what discussions he has had with potential commissioners on that matter; and if he will make a statement. [1076]

Mr Hoban: The independent banking commission will be established under the auspices of, and will report its findings to, the Cabinet Banking Reform Committee. It will be established as quickly as practically possible. The Government will make further announcements in due course.

Bradford & Bingley

Dr Pugh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his policy is on the status of subordinated bondholders in Bradford & Bingley in the event of settlement; [1128]

(2) which former private banking and financial assets are in public ownership. [1234]

Mr Hoban: The Government wholly owns the following three banks: Bradford & Bingley plc; Northern Rock plc; and, Northern Rock (Asset Management) plc. The Government partially owns the following two banks: Royal Bank of Scotland plc and Lloyds Banking Group plc.

The Government's shareholdings in all the above five banks are managed by UKFI (United Kingdom Financial Investments Ltd) whose objectives are to maximise taxpayer value, help maintain financial stability and promote banking competition.

The subordinated bonds issued by Bradford & Bingley plc (B&B) are not covered by the Treasury wholesale deposit guarantee arrangements announced on 29 September 2008. Payments of these bonds, including interest, are entirely a matter for the board of B&B.

The company announced on 23 February 2010 that it will defer payment (principal and interest) on its subordinated bonds until the £18.4 billion statutory debt owed to the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) and the Treasury is repaid. The deferral of the payments of these bonds is part of the condition for which EC state aid approval was granted on 25 January 2010.

Business: Closures

Mr Sanders: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of the limited liability companies which ceased operations in the last financial year owed money to HM Revenue and Customs. [1018]

Mr Gauke: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Child Trust Fund

Mr Umunna: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many children in Streatham constituency have received assistance from the Child Trust Fund; [1088]

(2) what steps his Department takes in respect of stakeholder accounts into which child trust fund vouchers have not been paid by the child's parents within one year of issue. [1089]

Mr Hoban: The annual statistical information on Child Trust Fund accounts, including constituency and regional level data, can be viewed on HMRC's website:

http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/ctf/stats.htm

The data shows that 9,626 children born on or before 5 April 2008 in the Streatham constituency have a Child Trust Fund account, of which 2,581 were opened by HMRC.

If the parents or guardians of a child that received a voucher under the scheme have not opened an account within a year of the voucher being issued, HM Revenue and Customs will have opened a stakeholder account for them.

Equitable Life Assurance Society: Compensation

Richard Harrington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking in respect of payment of compensation to Equitable Life policyholders. [1002]

Mr Hoban: The Government have pledged to make fair and transparent payment to Equitable Life policyholders, through an independently designed payment scheme, for their relative loss as a result of regulatory failure.

The Queen's Speech announced the Government's intention to introduce a Bill in the first session of Parliament to enable payments to be made to Equitable Life policyholders.

On the same day, the Government also announced that an independent commission would be established to determine scheme design.

These steps are a sign of the Government's commitment to deliver on their pledge.

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what timetable has been set in respect of ex gratia payments to equitable Life policyholders who experienced losses. [1026]

Mr Hoban: We will establish an independently designed payment scheme that is transparent and fair to both taxpayers and policyholders.

Sir John Chadwick is due to submit his final report to the Treasury by mid-July. While Sir John finalises his report, the Government will consult with others on the next stage of the process.

The Government will then publish Sir John's report alongside a detailed update, giving next steps towards implementing an independently designed payment scheme.

Excise Duties: Fuels

Kate Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his policy is on the taxation of road fuel; [1493]

(2) if he will initiate a public consultation on reform of the taxation of road fuel; [1494]

(3) if he will introduce a road fuel discount scheme for drivers in rural areas. [1495]

Justine Greening: The main rate of fuel duty is currently 57.19p per litre. Under plans set out by the previous Government, it is scheduled to rise by:

1p per litre on 1 October 2010;

0.76p per litre on 1 January 2011; and

1p per litre above inflation each year thereafter until 2014.

The coalition Government have committed to investigate measures to help with fuel costs in remote rural areas. The Chancellor keeps all taxes under review.

Office for Budget Responsibility

Dr Pugh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors he took into account when appointing Sir Alan Budd as head of the Office for Budgetary Responsibility. [982]

Mr Hoban: Sir Alan Budd was appointed on the basis of his skills and experience in macroeconomics and fiscal policy.

Tax Allowances: Married People

Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number and proportion of households in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Bristol East constituency who will be eligible for the proposed transferable tax allowance for married couples. [1093]

Mr Gauke: The Government have not announced their plans for recognising marriage in the tax system, and therefore it is not possible to provide the estimates that the hon. Lady asks for. Proposals will be brought forward by the Chancellor at the appropriate time.

Mr Bain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the recognition of marriage in the taxation system. [1185]

Mr Gauke: Proposals that recognise marriage and civil partnerships in the income tax system will be brought forward by the Chancellor at the appropriate time.

Taxation: Financial Services

Mr Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to introduce a levy on financial transactions in the UK. [1291]

Mr Hoban: We are working with international partners, looking at all the options, and will be taking note of the International Monetary Fund's report on how the financial sector can make a fair and substantial contribution. We will introduce a banking levy as detailed in the coalition agreement.

VAT

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to businesses of implementing the recent temporary reduction in the rate of value added tax. [1139]

Mr Gauke: The previous administration published an impact assessment at the 2008 pre-Budget report, available at:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/pbr08_vat_1845.pdf

The November 2008 impact assessment estimated that the total cost for businesses in implementing the reduction at £175 million and the cost of the reversion at £125 million.

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has commissioned research to look at the actual costs of complying with the VAT rate reduction and rate reversion. The findings of this work will be published in line with HMRC's stated publication policy following their expected completion later this year.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Aimhigher Programme

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent representations he has received on the future of the Aimhigher programme. [474]

Mr Willetts *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* To date, I have received one letter about the future of the Aimhigher programme, which is from the hon. Member.

Alcoholic Drinks: Prices

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what role the Government has in *(a)* determining the legal implications of setting a minimum price per unit of alcohol in Scotland and *(b)* ensuring that implementation is compatible with EU competition law. [1522]

Mr Davey: The Scottish Government's Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill is currently being considered by the Scottish Parliament. At this stage, it is for the Scottish Government to respond to the questions that have been raised about the Bill and to ensure its legislation and actions are compatible with EU law and within competence.

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what legal advice he has received regarding the minimum pricing per unit of alcohol; and what steps he is taking to ensure that minimum price setting is compatible with *(a)* domestic and *(b)* EU competition law. [1524]

Mr Davey: As part of the Government's work in examining options for tackling harms associated with excessive consumption of alcohol, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has considered the legal issues associated with a minimum unit price for alcohol. The Department will continue to contribute to the Government's work in this area, including advising how competition law relates to any proposed measures.

Apprentices: Bexley

Mr Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent assessment his Department has made of levels of demand for apprenticeships in the London Borough of Bexley. [458]

Mr Hayes: We know that the demand from young people and adults for good quality employer-owned apprenticeships is high. Last year, there were 800 starts in Bexley and there have already been 500 starts in the first half of this academic year (up to 31 January).

We intend to increase the number of apprenticeship places for people of all ages, and we are committed to improving the quality of apprenticeships to make them better suited to the needs of employers and learners.

The Government's decision to redeploy £150 million of our savings for 2010-11, creating an additional 50,000 places this financial year, demonstrates our commitment to high-quality skills. We are investing in our future and training the next generation, as well as developing the existing work force, which is vital as we emerge from recession.

Business: Reading Berkshire

Mr Rob Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent steps his Department has taken to assist small and medium-sized businesses in Reading East constituency. [985]

Mr Prisk: The Government are currently setting their policy priorities for the next five years, which will aim to make this the most entrepreneurial decade in history. This means creating the right environment to start and grow a business, including tackling issues such as the availability of finance and skills, the burden of regulation and issues of business confidence and taxation.

The Government are committed to promoting economic growth across the country and will support the creation of local enterprise partnerships to promote local economic development, to replace the regional development agencies. These may take the form of the existing RDAs where they are popular.

The Government are also redirecting £150 million of funding in 2010-11 to create an additional 50,000 high quality employer-led apprenticeship places. These new places will be targeted especially at SMEs to make it easier for small businesses to take on apprentices and access the benefits they can bring to the workplace.

Departmental Official Residences

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether any domestic properties in the gift of the Government have been allocated to the use of Ministers in his Department. [1792]

Mr Davey: No.

Further Education: Finance

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether he plans to ring-fence funding for further education. [1161]

Mr Hayes: The announcements on savings to reduce the fiscal deficit made by the Government on 24 May 2010 included a reduction of £200 million in the train to gain budget in 2010-11. However, this resource is being reinvested in more apprenticeship places and further education capital projects. We will set out our plans for future years, including details of any ring-fences, in the forthcoming Spending Review. In general, we will aim to enable each of the sectors we fund to plan ahead with comparative certainty, although every Government needs to retain a capacity, subject to parliamentary scrutiny, to be able to respond to changing circumstances.

Further Education: Student Numbers

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what estimate he has made of the change in the number of students studying at further education colleges in the west midlands between academic years 2009-10 and 2010-11. [1448]

Mr Hayes: The following table shows learners studying at FE colleges in the west midlands Government office region in 2007/08 and 2008/09, the most recent years for which full year data are available.

Learners studying at further education colleges in the west midlands, 2007/08 and 2008/09

Region	*2007/08*	*2008/09*
West midlands	330,865	380,692

Notes:
1. Further education provision includes general further education colleges including tertiary, sixth form colleges, special college—agricultural and horticultural colleges and art and design colleges, specialist colleges and external institutions.
2. Volumes are rounded to the nearest hundred.
3. Figures for 2008/09 are not directly comparable to 2007/08 due to a change in funding methodology.

Source:
Individualised Learner Record.

Higher Education: Finance

Kelvin Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many and what proportion of students studying for a higher education qualification in *(a)* a further education college and *(b)* other institutions in 2008-09 were (i) directly funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, (ii) funded via a university and (iii) funded by the Learning and Skills Council. [913]

Mr Willetts: The latest available information from the Learning and Skills Council and the Higher Education Statistics Agency is provided in the attached tables.

Table 1: Full person equivalent (FPE) students registered at institutions in England and studying for a Higher Education (HE) qualification by type of provision and source of funding: English Further Education Colleges—Academic Year 2007-08

Type of Provision	*Funding source*	*Number*	*Proportion (%)*
Accredited HE not fundable by HEFCE, delivered by English FEC	LSC	32,960	20

Accredited HE not fundable by HEFCE, delivered by English FEC	Other funding source	5,335	3
Accredited HE not fundable by HEFCE, delivered by English FEC	Total	38,300	—
Prescribed HE directly delivered by English FEC	HEFCE	47,650	28
Prescribed HE directly delivered by English FEC	Other funding source	9,090	5
Prescribed HE directly delivered by English FEC	Total	56,735	—
Franchised HE delivered by English FEC in partnership with an HEI	HEFCE	51,500	31
Franchised HE delivered by English FEC in partnership with an HEI	Other funding source	4,360	3
Franchised HE delivered by English FEC in partnership with an HEI	Total	55,855	—
Franchised HE delivered by an unknown or non-HEI/FEC institution in partnership with an HEI	HEFCE	11,700	7
Franchised HE delivered by an unknown or non-HEI/FEC institution in partnership with an HEI	Other funding source	5,260	3
Franchised HE delivered by an unknown or non-HEI/FEC institution in partnership with an HEI	Total	16,960	—
Grand Total		167,850	100

Notes:
HEI: Higher Education Institution: FEC:Further Education College
HEFCE: Higher Education Funding Council for England
Numbers include all students taught by English FECs, or by an unknown or non-HEI/FEC institution, and all modes of learning including distance learners, and all levels of HE.
Students returned to HESA as 'Fundable by HEFCE, but funds not sought' have been attributed to 'Other funding source'.
FPE students taught by English HEIs are not accounted for in these data.
FPEs have been rounded to the nearest five and percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer.
2008-09 HESA and LSC data are available but the equivalent analysis has not yet been performed by HEFCE.
Source:
Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student record and Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Individualised Learner Record F04 data.

Table 2: Higher Education Enrolment[1] by Source of Funding English Higher Education Institutions: Academic Year 2008-09

Source of funding	*Number*	*Proportion (%)*
Directly funded by HEFCE	1,740,350	86.8
Funded by LSC	90	<0.1
Funded via a University	3,105	0.2
Other	262,305	13.1
Total	2,005,845	100

[1] Covers postgraduate and undergraduate students of all domiciles enrolled on full-time and part-time courses.
Notes:
Figures are based on a HESA Standard Registration Population.
Figures are rounded to the nearest five, so components may not sum to total.
Percentages are given to one decimal place.
HEFCE: Higher Education Funding Council for England LSC: Learning and Skills Council
Source:
Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether he plans to make in-year changes to his Department's budgetary provision for each university in the West Midlands in 2010-11. [1510]

Mr Willetts: The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) announced provisional allocations to institutions for academic year 2010/11 on 18 March 2010. As in previous years, final allocations taking into account any further changes, including those resulting from the Chancellor's statement on 24 May 2010, will be announced by HEFCE in July this year.

Higher Education: Student Numbers

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many young people were in higher education in each *(a)* constituency and *(b)* local authority area in (i) 1997 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available; and what estimate he has made of the number of young people likely to be in higher education in each such area in the next three years. [1240]

Mr Willetts: The latest available information from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), showing young undergraduate enrolments by constituency and local authority, will be placed in the Libraries of the House. Figures for the 2009/10 academic year will be available from HESA in January 2011.

The Department does not make forward estimates of student numbers below national level. Estimates for the next three years are therefore not available by age group, local authority or constituency.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what estimate he has made of the change in the number of students studying at universities in the west midlands between academic years 2009-10 and 2010-11. [1452]

Mr Willetts: The number of students in each institution will depend upon the recruitment decisions taken by individual institutions. However, we are making available funding for an additional 10,000 places in academic year 2010/11 which will be allocated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Northwest Regional Development Agency

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills by what date he plans to decide whether to abolish the Northwest Regional Development Agency. [1644]

Mr Prisk: The Government will provide further detail on the future of the regional development agencies and how we propose to take forward our proposals for local enterprise partnerships in due course.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which individual *(a)* programmes and *(b)* grants in each regional development agency he has identified as lower-value expenditure to contribute towards his Department's proposed expenditure reductions. [1395]

Mr Prisk: No decisions have been made on how projects/programmes currently delivered by the regional development agencies (RDAs) will be affected. We are working closely with the RDAs to minimise the impact on priority programmes in line with Government priorities. Affected programmes and projects will be kept fully informed as specific decisions are made and plans are developed.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether he has made an assessment of the merits of Advantage West Midlands' plans to allocate funding to Castle Hill in Dudley; and if he will ensure that the funding for those plans will not be affected by the implementation of the reductions needed to achieve the £100 million reduction in expenditure set out by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 24 May 2010. [1445]

Mr Prisk: The Government have set out plans to make over £6 billion of savings. The RDAs outside London (which is being dealt with separately) will contribute £270 million from their programme budgets. We are in discussions with the RDAs about how this will translate across the RDA network. Decisions as to how these reductions impact on individual projects will be for the RDAs themselves. We have however indicated that we wish to minimise the impact in the north-east, north-west, Yorkshire and the west midlands.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent representations he has received from local authorities in the west midlands on the work of Advantage West Midlands. [1520]

Mr Prisk: The Department has had no formal representation from individual local authorities in the west midlands on the work of Advantage West Midlands. The West Midlands Joint Strategy and Investment Board (JS&IB) has however requested a meeting to discuss how they can help rebalance the regional economy and I hope to meet them in due course.

Sheffield Forgemasters: Finance

Mr MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will maintain the present level of financial support from his Department for Sheffield Forgemasters. [1388]

Mr Prisk: In line with the statement given by my right hon. Friend the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 May, and along with other projects which were approved after January 2010, the loan to Forgemasters is undergoing a process of review. An announcement will be made in due course as part of the review.

Students: Loans

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) how many EU nationals have claimed a maintenance loan while attending university in the UK in the last 10 years; and how many such EU nationals are in arrears in respect of their loan repayments; [360]

(2) how many nationals of other EU countries attending university in England were in receipt of a maintenance loan in each of the last five years; and how many are in arrears with repayment; [654]

(3) how many nationals of other European countries attending university in England and in receipt of a maintenance loan have defaulted on repayments in each of the last five years. [670]

Mr Willetts *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* The information requested is available for tuition fee loans, but not available in the format requested for maintenance loans.

European Union (EU) nationals are generally eligible for tuition fee support only, provided that they have been ordinarily resident in the European economic area (EEA) or Switzerland for the three years prior to the first day of the first academic year of their course. EU nationals have been eligible to apply for tuition fee loans since they were introduced in the 2006/07academic year.

EU nationals who have been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands for the three years prior to the first day of the first academic year of their course may also qualify for maintenance loans. Additionally, certain EEA and Swiss migrant workers and specified family members, children of Swiss nationals, and children of Turkish workers in the UK may be eligible for the full support package provided that they satisfy specific residence conditions.

By June 2009 there were 4,800 EU borrowers who had studied in England who had become liable to repay tuition fee loans. Of those, 600 were considered to be in arrears. The majority of this 600 are borrowers who are known to be overseas, have not provided details of their income, and have therefore been set up with repayment schedules and put into notional arrears in order that the Student Loans Company can commence tracing and possibly legal action where appropriate. This is an essential step in the overseas collection process. This figure does also include those accounts where borrowers have defaulted on their loan repayments.

On 22 June the Student Loans Company is due to publish updated figures in Income Contingent Repayments by Repayment Cohort and Tax Year 2000/01 to 2008/09.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what plans he has to consult trade unions in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies on cost reduction plans. [598]

Mr Davey: On 26 May 2010 the HR Director for BIS and his team met with the departmental trade unions (PCS, prospect and FDA) regarding the implications of the Chancellor's announcement on 24 May. A programme of weekly meetings is being set up to maintain the dialogue and consultation on this.

The agencies of BIS have their own trade union representatives and consultative arrangements. Meetings between management and the trade unions in the agencies are taking place to discuss the implications of the Chancellor's announcement.

Vocational Training: North East

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he plans to take to increase the skills levels of the workforce in *(a)* Hartlepool constituency and *(b)* the North East. [88]

Mr Hayes: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills will seek to drive up the skills levels of the workforce by directing public funding where it will bring the clearest benefits. We will also make sure that employers and individuals have the information they need to make the best choices about investing in training. We have begun to rebalance skills provision by redeploying £150 million of Train to Gain funding to create 50,000 high-quality Apprenticeship places, focused on small and medium sized enterprises. We are also taking action to set colleges and training organisations free from excessive bureaucracy and direct state control, to give them the freedom to respond better to local needs.

The Skills Funding Agency is responsible for the delivery of public funds for skills training, including Apprenticeships. Hartlepool and the North East will benefit from the refocusing of funding towards higher-quality training with clearer benefits. In excess of £6 million of public funding will be supporting skills training delivered in Hartlepool in 2010-11 covering a diverse range of programmes to meet the needs of individuals and employers, including apprentices. This is supplemented by a range of other Teesside programmes which are accessible to many of those living in Hartlepool.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 10 June 2010

WALES

Departmental Domestic Visits

Mr David: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many meetings the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State has held in the Wales Office in Cardiff since his appointment. [1994]

Mr David Jones: I have had one meeting so far.

Mr David: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many meetings she has had with the Welsh First Minister since her appointment. [1995]

Mrs Gillan: To date I have met the First Minister five times since my appointment and we have had several telephone conversations.

Mr David: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times she has visited Wales since her appointment. [2031]

Mrs Gillan: To date I have spent seven days working in Wales.

Mr David: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State has visited the National Assembly for Wales since his appointment. [2032]

Mr David Jones: Once.

Mr David: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what bilateral meetings the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State has had with Welsh Assembly Government Ministers since his appointment. [2033]

Mr David Jones: None, although future meetings have been arranged.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Future Jobs Fund: North East

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the effect on the level of employment in *(a)* the north east and *(b)* England of the ending of the Future Jobs Fund; and if he will make a statement. [1159]

Chris Grayling: At up to £6,500 per placement, the Future Jobs Fund is five times more expensive than other aspects of the Young Persons Guarantee, making it poorer value for money. As we emerge from a recession with a huge budget deficit, it is right that the Government take decisive steps to secure long lasting benefits rather than temporary changes to unemployment. Next year we will introduce our new Work Programme, which will bring better targeted and more effective support to young people and the unemployed.

Future Jobs Fund: West Midlands

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people resident in *(a)* Dudley North, *(b)* the borough of Dudley and *(c)* the west midlands are participating in the Future Jobs Fund. [1508]

Chris Grayling: This information is not available for how many people resident in Dudley North and the borough of Dudley are participating in the Future Jobs Fund.

For the West Midlands, the latest release of official statistics show that 940 people started Future Jobs Fund jobs between October 2009 and January 2010.

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his most recent assessment is of the effect on levels of employment of abolishing the Future Jobs Fund in *(a)* the west midlands and *(b)* Coventry. [1598]

Chris Grayling: At up to £6,500 per placement, the Future Jobs Fund is five times more expensive than other aspects of the Young Persons Guarantee, making it poorer value for money. As we emerge from a recession with a huge budget deficit, it is right that the Government take decisive steps to secure long lasting benefits rather than temporary changes to unemployment. Next year we will introduce our new Work Programme, which will bring better targeted and more effective support to young people and the unemployed.

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his most recent estimate is of the number of people who have found employment through the Future Jobs Fund in *(a)* the west midlands and *(b)* Coventry. [1599]

Chris Grayling: The information is as follows:

(a) The latest release of Official Statistics, covering the October 2009 to January 2010 period, shows that 940 people started the Future Jobs Fund in the west midlands.

(b) This information is not available in the format requested.

Social Security Benefits: Fraud

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much his Department budgeted for advertising tackling benefit fraud in 2010-11. [1034]

Chris Grayling: We are reviewing all advertising expenditure and any requests for funding will be submitted to HM Treasury for approval.

Social Security Benefits: Overpayments

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate his Department has made of gross overpayments of benefit in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what plans he has to reduce overpayments. [962]

Chris Grayling: The latest estimates of overpayments as a result of fraud and error are contained in the Department for Work and Pensions publication "Fraud and Error in the Benefit System: October 2008 to September 2009", copies of which are available in the Library.

We will be looking carefully at the Department's approach to controlling fraud and error to ensure all possible steps are taken to tackle it more effectively.

DEFENCE

Chinook Helicopters

Dr Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many crashes and near misses involving Chinooks owned and operated by the armed forces have been recorded in each of the last 10 years. [422]

Nick Harvey: The number of crashes and near misses for Chinooks are listed in the following table:

	Crashes	*Near misses*
2000	0	0
2001	0	0
2002	0	3
2003	0	0
2004	0	2
2005	0	3
2006	1	1
2007	0	1
2008	0	3
2009	2	4

A crash has been defined as a major incident involving irreparable damage to the aircraft. This excludes occasions where Chinooks have incurred damage that can be repaired either in theatre or in the UK. A near miss has been taken to be an air proximity hazard, the formal definition of which is an incident in which, in the opinion of a pilot or controller, the distance between aircraft as well as their relative positions and speeds have been such that the safety of the aircraft involved was or may have been compromised.

Defence Storage and Distribution Agency

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for future ownership arrangements of the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency. [1389]

Peter Luff: The Treasury-led Operational Efficiency Programme made a number of recommendations regarding the future of the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency, subject to value for money considerations. The Ministry of Defence is currently considering, in consultation with the trade unions, how these recommendations could be delivered. Once this work is complete, I will make a further announcement.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in his Department. [1477]

Mr Robathan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Mr Watson) on 9 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 180W.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future ownership arrangements of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. [1464]

Nick Harvey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 7 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 11W, to the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones).

Unmanned Air Vehicles

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the testing of surveillance drones over the proposed land corridor between Aberporth and Epynt; what account this policy takes of the right to privacy of individuals resident within the corridor; and if he will make a statement. [1529]

Nick Harvey: The approved airspace corridor from Parc Aberporth will be used to enable the Watchkeeper unmanned air system to fly to the Sennybridge Training Area in Mynydd Epynt, mid-Wales, where it will undergo trials. Sensors and surveillance equipment will be switched off during transit through the air corridor; therefore the privacy of residents will be unaffected.

TREASURY

Aggregates Levy

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he plans to review the level of aggregates levy tax. [1829]

Justine Greening: Decisions on the rate of aggregates levy are taken by the Chancellor as part of the Budget process.

Departmental Appointments

Helen Goodman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many special advisers *(a)* he and *(b)* each named Minister in his Department (i) has appointed to date and (ii) plans to appoint. [320]

Mr Watson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments he has made since his appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [371]

Justine Greening: I refer the hon. Members to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which Ministers in his Department have been issued with *(a)* a BlackBerry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1430]

Justine Greening: All Treasury Ministers have been issued with centrally provided BlackBerry devices for official use.

According to central records no additional mobile phones, iPhones or personal digital assistants have been supplied by the Department to Ministers.

Departmental Official Hospitality

John Mann: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what budget his Department has allocated for entertainment, including alcohol, in each of the next three years. [1322]

Justine Greening: The Treasury does not currently have a budget for official entertainment for 2010-11 or later years.

In the event that any spending is incurred it will be consistent with the Ministerial and Civil Service Codes and be subject to the limits set out in the expenses manual, a copy of which is available online at:

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/foi_expensesmanual.pdf

All expenditure is incurred in accordance with the principles of Managing Public Money and the Treasury handbook on Regularity and Propriety.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when and in what form he plans to publish a list of all items of expenditure by his Department over £25,000. [275]

Justine Greening: The Prime Minister has written to Cabinet Ministers[1] reiterating transparency commitments made in the Coalition programme for government, and setting out a timetable for achieving them. In particular, all new items of central Government spending over £25,000 will be published online in an open format from November 2010.

[1] http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/statements-and-articles/2010/05/letter-to-government-departments-on-opening-up-data-51204

Public Expenditure

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the merits of introducing a needs-based formula for the distribution of central government funding to the regions of England. [1399]

Danny Alexander: It is for Government Departments to decide the allocation of their budgets to regions in England. Departments use a variety of means of allocating spending regionally and locally reflecting their own circumstances.

Tax Evasion

Sammy Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will commission an investigation into the circumstances in which the offences of tax evasion for which Patrick Small and Mary Small were convicted in February 2010 were not detected by HM Revenue and Customs and its predecessor. [1459]

Mr Gauke: The offences for which Mr and Mrs Small were convicted, amounted to Northern Ireland's largest ever tax fraud case, involving the evasion of VAT and income tax on a huge scale. This is demonstrated by the £4.6 million confiscation order made against them by the court.

The convictions secured are the result of a complex and detailed investigation by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), which started in 2005. The court's decision on this case demonstrates HMRC's ability to both identify tax fraud and successfully address such offences through the courts. The Government have no plans to commission an investigation into these matters.

TRANSPORT

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in his Department. [1489]

Mike Penning: The Department for Transport inherited three cars allocated to its Ministers. One is a Toyota Prius T3 and manufactured in Japan and two are Honda Civic ES Hybrids also manufactured in Japan.

These arrangements are changing following the publication of the new Ministerial Code which contains changes that affect ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. The Code states that:

"the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed".

The Cabinet Office has provided clarification on how the code should be interpreted. The expectation is that Ministers not in the Cabinet will use the pool service and that Cabinet Ministers who have an allocated car will wish to consider how that car might be utilised by other Ministers within the Department before calls are made on the Government Car Service Pool.

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with Departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements.

Departmental Official Hospitality

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what budget his Department has allocated for entertainment, including alcohol, in each of the next three years. [1320]

Mr Philip Hammond: My Department has not allocated any budgets to entertainment for the next three years.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to consult trade unions in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies concerning deficit reduction plans. [614]

Mr Philip Hammond: The Department for Transport and its agencies have met with the recognised trade unions informally to agree a regular forum to discuss potential impact on departmental activity of the deficit reduction plans.

Langstone Harbour Board: Fees and Charges

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish notices of the outcomes of his inquiry into the Langstone Harbour Board dues under Section 31 of the Harbours Act 1964. [1830]

Mike Penning: We intend to announce our decision before the end of this month.

Manchester Metrolink

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what cost-benefit analysis his Department has conducted into construction of the 3A phase of Manchester Metrolink extension alone; and if he will make a statement. [901]

Norman Baker: The Department for Transport (DfT) awarded final approval to the Manchester Metrolink 3A extensions to Rochdale (via Oldham) and Chorlton in 2008 with an agreed funding contribution of £244 million.

The decision to award funding was taken by Ministers after officials assessed the business case put forward by Greater Manchester Public Transport Executive (GMPTE). The assessment included a full cost-benefit analysis prepared in line with DfT guidance at that time. DfT officials concluded that these two extensions offered benefits of around £2.50 for every £1 of Government expenditure, in addition to positive impacts on air quality, landscape, safety, accessibility and the wider economy.

Metrolink 3A also includes an extension to Droylesden. The Department did not fully assess the impact of this other extension given that GMPTE committed to fund this without any contribution from central Government.

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the review of funding for the Metrolink extensions to be published; and if he will make a statement. [1516]

Norman Baker: As announced by HM Treasury on 17 May, the Chief Secretary has asked all Secretaries of State to re-examine all spending approvals granted since 1 January this year. This includes the extensions of the Manchester Metrolink to Ashton-under-Lyne and to East Didsbury. This work is being carried out as quickly as possible following which decisions will be announced.

Motorways: Bridges

Mr Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cattle bridges there are on motorways in England; what the life expectancy of such bridges was when they were built; what programme of replacement the Highways Agency has for such bridges; and what estimate he has made of the cost of this programme. [960]

Mike Penning: There are 376 farm accommodation bridges currently on the motorway network managed by the Highways Agency in England. Accommodation bridges are mainly provided for the use of farmers to cross over from one side of the road to the other to access farmland. There are a further 269 accommodation structures where the farm access passes underneath the motorway. Of this total of 645 structures only 20 are specifically identified on the Agency's inventory database as for the use of cattle, though in practice others will be used for this purpose.

Accommodation bridges are designed for 120 years design life. All highway structures are subject to a programme of regular inspection, and where necessary repairs are undertaken. There is no specific national programme of replacement of accommodation bridges, and consequently no associated costs have been identified.

Railways: Construction

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he expects construction of high speed rail lines connecting London and Heathrow airport with Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds to begin; [1414]

(2) when he expects construction of a high speed rail line connecting English cities with those in Scotland to begin. [1415]

Mr Philip Hammond: A proposed construction timetable will be published prior to public consultation on any section of the national network. The Government's view is that, subject to public consultation and parliamentary approval, enabling works on the first phase of a national network could begin in 2015.

We will examine every stage in the process to ensure that the project is moving as quickly as possible and is compatible with ensuring value for taxpayer money.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on progress towards establishing a green investment bank; and what his policy is on using such a bank to facilitate the funding of new high speed rail lines. [R] [1416]

Mr Philip Hammond: The Government remain committed to the creation of a green investment bank. To date I have had no such discussions on using such a bank to facilitate the funding of a high speed rail network.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of the funding required to construct the planned new high speed rail line will be from the *(a)* public purse and *(b)* private sector; and if he will make a statement. [R] [1417]

Mr Philip Hammond: The report published by HS2 Ltd in March 2010 argued that the most cost efficient way of funding the route elements of a high speed rail network would be through the public purse. However, the Government will explore all options for funding the project. In particular, we will explore the possibility that other very substantial elements—such as stations, interchanges and rolling stock—could be funded in part or in whole by the private sector or other third parties. At this early stage, it is not possible to provide breakdowns.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Carbon Emissions: Business

Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she plans to publish her Department's proposals on the introduction of mandatory reporting of greenhouse gas emissions under section 85 of the Climate Change Act 2008; [1132]

(2) when she plans to lay before Parliament a report under section 84 of the Climate Change Act 2008; [1133]

(3) what recent assessments she has made of the merits of encouraging corporate reporting on emissions defined by her Department as scope 3. [1131]

Mr Paice: DEFRA is currently undertaking a research project and gathering other evidence on the contribution that corporate reporting makes to the UK meeting its climate change objectives and on the associated benefits and costs of reporting. This will include an assessment of the merits of reporting on 'scope 3' emissions (i.e. indirect emissions). A report of this review will be laid before Parliament by 1 December 2010, as required by section 84 of the Climate Change Act 2008. The timetable for decisions on mandatory reporting is still under consideration.

Departmental Flags

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which her Department is responsible. [1815]

Richard Benyon: The Department adheres to the current published guidance issued by the Department for Culture Media and Sport for flying the Union flag in respect of those premises having a flag pole under departmental management control.

The current guidance is available to view at:

www.culture.gov.uk/flagflying/protocol.html

Departmental Official Residences

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether any domestic properties in the gift of the Government have been allocated to the use of Ministers in her Department. [1787]

Richard Benyon: The Department has no domestic properties in its gift for allocation to Ministers.

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her most recent estimate is of the annual cost to her Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff employed by (i) her Department and (ii) its agencies. [635]

Richard Benyon: The Department has not made any estimate of redundancy costs.

Environmental Stewardship Scheme

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect on the environmental stewardship scheme introduced in 2010 of moving to a risk-based regulatory system for hill farmers. [1298]

Mr Paice: The new Uplands Entry Level Stewardship strand is based on the existing Environmental Stewardship model. It is a voluntary scheme which rewards existing good practice in environmental land management, and encourages improvements across a range of objectives. A full impact assessment of the planned scheme published in 2008 set out impacts on farmers, delivery bodies and the environment, and can be found on the DEFRA website:

www.defra.gov.uk

at:

www.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/countryside/uplands/uels-ria.pdf

First agreements commence in July 2010, and the strand will be subject to evaluation in future to assess the impact of its introduction.

Natural England: Finance

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether Natural England has been required to reduce its budget for 2010-11. [1442]

Richard Benyon: The Government's top priority is to tackle the fiscal deficit. DEFRA and its network are committed to delivering £162 million savings out of a total of £6.2 billion savings recently announced for 2010-11 by the Government. Organisations within the DEFRA network, including Natural England, will need to contribute to the savings. For Natural England, this contribution will amount to some £7.5 million.

Nature Conservation

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the implications for her Department's policies of the contents of the third edition of the UN Global Biodiversity Outlook. [1828]

Richard Benyon: We have noted the findings of the Global Biodiversity Outlook 3 (GB03) which confirm that the global 2010 biodiversity target has not been met.

We are working hard to prepare for the landmark Convention on Biological Diversity conference in Nagoya, Japan, in October which will bring together up to 193 parties to consider a framework for tackling global biodiversity loss beyond 2010. The findings and analyses included in GB03 have informed the development of the post-2010 framework, so that it seeks to respond to the underlying drivers of biodiversity loss.

At Nagoya, we are aiming to adopt strong global post-2010 targets that drive action, and allow parties to set their own national targets within that over-arching framework.

Following on from Nagoya one of our key priorities will be to deliver a White Paper on the natural environment. We will be making an announcement on the White Paper in the coming weeks.

Rural Development Programme: Yorkshire and the Humber

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the East Peak Innovation Partnership; and what her policy is on maintaining its present level of funding from her Department. [1440]

Mr Paice: East Peak Innovation Partnership is a Local Action Group (LAG) funded under Axis 4 (the bottom up, community-led Leader approach) of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). LAGs are managed by the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs).

East Peak Innovation Partnership is managed by Yorkshire Forward. It is the responsibility of Yorkshire Forward to monitor and evaluate its progress and effectiveness. A formal annual review of the Partnership by Yorkshire Forward took place on 19 May 2010.

DEFRA has two independent evaluations under way looking at the effectiveness of the Leader approach in England. This will form part of the formal mid-term evaluation (MTE) of the RDPE required by EU regulation, and also a specific piece of economic research that will provide evidence for future policy options. The MTE will report at the end of 2010 and the research project in late July/early August.

Sheep: Tagging

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent estimate she has made of the cost to farmers of electronic tagging of sheep. [1118]

Mr Paice: Detailed information about the cost of implementation in England is provided in the regulatory impact assessment on electronic identification (EID) of sheep and goats. This is available on the DEFRA website:

www.defra.gov.uk

at:

www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/movements/sheep/documents/ia-sheep100226.pdf

Supermarkets: Competition

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs by what date she intends to implement her plans for an Ombudsman to enforce the Grocery Supply Chain Code of Practice; whether legislation will be required; whether the Ombudsman will have powers to deal with the international supply chain; and if she will make a statement. [1689]

Mr Davey: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Andrew George) and the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 44W.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1282]

John Penrose: The percentage of invoices paid within 10 working days of receipt was 97.45% in March and 98.05% in April 2010.

Departmental Flags

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what his policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which his Department is responsible. [1819]

John Penrose: The Department flies the Union flag every day of the year in accordance with the guidance for the flying of the Union flag on UK Government buildings. The guidance is available on the DCMS website

http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/honours/7124.aspx

Departmental Translation Services

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of translating information distributed in the UK by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its associated public bodies into languages other than English in the latest period for which figures are available. [1718]

John Penrose: In 2009-10 the total cost of translating information distributed in the UK into languages other than English by this Department was £2,397.04. The cost for DCMS associated public bodies is not held centrally by the Department.

National Lottery: Wales

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what effect the proposed changes in the proportions of *(a)* National Lottery funding for the arts, heritage and sport and *(b)* the Big Lottery Fund will have on the amount of National Lottery funding that will be allocated to Wales. [585]

John Penrose: On current projects of lottery income, after the proposed change in the shares of lottery income and the end of the Olympic Lottery diversion after 2012-13, all the non-Olympic lottery distributors including Big Lottery Fund, should have higher incomes.

On current projections, the lottery funding for Arts Council Wales and Sports Council Wales should increase by around £2.5 million a year each, a total of around £5 million.

In addition, Wales will continue to receive its share of funding from the UK wide distributors: UK Sport, the UK Film Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund. Big has to date allocated a standard

proportion of funding to Wales: after top-slicing 10% for UK wide projects, 6.5% is allocated to projects in Wales and this will not be affected by these changes. The other distributors, due to the nature of their business, have not operated with a such a standard proportion in the past and the amount of funding going to Wales in future will therefore depend on individual decisions about funding applications received, as usual.

The Government's consultation on the change to the lottery shares is intended to pick up any details of impact. Full details of the consultation can be found at:

http://www.dcms.gov.uk/consultations/7070.aspx

JUSTICE

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice which Ministers in his Department have been issued with (a) a Blackberry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1425]

Mr Djanogly: The Ministry of Justice has issued the following Ministers with *(a)* a BlackBerry: Lord McNally, Crispin Blunt and myself. No Ministers have been issued with *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of telephone or *(d)* a personal digital assistant.

Electoral Register

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice which local authority electoral registration departments *(a)* did and *(b)* did not use door-to-door canvassing in their last electoral registration; and what the (i) actual and (ii) percentage change was in the number of people registered in each category of authority as a result of that exercise. [173]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

In relation to points *(a)* and *(b)*, under section 9A of the Representation of the People Act 1983, electoral registration officers (EROs) have a duty to take certain steps to maintain the electoral register, including house-to-house inquiries, and therefore it is expected that all local authority electoral registration departments would undertake this exercise.

The Electoral Commission requests that electoral registration officers supply them with information about the methods they use to canvass properties. This information is supplied on a voluntary basis, and does not therefore give a comprehensive picture.

The most recent data are published in a spreadsheet titled "The electoral registration data for 2009" on the Commission's website at

http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards/data-collection

and includes the following headings:

Number of households sent an annual canvass form

Number of households returning a canvass form by personal canvasser

Number of electors added to the revised register following the 2009 annual canvass as a result of an annual canvass form

Number of electors on the local government register at 1 September 2009

Number of electors on the local government register at 1 December 2009

The information in respect of parts (i) and (ii) is not held by the Government.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice with reference to the answer of 4 March 2009, *Official Report*, columns 1705-07W, on the electoral register, what progress has been made towards enabling lower tier authorities in two tier areas to access data held by the higher authority to facilitate the identification of individuals not registered to vote. [175]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

Electoral registration officers (EROs) may currently inspect records held by the local authority that appointed them to assist them in maintaining the electoral register. These would include:

the register of births and deaths;

council tax records;

registers of households in multiple occupation;

local land and property gazetteers;

housing benefit applications;

lists of persons in residential and care homes (in unitary local authorities only); and details of "attainers" (those aged 16 or 17) held by education departments (in unitary local authorities only).

Legislation currently provides that EROs may only inspect records held by the local authority that appointed them. EROs appointed by district or borough councils in two tier local authority areas may therefore not have access to records held by county councils, including data held by social services and education departments. The Government have announced their intention to speed up the implementation of individual electoral registration in Great Britain and any consideration of wider legislation relating to registration will be in that context.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice which local authority electoral registration officers *(a)* sent canvass returns more than once, *(b)* made house-to-house inquiries in connection with the canvass, *(c)* made contact by such other means as they thought appropriate with a person with no entry in the register and *(d)* inspected a record they were permitted by law to inspect as part of the last electoral registration exercise. [177]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government do not hold this information, but under section 9A of the Representation of the People Act 1983, each electoral registration officer is under a duty to take all steps that are necessary to maintain their registers.

The steps that EROs must take, as set out in that section, include:

(a) sending more than once to any address the form to be used for the canvass;

(b) making on one or more occasions house to house inquiries;

(c) making contact by such other means as the registration officer thinks appropriate with persons who do not have an entry in a register;

(d) inspecting any records held by any person which he is permitted to inspect under or by virtue of any enactment or rule of law;

(e) providing training to persons under his direction or control in connection with the carrying out of the duty.

The Electoral Commission published a report on EROs' performance in March 2010: "Report on performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain". The report found that just under 96% of EROs in Great Britain met or exceeded the required standard for the "Completeness and accuracy of electoral registration records", compared with 83% of EROs the previous year.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what records electoral registration officers may inspect to assist them with registration. [178]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

Electoral registration officers (EROs) may currently inspect records held by the local authority that appointed them to assist them in maintaining the electoral register. These would include:

the register of births and deaths;

council tax records;

registers of households in multiple occupation;

local land and property gazetteers;

housing benefit applications;

lists of persons in residential and care homes (in unitary local authorities only); and

details of "attainers" (those aged 16 or 17) held by education departments (in unitary local authorities only).

Legislation currently provides that EROs may only inspect records held by the local authority that appointed them. EROs appointed by district or borough councils in two tier local authority areas may therefore not have access to records held by County councils, including data held by social services and education departments.

Information Commissioner: Standards

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the average time taken to resolve complaints made to the Information Commissioner's office was in the latest period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [1517]

Mr Blunt: The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) divides the complaints it receives into two categories: Data Protection and Freedom of Information. The latest period for which figures for the average time taken to resolve complaints are available is 1 January to 31 March 2010.

	Cases closed	*Average time to close*
Data Protection	7,674	70 days
Freedom of Information	1,068	167 days

The ICO closed its oldest FOI cases during this period which has affected the average age of cases closed. On 1 April 2009 the average age of live FOI cases was 286 days but by 1 April 2010 this had fallen to 150 days.

This information has been provided by the ICO.

Liverpool and Birmingham Prisons: Manpower

Mr Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many prison officers at each grade were assigned to *(a)* HMP Liverpool and *(b)* HMP Birmingham on the most recent date for which figures are available. [1834]

Mr Blunt: Information on the number of officers employed at HMP Liverpool and HMP Birmingham, on 31 December 2009 is contained in the following table:

Officers employed at HMP Liverpool and HMP Birmingham

Number

	Prison officer	*Senior officer*	*Principal officer*	*Total*
HMP Liverpool	316	52	14	382
HMP Birmingham	406	75	25	506

Prison Service: Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many prison service staff of each Civil Service grade were employed at each prison in each of the last three financial years. [1227]

Mr Blunt: Information on the number of staff employed in each Prison Service establishment in the last three years has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Probation Officers: Manpower

Mr Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many probation staff at each grade were employed by *(a)* Greater Manchester Probation Trust, *(b)* Merseyside Probation Trust, *(c)* Staffordshire and West Midlands Trust in the West Midlands area and *(d)* Wales Probation Trust in South Wales on the most recent date for which figures are available. [1833]

Mr Blunt: The latest available staff in post figures at 30 September 2009[1] are shown in the following table. The Staffordshire/West Midlands and Wales mergers did not take place until April 2010, so are shown as separate areas in the table.

Number

Job group	*Greater Manchester*	*Merseyside*[1]	*Staffordshire*	*West Midlands*	*Dyfed Powys*	*Gwent*	*North Wales*	*South Wales*
Area/district manager	13.00	0.00	3.00	27.00	2.00	1.00	9.00	14.59
Assistant chief officer	11.00	7.00	0.00	16.60	0.00	5.00	3.00	5.00

Number

Job group	Greater Manchester	Merseyside[1]	Staffordshire	West Midlands	Dyfed Powys	Gwent	North Wales	South Wales
Chief officer	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Deputy chief officer	3.00	2.00	2.00	4.70	2.00	0.00	0.00	2.00
Middle manager	39.60	55.44	26.61	106.98	16.30	17.50	6.40	54.73
Other operational staff	143.26	0.00	7.17	68.48	2.00	21.76	19.82	13.29
Other staff	1.57	0.00	0.00	3.00	3.41	2.00	6.60	9.00
Practice development assessor	4.00	3.00	1.50	7.60	0.60	0.00	0.00	4.60
Probation Officer	340.87	207.23	131.90	355.12	35.10	73.14	64.00	132.62
Probation services officer	258.63	225.97	86.44	400.59	44.50	55.43	50.86	171.25
Psychologist	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
Senior practitioner	73.92	0.00	0.00	3.50	0.00	0.00	12.21	0.00
Support staff administration	319.04	126.52	95.66	398.93	34.30	57.63	53.78	109.23
Support staff—other	33.50	58.03	30.79	43.56	16.49	10.42	12.11	31.44
Trainee probation officer	49.92	29.00	0.00	23.00	13.00	8.00	17.00	15.00
Treatment manager	17.01	4.00	0.00	10.20	1.80	4.00	0.00	1.00
Not recorded	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	1,309.32	720.19	386.07	1,472.26	172.50	256.88	256.78	564.75

[1] Merseyside Probation Trust were unable to submit data to the HR Data Warehouse in September or August 2009 due to local staffing issues. The figures provided for Merseyside are therefore at 30 July 2009.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Ascension Island

Mark Lancaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the discussions between his Department and the Ministry of Defence on the budget for Ascension Island to be concluded. [1797]

Mr Bellingham: The budget for Ascension Island is set by the Governor of the Island on the advice of the Ascension Island Council and the Government; not by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or the Ministry of Defence.

Departmental Press: Subscriptions

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what newspapers, magazines and other periodicals are provided for each *(a)* Ministerial and *(b)* official's office in his Department; and at what annual cost those publications are provided. [1098]

Alistair Burt: As new ministerial teams are in place the following information reflects our monthly position as of May 2010 (the latest information available) and our requirement may be subject to further change.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's Private Office and Special Advisers receive the following papers and periodicals Monday to Friday, or when published, at a cost of £762.44 per month: *Daily Mail* x three, *Daily Telegraph* x four, *Financial Times* x three, *Guardian* x four, *International Herald Tribune* x two, *The Sun* x four, *The Times* x four, *Spectator*, *Private Eye*.

My hon. Friend Henry Bellingham's Private Office receives the following newspapers and magazines Monday to Friday or when published, at a cost of £150.50 per month: *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *Daily Mail*, *Financial Times*, *Daily Telegraph* and two copies of *The Economist*.

My hon. Friend Jeremy Browne's Private Office receives the following newspapers and magazines Monday to Thursday or when published, at a cost of £161.34 per month: *Financial Times*, *The Times*, *Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *The Mail*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Independent*, *The Sun*, *Mirror*, *The Express*, *New Statesman*, *Economist*, *The Spectator*.

My hon. Friend David Lidington's Private Office receives the following papers and periodicals Monday to Friday, or when published, at a cost of £129.86 per month: *Financial Times*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*.

My noble Friend the right hon. Lord Howell's Private Office receives one copy of the following papers and periodicals Monday to Friday, or when published at a cost of £124.70 per month: *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *The Times*, *the Financial Times*, *the Economist* and *New Statesman*.

My Private Office receives one copy of each of the following papers Monday to Thursday at a cost of £104.55 per month: *Financial Times*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Telegraph*, *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*.

We do not have a central record of these requirements covering the offices of officials and there would be a disproportionate cost involved in obtaining this information.

Israel: Nuclear Weapons

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of the documents uncovered by Sasha Polakow-Suransky regarding Israel and possession of nuclear weapons; whether he has had discussions with the Israeli Government on this matter; and if he will make a statement. [1301]

Alistair Burt: We are aware of press reports but have had nothing to substantiate these claims. We have not had any discussions with the Israeli Government regarding this matter.

Middle East: Armed Conflict

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment the Government has made of whether the linkage made by the government of Israel between access for aid and reconstruction materials and the refusal of Hamas to renounce violence constitutes collective punishment of the people of Gaza within the meaning of the Fourth Geneva Convention; and if he will make a statement. [1192]

Alistair Burt *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* Israel states that it has imposed the blockade in self-defence given its conflict with Hamas. Blockading a coastline to prevent supplies reaching the enemy is a legitimate military measure. But there are limits. One of these is that the damage to the civilian population is not expected to be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated from the blockade.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear in his statement to the House on 2 June 2010 that it is essential that there be unfettered access not only to meet the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza, but to enable the reconstruction of homes and livelihoods and permit trade to take place. The Foreign Secretary also raised this in his conversation with the Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman.

The UK will continue to press the Israeli Government to lift Gaza's closure and to discuss these issues urgently with our international partners.

Pakistan: British Nationals Abroad

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Government of Pakistan on the targeting by criminals of UK citizens visiting that country. [1651]

Alistair Burt: The UK has ongoing contact with the Government of Pakistan across a whole range of topics. This includes engaging with the relevant Pakistani authorities when UK citizens are the victim of crime while in Pakistan. Senior officials are engaged with the relevant Pakistani authorities on specific long-running cases affecting UK citizens on a case-by-case basis.

Passports: Fraud

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the Oral Statement by the then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of 23 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 133, on UK passports (use in Dubai murder), what response was received to the request to Foreign Minister Lieberman for a formal assurance that in future the state of Israel would never be party to the misuse of British passports; on what dates *(a)* the Secretary of State and *(b)* (i) Ministers and (ii) officials of his Department have subsequently discussed the matter with representatives of the government of Israel; what the outcome of such discussions was; and if he will make a statement. [1806]

Alistair Burt: We have not yet received a formal assurance from the Government of Israel on this matter. We will continue to discuss these issues with the Israeli Government: we will not tolerate the misuse of British passports.

Thailand: Politics and Government

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's most recent assessment is of the security situation in Thailand, with particular reference to the recent anti-government protests; and if he will make a statement. [1238]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office currently advises against all travel to the Preah Vihear temple area, on the border with Cambodia, due to violence in the area and advises against all but essential travel to, or through, the far southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Songkla, due to the insurgency in those areas. Elsewhere the situation in Thailand is generally calm although a State of Emergency is in place in Bangkok and 23 other provinces. There have been no serious outbreaks of violence since 19 May 2010. However, there remains a risk that political developments may lead to further violence. We are advising British nationals in Thailand to avoid demonstrations and large gatherings and to exercise caution.

UNESCO: Prizes

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will request the members of the Regional Electoral Group, representing the UK's interests on the UNESCO Executive Board, to press the Board to assess the human rights record of the Government of Equatorial Guinea at its meeting on 15 June 2010 and to withdraw the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences in consequence. [1460]

Mr Bellingham: We are concerned about the human rights situation in Equatorial Guinea, and made this clear at the UN Human Rights Council on 9 December 2009, when Equatorial Guinea underwent its Universal Periodic Review. Our ambassador to Equatorial Guinea will continue to raise our concerns with the Equato-Guinean authorities during his visits to the country. The UK does not wish to see this prize awarded given the incompatibility of the funding and naming with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization values and work on human rights and press freedoms. Minister of State for International

Development, Alan Duncan, raised our concerns with the Director General on 4 June. The UK Government intend to pursue further and will remain engaged in efforts to find a solution.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

General Elections

Andrew Selous: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on payments to returning officers who supervise elections; how much this cost for the 2010 general election; and if he will make a statement. [1804]

Mr Harper: Returning officers are entitled by statute to recover payment for services rendered and expenses incurred in administering UK parliamentary elections from the Consolidated Fund under section 29 of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983. These amounts are set out in the Parliamentary Elections (Returning Officer's Charges) Order 2010 which was made on 15 March 2010. The amounts recoverable for the services of returning officers are calculated by reference to the electorates in each constituency, and taking into account any combination of polls. For the 2010 general election, the total of the maximum recoverable amounts for returning officers for the 632 parliamentary constituencies in Great Britain was £2,206,955.

These are, however, maximum recoverable amounts and returning officers are not obliged to claim them. Until all claims have been received from each constituency and finalised (under the Returning Officers' Accounts (Parliamentary Elections) (England and Wales) Regulations 2010 returning officers have a year following the election in which to submit their claims), no final total of actual expenditure will be available.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which Ministers in his Department have been issued with *(a)* a BlackBerry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1424]

Mr Paterson: The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) ministerial team has not been supplied with any of these items by the Department.

HEALTH

Abortion

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost to the NHS was of provision of abortions in *(a)* NHS hospitals and *(b)* approved independent sector places in 2009. [2135]

Anne Milton: The cost to the national health service of abortions performed in NHS hospitals in 2008-09 was £82.1 million. The NHS funds abortions undertaken by approved independent sector places under contract to individual primary care trusts. Information on these contracts is commercially sensitive and is not collected centrally.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers are employed by his Department; and at what Civil Service pay grade in each such case. [1269]

Mr Simon Burns: One special adviser has been appointed and another will be appointed shortly. Special advisers are not aligned to civil service pay grades.

The number of press officers employed by the Department is set out in the following table:

Press officers	*Number*
Grade 6 and above	2
Grade 7	6.2
Senior executive officer	8
Higher executive officer	15
Executive officer/administrative officer	5

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in his Department. [1483]

Mr Simon Burns: The information requested is set out in the following table.

Make	*Model*	*Place of manufacture*	*Number of cars*
Jaguar	XJ TDVi Sovereign	United Kingdom	1
Toyota	Prius T3 hybrid	Japan	2
Honda	Civic ES hybrid	Japan	2

We do not link each vehicle to a particular Minister on grounds of security.

In line with the new ministerial code, Ministers at the Department have given up their allocated cars and drivers and the existing contracts, which were subject to a 90-day contract termination period, ending on the 19 August 2010.

Hospitals: Parking

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on charges for car parking at hospitals in England. [1509]

Mr Simon Burns: National health service organisations have the autonomy to make decisions that best suit their local circumstances. This includes decisions on charges for car parking. However, should charges discourage patients from accessing their services or friends and families from visiting patients, or prevent staff doing their jobs properly those NHS organisations have a responsibility to look at that further.

Motor Neurone Disease

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a national strategy for motor neurone disease. [1015]

Mr Burstow: There are no current plans to publish a national strategy on motor neurone disease (MND). Work on MND is being taken forward in the National Service Framework for Long-Term Conditions (NSF). The NSF was developed to address long-standing issues in neurological care, e.g. inequity in access to services; work force shortages and variable quality of care across the country.

The NSF does not look at individual neurological conditions but at elements of service provision that are common to different conditions. It focuses on the neurological care pathway setting out 11 quality requirements from diagnosis to the end of life, and makes recommendations to transform the way health and social care services work together to deliver appropriate care, planned and delivered around people's individual needs.

The NSF's quality requirements include a separate section on addressing the needs of people with rapidly progressing conditions, such as motor neurone disease, where services need to respond quickly.

We are committed to supporting implementation of the NSF over 10 years (from 2005).

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Nuclear Power Stations: Decommissioning

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much funding from the public purse had been allocated for the purposes of *(a)* the underwriting of insurance liabilities, *(b)* research and development for long-term nuclear waste management and facility decommissioning and *(c)* payments to (i) the International Atomic Energy Agency (ii) the Euratom Nuclear Agency, (iii) the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency, (iv) the National Nuclear Laboratory, (v) the Nuclear Academy, (vi) the Nuclear Institute and (vii) other international nuclear bodies on the latest date for which figures are available. [1087]

Charles Hendry: The information is as follows:

Funding

(a) The underwriting of insurance liabilities

There is currently no Government funding for the purposes of underwriting nuclear insurance liabilities.

(b) Research

The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) directly commissions research in support of its decommissioning and waste management mission. In 2010-11 the NDA has allocated £11 million to research expenditure. This does not include indirect expenditure by NDA's contractors.

The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's (EPSRC) current research portfolio in this area has a total value of £8.5 million. In 2008-09 the Research Councils UK Energy Programme spent £1.7 million on eight projects directly relevant to long-term nuclear waste management and facility decommissioning. The Natural Environment Research Council has allocated £676,000 for 2010-11 and £2.6 million in future years to decommissioning and waste management research. In 2009-10 they provided funding of £277,000 to projects in this area.

The Environment Agency (EA) commission research relevant to radioactive substance regulation. The EA is currently reviewing its funding allocations for research. The Environment Agency recover the majority of the costs of this research from industry. However in 2009-10, the EA spent some £180,000 in grant in aid on regulatory research relevant to nuclear waste and decommissioning (approximately 25% of the research costs in that year).

(c) Payments to:

(i) The International Atomic Energy Agency

The UK allocated and paid a total of just under US$ 9.3 million and Euros 16.4 million to the IAEA for 2010. A similar sum, but allowing for inflation, exchange rate differences, and the likely outcome of current ongoing budget negotiations among member states and the agency, has been set aside for 2011.

(ii) Euratom Nuclear Agency

It is assumed for the purpose of this PQ that the Member for Newport West is referring to the Euratom Supply Agency. Since 2008 the European Commission has taken charge of all expenses incurred by the Euratom Supply Agency.

(iii) OECD Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA)

As a member of the NEA the UK pays an annual subscription of around £0.6 million (depending on exchange rates). In addition the UK also subscribes to the NEA's Databank, which contains technical information from other NEA members, at a cost of £350,000 a year. However, the money paid by the UK Government for the Databank subscription is recovered from those in the nuclear industry who access/use the information.

(iv) The National Nuclear Laboratory

The NNL operates on a commercial basis, managed through a GOCO (Government-Owned, Contractor-Operated) arrangement and does not receive funding from the public purse.

(v) The Nuclear Academy

No funding is currently allocated directly from the public purse. However, in 2007-08 the NDA provided £5 million to support the establishment of Energus (formerly referred to as the Nuclear Academy) as a centre of excellence for skills, training and business support.

(vi) The Nuclear Institute

The Nuclear Institute receives no public income. The NI income is from individual membership, surplus from events and sales of journals and journal advertising and some occasional donations.

(vii) Other international nuclear bodies

We do not make payments to any other international nuclear bodies.

Office for Nuclear Development: Finance

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what the budget of the Office of Nuclear Development is for 2010-11, broken down by sub-heading. [1916]

Charles Hendry: The Office for Nuclear Development is responsible for facilitating new nuclear build in the UK. The total budget for the Office of Nuclear Development for 2010-11 is £3 million. This comprises of an administration budget of £1.7 million for staff and associated costs and a programme budget of £1.3 million. The Office for Nuclear Development does not have a capital expenditure budget. These figures do not include the Department's wider work on, policy associated with nuclear security, safety and non-proliferation, nor do they reflect any efficiency savings yet to be made by the Department.

Renewable Energy

Jonathan Reynolds: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what percentage of the UK's energy is supplied from renewable energy sources; and what his projection is for this percentage in each of the next three years. [1358]

Charles Hendry: Overall UK energy consumption from renewables was 2.3% in 2008 (the latest data available). The Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics (DUKES) 2010, giving 2009 data, will be published in July.

Projections of the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption under the EU renewable energy directive definition for 2010-12 are given in Table 1. These are based on June 2010 Updated Energy and Emissions Projections published on the DECC website.

The Government are committed to a major increase in renewable energy gencration and we have, or are putting in place, a number of financial and non-financial measures to help us meet our 2020 renewable energy target.

Table 1: Projected renewable energy as a percentage of final energy consumption

			Percentage
	2010	*2011*	*2012*
Renewable energy as percentage final energy consumption—renewable energy directive definition	2.9	3.4	4.0

Source: DECC June 2010 updated Energy and Emissions Projections.

Renewable Energy: Feed-in Tariffs

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change if he will take steps to equalise the payments made to businesses and to homes that have installed micro-generation capacity for feed-in tariffs. [1885]

Charles Hendry: Tariffs for new installations under the feed-in tariffs scheme follow international best practice and differ depending on technology and capacity installed and are available from the DECC website at:

www.decc.gov.uk/fits

There is no differentiation of tariffs between businesses and homes.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which Ministers in his Department have been issued with *(a)* a Blackberry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1423]

David Mundell: Both the Secretary of State and I have been supplied with BlackBerrys.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in his Department. [1488]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office inherited one car allocated to the Secretary of State and used by other departmental Ministers. The car is a Honda Civic ES Hybrid and was manufactured in Japan.

Departmental Public Appointments

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments he has made since his appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [364]

David Mundell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W to the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman).

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Andersen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to his Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front-line and *(b)* other staff. [643]

David Mundell: All the staff in the Scotland Office are on secondment, mainly from the Ministry of Justice or the Scottish Government and redundancy issues are a matter for these parent bodies.

CABINET OFFICE

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Andrew George: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office which non-departmental public bodies the Government intends to abolish in the next 12 months. [674]

Mr Maude: The Government are committed to reducing the number of public bodies to increase accountability and reduce costs. To this end, I will be working with Departments to assess the public bodies that fall within their areas of responsibility. We expect to publish the outcome of this assessment in the autumn.

Voluntary Organisations

Fiona Bruce: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps his Department is taking to provide additional resources to the voluntary sector. [1357]

Mr Hurd: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave during Cabinet Office oral questions on 9 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 316.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will re-issue to hon. Members the antisocial behaviour information booklet dated February 2010. [1618]

Nick Herbert: There are currently no plans to reissue the booklet in question.

Automatic Number Plate Recognition

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cars have been confiscated by the police on the basis of automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) data since the police ANPR system became operational. [1577]

James Brokenshire: The information requested is not held centrally.

Community Policing

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what her policy is on implementation of the proposals contained in the safer confident neighbourhood policing strategy of February 2010. [1024]

Nick Herbert: The Government support neighbourhood policing. The programme set out by the coalition explains our approach to policing with greater freedom for police forces from Ministerial control, police forces which are better able to deal with the crime and antisocial behaviour that blights people's lives, and are much more accountable to the public they serve. This includes:

directly elected individuals to make the police more accountable;

reducing bureaucracy that hinders the police, and introduce better technology;

publishing crime maps showing the public what is happening on their streets; and

regular beat meetings allowing residents to hold the police to account.

We will consider how neighbourhood policing—working with local government and other local partners—can take forward these aims.

Crime: British Nationals Abroad

Jo Swinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of *(a)* all offences committed against UK citizens abroad reported to police forces in the UK and *(b)* such cases involving rape were referred to Interpol in the latest period for which figures are available; what the mean time was between the referral and receipt of a response in (i) all cases and (ii) cases of rape in that period; and in what proportion of (A) all cases and (B) cases of rape so reported a conviction resulted. [1534]

James Brokenshire: The requested data are not held centrally.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full-time equivalent staff at each civil service grade are employed in the private office of each Minister in her Department. [115]

Nick Herbert: The number of full-time equivalent staff at each civil service grade employed in the private office of each Home Office Minister can be found in the following tables:

Home Secretary

Grade	*Number*
G5	1
G7	5
SIO	1
HEO (D)	1
HEO	1
EO	2
AO	3
Total	14

Damian Green

Grade	*Number*
G7	1
HEO (D)	1
HEO	2
EO	1
AO	1
Total	6

Nick Herbert

Grade	*Number*
G7	1
HEO (D)	1
HEO	2
EO	1
Total	5

Baroness Neville-Jones

Grade	*Number*
G7	1
HEO	1
EO	4
Total	6

Lynne Featherstone

Grade	*Number*
SEO	1
EO	6
Total	7

James Brokenshire

Grade	*Number*
HEO (D)	1
EO	4
Total	5

Drugs: Latin America

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether she plans to seek to tackle the drugs trade in *(a)* Peru and *(b)* Venezuela; [1109]

(2) what her policy is on tackling the drugs trade in Colombia. [1110]

James Brokenshire: Our counter-narcotics work with Colombia is an integral part of the Government's drugs strategy. The UK Threat Assessment (UKTA) for 2009-10 estimated that around 65% of global cocaine production and distribution originates from Colombia or in the border areas of Venezuela and Ecuador. Peru and Bolivia account for the remaining 30 to 35%. Venezuela and Brazil, as well as Caribbean and West African states, are also identified as trafficking routes to the UK and the rest of Europe.

In Colombia, the UK Government have supported projects totalling £1.1 million through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and works with other countries in information sharing, raising policing and law-enforcement standards and promoting best practice among Colombian law-enforcement partners. This has contributed to the arrest of high profile drugs traffickers, the dismantling of organised crime networks and the seizure of many tonnes of cocaine destined for the UK.

In Peru, we work closely with Peruvian partners to support their efforts to tackle the threat that cocaine poses to the UK and Europe. We invest in a range of UNODC implemented capacity building projects focusing on the areas of forensics, law enforcement, and anti-money-laundering work, totalling approximately £180,000 in FY 2009-10. The UK has also supported Peru's introduction of its 'FRANCO' helpline and website for young people, which is based on the UK's 'Talk to FRANK' campaign.

Venezuela is used as a trafficking route to the UK and the rest of Europe. There is good operational co-operation between Venezuela and UK law enforcement agencies and we have supported several initiatives in information sharing, the sharing of best practice and co-operation on seizures and arrests. This has resulted in disruption to organised crime networks and the seizure of cocaine destined for European/UK markets. The recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and Venezuela demonstrates the Government's commitment to counter narcotics work in Venezuela.

Identity Cards

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will make it her policy to offer a reduction in the full passport application fee equivalent to the application fee for an ID card to persons who acted on advice from the Identity and Passport Service to apply for an ID card for use as a travel document in lieu of a passport. [1634]

Damian Green: The Identity Documents Bill was laid before Parliament on 26 May 2010. The Bill proposes the scrapping of ID Cards and the National Identity Register. Cards will remain valid for one month after Royal Assent. As was made clear in Opposition and as the Home Secretary has reiterated in Government, the Government will not compensate people who bought an ID card.

Police: Finance

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 27 May 2010, *Official Report*, columns 12-15WS, on police authorities (funding allocations), what plans she has to allow police authorities to revise precepts within the financial year 2010-11; what powers are available to police authorities to undertake a revised precept within the current financial year; and what consultation she undertook with chief constables prior to making the written ministerial statement. [1169]

Nick Herbert: Once a police authority has carried out its statutory responsibility of calculating its budget requirement and its basic amount of council tax for a financial year, legislation allows the authority to make substitute calculations provided that it does not increase the level of its budget requirement or basic amount of council tax. Where substitute calculations are made, the authority may issue a new precept. The relevant provisions are sections 43 to 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

Decisions about the level of precept are a matter for individual police authorities. Like every other part of the public sector we believe police authorities can make significant efficiencies and, if necessary, reduce spending or reprioritise with no effect on precepts or frontline services.

Informal discussions were held between the Home Secretary, and myself prior to the written ministerial statement. A consultation period will begin once the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) Amending Report 2010-11 for the revised Police Funding Settlement 2010-11 has been laid in the House.

Police: Manpower

Mr Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers at each rank were employed by *(a)* Greater Manchester police service, *(b)* Merseyside police service, *(c)* West Midlands police service and *(d)* South Wales police on the most recent date for which figures are available. [1832]

Nick Herbert: The available data, as at 30 September 2009, can be seen in the following table:

Police officer strength by police force and rank (full-time equivalents)[1], 30 September 2009

	ACPO	*Chief Superintendent*	*Superintendent*	*Chief Inspector*	*Inspector*	*Sergeant*	*Constable*	*Total*
Greater Manchester	8	19	63	99	360	1,181	6,532	8,261
Merseyside	6	15	33	59	235	672	3,492	4,512

Police officer strength by police force and rank (full-time equivalents)[1], 30 September 2009

	ACPO	Chief Superintendent	Superintendent	Chief Inspector	Inspector	Sergeant	Constable	Total
West Midlands	7	31	46	63	385	1,177	6,986	8,694
South Wales	6	13	23	50	189	510	2,348	3,129

[1] Total figures are previously published, but figures for rank breakdowns are provisional and have not been verified by forces.

Police: Unmanned Air Vehicles

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what her policy is on the use of surveillance drones by police forces; and if she will make a statement. [1527]

James Brokenshire: The use by forces of unmanned airborne vehicles is an operational matter for the police in accordance with relevant ACPO guidance and Civil Aviation Authority regulations.

Sexual Offences: Registration

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will consider bringing forward proposals to amend the Sex Offenders Act 1997 to provide that those convicted, cautioned or released from prison for sexual offences before September 1997 be considered for inclusion on the sex offenders register; and if she will make a statement. [1458]

James Brokenshire: The Sex Offenders Act 1997 is no longer in force as it has been repealed and replaced by the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Under sections 81(3)(a) to (d) of the 2003 Act, a person convicted before 1 September 1997 of an offence listed in Schedule 3 can already be placed on the sex offenders' register. This applies to offenders in relation to the relevant Schedule 3 offences if they:

had been convicted prior to 1 September 1997, but had not been sentenced until after that date;

were already serving a sentence of imprisonment, a term of service detention or subject to a community order on 1 September 1997;

were subject to supervision on 1 September 1997 after being released from prison having served the whole or part of their sentence of imprisonment;

were detained in a hospital or subject to a guardianship order on 1 September 1997 following their conviction.

Wickham Research Laboratories: Animal Experiments

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she expects to publish the results of the review of animal testing at Wickham Laboratories; and for what reasons the expected publication timetable has not been met. [1532]

Lynne Featherstone: I expect to receive the report of the review shortly and will publish the results when I have considered its findings.

The review timetable has been extended to ensure that input from the independent members of the review team could be taken fully into account.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Adult Education

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he plans to take in relation to implementation of the recommendations of the White Paper, "The Learning Revolution". [1670]

Mr Hayes: "The Learning Revolution" White Paper was published by the previous Government. We now have a new Government and a fresh chance to reassess the principles that underpin public policy in order to build a better society founded on social mobility, social justice and social cohesion.

I have long been a believer in the power of adult and community learning and the contribution it makes to the development of stronger, healthier and more confident communities. These views are shared by my Secretary of State and by the Prime Minister. We want everyone to have the chance to be inspired by learning, so that their lives, their families and their communities can benefit.

We want people to rise as high as their talents and ambitions will take them. We will achieve this by reducing bureaucracy, by putting an end to the previous preoccupation with targets and by making adult and community learning universally available, targeting public support for disadvantaged areas and those people who have had least opportunity to learn in the past.

Advantage West Midlands

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what his most recent assessment is of the effectiveness of the work of Advantage West Midlands in *(a)* the West Midlands and *(b)* Coventry. [1596]

Mr Prisk: An Independent Performance Assessment (IPA) conducted by the National Audit Office in 2006-07 assessed AWM as performing well. The NAO, on behalf of my Department, is currently undertaking an Independent Supplementary Review of RDAs and is due to report shortly.

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what timetable he has set for restructuring Advantage West Midlands into a local partnership. [1597]

Mr Prisk: The Government will provide further detail on the future of the Regional Development Agencies and how we propose to take forward our proposals for local enterprise partnerships in due course.

Apprentices

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills who will have responsibility for allocating new apprenticeship places which are created in the next 12 months. [1578]

Mr Hayes: This Department is working with the National Apprenticeship Service and the Skills Funding Agency to implement the redeployment of £150 million of Train to Gain funds announced on 24 May 2010.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills by what mechanism the announced £150 million of funding for adult apprenticeships will be made available to small and medium-sized enterprises. [1642]

Mr Hayes: This Department is working with the National Apprenticeship Service and the Skills Funding Agency to implement the redeployment of £150 million of Train to Gain funds which will support adult Apprenticeship places focused on small and medium-sized enterprise. Further details will be provided shortly.

UKTI DSO

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what amount of arms sale exports has been generated by the Defence and Security Organisation in UK Trade and Investment in the latest period for which figures are available.; [1613]

(2) what criteria are used by the Defence and Security Organisation in deciding on provision of support for arms exports; [1615]

(3) what steps the Defence and Security Organisation takes to ensure that it does not provide support for the export of UK arms to countries where human rights abuses have taken place; [1616]

(4) what the operational cost of the UK Trade and Investment Defence and Security Organisation was in the latest year for which figures are available. [1614]

Mr Davey: UK Trade and Investment Defence and Security Organisation (UKTI DSO) helps UK defence and security companies succeed internationally. In 2008 the value of new orders for the sale of goods and services by UK defence exporters to overseas Governments was £4.3 billion. Security exports were estimated at £1.4 billion in 2008/09.

To qualify for UKTI and UKTI DSO trade services, a business must be able to demonstrate that it has an active UK trading address. There may also be circumstances in which it is judged that there is a benefit to the UK economy in offering UKTI trade services to a foreign owned business overseas. This is most likely to apply in the case of an overseas-based business with concrete plans to establish in the UK. UKTI and UKTI DSO however retain discretion on who can access its services.

UKTI DSO maintains close dialogue with the rest of Government to ensure it is aware of nations of concern, including those where human rights considerations may apply. DSO also keeps informed about changes in export control regulation and reminds companies about the requirement for export licences under the Export Control Act 2002.

All applications for export licences for military equipment are assessed by BIS's Export Control Organisation (ECO) against the Consolidated Criteria, which require the Government to assess the recipient country's attitude towards relevant principles established by international human rights instruments. The Government will not issue an export licence if there is a clear risk that the proposed export might be used for internal repression. The ECO is entirely separate from UKTI DSO, and DSO is not involved in assessing licence applications.

The operational cost for UKTI DSO for financial year 2008/09 was £14.6 million.

Bankruptcy: Bexley

Mr Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many people have been declared bankrupt in Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency in each year since 2000. [1899]

Mr Davey: Figures for bankrupts in Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency for each year since 2000 are shown in the following table.

Bankruptcies in Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency[1]

	Bankruptcies
2000	27
2001	24
2002	27
2003	42
2004	35
2005	68
2006	73
2007	71
2008	62

[1] Where bankrupt has provided a valid postcode (from 87.7% in 2000 to 96.9% in 2008).

Regional figures for 2009 are not currently available for bankruptcies, as they are compiled on an annual basis. They should be available July 2010.

Business: Regulation

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills with reference to The Coalition: Our Programme for Government, if he will set out the business regulations he intends to be implemented; and what estimate has been made of the cost to the public purse in each such case. [1364]

Mr Prisk: In developing policy options, Government Departments are considering a range of options including alternatives to regulation. Where a regulatory option is decided upon, the costs and details of the alternatives considered will be clearly set out in an impact assessment.

The Government are introducing a "one-in, one-out" rule to cap the cost of regulation.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether the proposed "one-in, one-out" rule on business regulation will apply to employment law. [1657]

Mr Davey: The "one-in, one-out" rule will change the incentives for policymakers across government, encouraging a focus on identifying regulations to be repealed, simplified or replaced by alternative policy approaches.

Responsible Departments will take forward the identification of regulations that can be removed or simplified. All relevant regulations are within scope.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills when he will announce details of his plans to allow the public to challenge regulations; and whether primary legislation will be required to implement those plans. [1661]

Mr Prisk: We are committed to giving the public the opportunity to challenge the worst regulations, thus putting power back into the hands of businesses and citizens, making regulations less complicated and boosting enterprise by cutting red tape. We are working to develop innovative and practical ways to achieve these objectives, and also examining whether new legislation is needed to do so. I will make a statement to the House with more detail in due course.

Company Accounts

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether his Department plans to conduct an assessment of the effectiveness of the company reporting requirements of the Companies Act 2006. [1663]

Mr Davey: The Department of Business, Innovation and Skills is currently evaluating the impact of the major provisions of the Companies Act 2006 including the narrative reporting provisions of the business review. We will publish the results of this evaluation later in 2010.

In addition, the Government are committed to reinstating an Operating and Financial Review to ensure that directors' social and environmental duties have to be covered in company reporting and investigate further ways of improving corporate accountability and transparency. We intend to consult on this issue this summer with a view to publishing our proposals by the end of the year.

Conditions of Employment

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills when he plans to announce details of the planned review of employment laws and practices; and what consultation he plans to undertake on the form of the review. [1660]

Mr Davey: We are considering the detail of our approach in this area, including how to involve those with an interest.

Departmental Flags

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what his policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which his Department is responsible. [1807]

Mr Davey: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport issues guidance for the flying of the Union flag on UK Government buildings. The guidance encourages the Union flag to be flown 365 days a year, and as a minimum all Departments must fly the Union flag on the 19 special designated days e.g. Queen's birthday, Remembrance Day, etc. and other special occasions as required e.g. State Opening of Parliament.

More information on the guidance is available on the DCMS website:

http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/honours/7124.aspx

The Department for Business Innovation and Skills flies the Union flag 365 days of the year from those buildings for which we have flagpoles.

Departmental Responsibilities

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which Ministers in his Department have responsibility for the postal service. [1656]

Mr Davey: I have responsibility for the postal service in my capacity as Minister for Employment Relations, Consumer and Postal Affairs.

Further Education

Mr Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which further education colleges Ministers in his Department have visited since their appointment. [1706]

Mr Hayes: Ministers in this Department have not yet visited any further education (FE) colleges but have already met representatives from the FE sector. The Government are committed to developing a valued relationship with the FE sector; this will include visiting institutions across the country. I will be making my first visit to a college shortly and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be visiting a FE college on Thursday 10 June while on a visit to the West Midlands.

New Businesses: Ex-servicemen

Mr Mark Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether he plans to continue the "Be the Boss" scheme announced in March 2010 to assist ex-service personnel in starting businesses; and if he will make a statement. [1700]

Mr Prisk: The "Be the Boss" scheme is being delivered by the Royal British Legion. To date, £2 million of endowment funding has been provided to them and the remaining funding for the endowment (potentially up to £3 million in the current financial year) is at the discretion of the Secretary of State and conditional upon an assessment that the scheme is making a positive impact.

The Royal British Legion will be accepting applications to the scheme from 14 June 2010 via

www.civvystreet.org/

Northwest Regional Development Agency: Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what projects in the Wigan local authority area received funding from the North West Regional Development Agency in the last 12 months. [1643]

Mr Prisk: The information is as follows:

Project name	*District*	*Constituency*	*Actual spend 2009-10 (£)*
Coalfields regeneration programme—Bickershaw Colliery	Wigan	Leigh	5,215,899
Coalfields regeneration programme—2200 Bickershaw Colliery Estate management costs	Wigan	Leigh	11,267
Wigan—Sandyforth Farm Restoration Phase 2	Wigan	—	493,733
Wigan-Leigh Sports Village	Wigan	Leigh	497,600
Ashton Town Centre Masterplan	Wigan	Wigan	34,890
Leigh Town Centre Masterplan	Wigan	Leigh	50,000
Selective Finance for Investment in England—Future Industrial Services	Wigan	Leigh	50,000
Selective Finance for Investment in England—Bakkavor Foods Ltd. T/A Hitchens Foods	Wigan	Wigan	500,000
Selective Finance for Investment in England—Technical Support For Industry Ltd.	Wigan	Wigan	7,863
Selective Finance for Investment in England—Ashton Town Centre Masterplan	Wigan	—	34,890
Selective Finance for Investment in England—Leigh Town Centre Masterplan	Wigan	Leigh	50,000
Selective Finance for Investment in England—Safelok Components Ltd. (2nd App)	Wigan	Wigan	35,000
Selective Finance for Investment in England—Bradford Pharma Ltd. 2nd App	Wigan	Wigan	152,948
Selective Finance for Investment in England—Value Works Ltd.	Wigan	Wigan	41,400
Selective Finance for Investment in England—Nutrisport Ltd.	Wigan	Wigan	66,100
Selective Finance for Investment in England—Remploy Local Public Sector	Wigan	Wigan	40,000
Business Start Up (Phase II)—Wigan	Wigan	—	99,975
Selective Finance for Investment in England—XpertRule Software Ltd.	Wigan	Leigh	30,629
Selective Finance for Investment in England—Optima Interiors Ltd	Wigan	Leigh	19,817
Selective Finance for Investment in England—atg UV Technology Limited.	Wigan	Wigan	11,793
Total			7,443,804

Sector Skills Councils

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what his plans are for the future of sector skills councils. [1669]

Mr Hayes: Sector skills councils have a crucial role in all aspects of our skills policy, including apprenticeships. We will continue to empower them as the voice of employers in the skills system, and to challenge them to perform with maximum effectiveness.

Supermarkets: Competition

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he plans to take to create a supermarket ombudsman; and if he will make a statement. [1920]

Mr Davey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend for St Ives (Andrew George) and the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, column reference 44W.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Garden Development

9. **Mr Offord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will bring forward proposals to increase the powers of local authorities to prevent infill and garden development. [1543]

Mr Pickles: We yesterday implemented our coalition agreement to give powers to local authorities to prevent overdevelopment and 'garden grabbing', by removing gardens from the definition of brownfield land and removing the top down density target. These changes will give power back to local authorities to take decisions that are right for their areas.

Regional Spatial Strategies

16. **Mr Buckland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps he plans to take to end regional spatial strategies. [1551]

Greg Clark: We committed in the Queen's Speech to abolishing regional strategies. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to all council leaders saying that he expects them to have regard to this as a material planning consideration in any decisions they are currently taking.

Homelessness

18. **Penny Mordaunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps he is taking to improve the co-ordination of Government policy on homelessness. [1553]

Grant Shapps: I will be very shortly announcing plans for a new cross-Government approach to tackling homelessness. This will, for the first time, mean that our policies on homelessness are properly joined up to reflect the multifaceted nature of the problems that homeless people face.

Home Information Packs

22. **Peter Aldous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what timetable he has set for the ending of the home information pack scheme. [R] [1557]

Grant Shapps: We took swift action to suspend the Home Information Pack (HIP) from 21 May and intend to introduce legislation to abolish the HIP later in the parliamentary session.

Travellers

23. **David Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the change in the number of unauthorised Traveller sites since 1997. [1558]

Mr Pickles: The number of caravans on unauthorised developments has increased from 887 in 1997 to 2,395 in 2010—an increase of 170% over 10 years.

Allotments

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will take steps to ensure that local authorities provide allotments under the terms of the Allotments and Small Holdings Act 1908. [1712]

Andrew Stunell: The Government recognise that allotments are valuable green spaces and community assets, and policy in this area is currently under consideration.

Council Housing: Repairs and Maintenance

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has for funding to local authorities to modernise council housing in each of the next three years. [1607]

Andrew Stunell: Future funding for the tackling the capital investment backlog in council housing will be decided in the context of the Government's Spending Review. The Government are in addition continuing with the consultation on the reform of the financing for council housing.

Departmental Accountancy

Angie Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what ministerial directions overruling the Accounting Officer of his Department have been issued in the last 12 months. [1381]

Robert Neill: In the last 12 months, ministerial directions were issued in relation to two decisions: the decision on the Exeter and Norwich unitary proposals; and the proposal to purchase Blackpool Leisure Assets. I have placed a copy of the correspondence between the Accounting Officer and the Secretary of State in relation to this issue in the Library of the House.

Fire Services: Working Hours

Damian Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will make it his policy to retain the opt-out of the EU working time directive for retained fire crews; and if he will make a statement. [1609]

Robert Neill: This Government committed in the coalition agreement to limit the application of the working time directive in the United Kingdom. We recognise the essential flexibility that the opt-out brings and will stand firm on its retention.

Losing the opt-out from the averaged 48-hour maximum to the working week set by the EU working time directive could have a serious impact on fire and rescue services. In particular, it would greatly reduce the hours which many on-call Retained Duty System fire-fighters, who provide around 90% of operational cover geographically across the United Kingdom as a whole, could be available for duty because many already work full time for a primary employer.

Housing: Construction

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what representations he has received from the building industry on in-year changes to his Department's expenditure on housing construction in 2010 following the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement on in-year changes in public expenditure on 24 May 2010. [1503]

Andrew Stunell: The Department is in regular dialogue with the construction industry, registered social landlords and developers, and there have been ongoing discussions regarding the savings that the Department is making on housing construction.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what assessment he has made of the effects on *(a)* levels of employment and *(b)* the number of apprenticeships in the construction sector of in-year change to his Department's expenditure on housing consequent upon the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement on in-year changes in public expenditure on 24 May 2010. [1504]

Andrew Stunell: The Government have announced £100 million of savings from the National Affordable Housing Programme and £50 million from the Kickstart Programme. Using the industry standard formula of 21 jobs and one apprenticeship per £1 million investment spend, the effect of these savings will equate to 2,100 fewer jobs and 100 fewer apprenticeships through the NAHP and 1,050 fewer jobs and 50 fewer apprentices through Kickstart.

However, £500 million out of the Government's £6.2 billion savings announced on 25 May is being reinvested to further education, apprenticeships and social housing. This will include £150 million to fund 50,000 new apprenticeship places, focused on small and medium enterprises and £170 million to safeguard delivery of around 4,000 otherwise unfunded social rented homes to start on site this year, protecting 3,500 jobs and prioritising provision for the most vulnerable.

Local Government: Public Consultation

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he expects to bring forward proposals to assist local communities to retain local facilities; and what consultation he plans to have on the development of such proposals. [1070]

Andrew Stunell: The Government's broad plans are set out in "The Coalition: our programme for government", and more detailed proposals will be published in the Decentralisation and Localism Bill in the autumn, after we have consulted informally with all those with an interest across the sectors.

Mayors

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how he has decided the 12 English cities in which he will provide for elected mayors; which cities they are; in what local authority areas the elected mayors will have powers; and when the referendums will take place. [1628]

Robert Neill: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Chris Leslie) on 9 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 174W.

Private Rented Housing

Ian Murray: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what recent representations he has received on protection of the rights of private tenants; and if he will make a statement. [1549]

Andrew Stunell: I have received four such representations. I have also received six representations about the rights of landlords. The sector is made up of around 1 million landlords with 3 million tenanted properties.

Regeneration: Waltham Forest

Stella Creasy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what meetings *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department have had with London and Quadrant Housing Association on (i) the future of Walthamstow Dog Track and (ii) regeneration of the London borough of Waltham Forest in the last three years. [1595]

Andrew Stunell: None.

Social Rented Housing

Stella Creasy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what guidance his Department issues to registered social landlords on the time period within which they must begin development of assets after acquisition in order to qualify for public subsidy for such development. [1608]

Andrew Stunell: This Department does not issue guidance to registered social landlords on the time period within which they must begin to develop assets after acquisition to qualify for public subsidy.

This Department provides funding to registered social landlords (RSLs)/registered providers (RPs) of affordable housing through the Homes and Communities (HCA) who administer the National Affordable Housing Programme (NAHP). The HCA sets out in their Prospectus and the Affordable Housing Capital Funding Guide (AHCFG) requirements for obtaining funding from the NAHP.

When seeking grant through the NAHP, RSLs/RPs must set milestones including start on site and practical completion dates as part of their bid. HCA monitors the RSLs/RPs, performance against these milestones. Grant is paid to RSLs/RPs on start on site and practical completion (i.e. when those milestones have been achieved). Where projects are delayed, the RSL/RP must re-forecast the milestone and the HCA will decide whether to accept the revised forecast. If delays are significant, and might impact on delivery of the HCA's programme and achievement of targets, it will consider withdrawing funding for the scheme.

Social Rented Housing: Construction

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the number of new *(a)* local authority and *(b)* housing association dwellings to be constructed in each west midlands borough in (i) 2010, (ii) 2011 and (iii) 2012; and if he will make a statement. [1506]

Andrew Stunell: We do not make estimates of the number of new housing association dwellings that will be constructed in future years. Similarly we make no estimates for local authority dwellings constructed with their own resources. However this Department is currently supporting a number of local authorities to deliver new council houses through a dedicated funding programme. Work on over 283 houses has already begun in the west midlands and will complete over this financial year and the next.

We are committed to the provision of affordable housing and are reviewing budgets across all CLG and HCA programmes. The position will be clarified in the Budget on 22 June.

EDUCATION

Children: Databases

Ed Balls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the effects on his Department's expenditure in *(a)* 2010-11, *(b)* 2011-12 and *(c)* 2012-13 of the immediate abolition of the ContactPoint database. [1221]

Tim Loughton: We have made clear our firm intention to end the ContactPoint database as soon as practicable. As we do so, we intend to consider the scope for a more proportionate approach to protecting children most in need. We shall make a further announcement in due course. The impact on the Department's existing expenditure plans will be determined in the light of those decisions.

Children: Disadvantaged

Mr Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to implement the policies contained in his Department's recent Green Paper on early intervention. [1289]

Tim Loughton *[holding answer 8 June 2010]:* The Paper contained examples of effective practice that other local areas may wish to consider. Any future decisions on early intervention policy will be advised on in due course as part of the Government's broader strategy for children, young people and families.

Marriage Guidance: Finance

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much funding his Department *(a)* has allocated and *(b)* intends to allocate in the next 12 months in respect of relationship support. [1073]

Tim Loughton: The Department for Education is currently providing funding of more than £7 million in grants for 2010-11 to support a range of voluntary and community sector family organisations that provide relationship support.

Decisions on the allocation of funding for the next 12 months have not yet been taken.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Former Members: ICT

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the House of Commons Commission what steps are being taken to *(a)* recover and *(b)* re-use parliamentary ICT equipment provided to hon. Members in the last Parliament who were defeated at the general election. [1714]

Sir Stuart Bell: The ICT equipment loaned by Parliament and used by previous Members not returning to the House is being retrieved. Where there is re-sale value, this equipment will be sold in order to reduce overall costs to Parliament, otherwise it will be disposed of environmentally. In both cases, all data and software will have been securely removed.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Manpower

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers are employed by his Department; and at what Civil Service pay grade in each such case. [1279]

Mr Duncan: The White Book, published by the Central Office of Information (COI) every six months, contains details of the Department for International Development's (DFID's) press team and pay grades.

With reference to special advisers, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Departmental Official Residences

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether any domestic properties in the gift of the Government have been allocated to the use of Ministers in his Department. [1801]

Mr Duncan: The Department for International Development (DFID) has not allocated any domestic properties for the use of Ministers.

Developing Countries: Politics and Government

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much funding he intends to allocate to *(a)* the development of local democratic institutions, *(b)* civil society groups, *(c)* media and enterprise and *(d)* efforts to tackle corruption in the next 12 months. [1709]

Mr Duncan: In the coming months, the Department for International Development (DFID) will be reviewing its aid programmes to determine how we can achieve better value for money for the taxpayer and accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. Allocation of funding for the development of local democratic institutions, civil society groups, media and enterprise and efforts to tackle corruption will be determined as part of the review, on a country by country basis.

Overseas Aid

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much and what proportion of his Department's budget was allocated in ways that do not fall within the OECD's definition of aid in the last 12 months. [1710]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The latest available figures are for calendar year 2009, during which 2.5% (£164 million) of the Department for International Development's (DFID) total spend was non-ODA eligible. This includes an estimated £122 million of expenditure through the EU budget to pre-accession states.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development to which countries his Department allocated funding in the last 12 months; and whether he plans to *(a)* withdraw funding from any such country and *(b)* commence funding to any new country. [1711]

Mr Duncan: Details of the level of aid provided to individual countries in 2008-09 were published in "Statistics on International Development", which is available on the Department for International Development's (DFID's) website at;

http://www.dfid.gov.uk/About-DFID/Finance-and-performance/Aid-Statistics/Statistics-on-International-Development-2009/

Provisional details of the 2009-10 programme will be published in the annual report in July and final details in "Statistics on International Development" later in 2010.

In the coming months DFID will be reviewing its aid programmes to determine how we can achieve better value for money for the taxpayer and accelerate progress towards the MDGs. Decisions on future allocations to countries will be taken during this process.

Overseas Aid: Public Consultation

Chris Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what criteria he used in his decision to end the five grant arrangements intended to engage the British public in development matters. [1610]

Mr Duncan: The highest priority for the Department of International Development (DFID) is to ensure that aid money is spent on activities that deliver real results on the ground in developing countries to reduce poverty. To this end, an initial review was conducted of those areas of expenditure where the link between project activities and poverty reduction in the developing world was least demonstrated. In this context, four projects within the Development Awareness Fund (DAF), and a festivals outreach project were identified for termination. An estimate of funds saved from the termination of these projects is approximately £590,000. These funds will be redirected to front line poverty reduction in developing countries.

A wider review of this area of work is now being undertaken and further decisions on expenditures in this area will be made in due course.

Sudan: Overseas Aid

Ms Ritchie: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what humanitarian aid his Department is providing to displaced people in Darfur. [R] [1021]

Mr O'Brien: The UK provides assistance to conflict-affected people in Darfur through a variety of mechanisms, including support for the African Union/United Nations peacekeeping mission (UNAMID) and other peacebuilding and security programmes.

Humanitarian programmes are targeted at both displaced and resident populations. We are the largest donor to the UN's Common Humanitarian Fund, with 30% of this fund spent on humanitarian assistance in Darfur. These contributions, along with our bilateral programme, have helped 87,000 IDPs return home in 2008, train and employ 800 teachers, open 64 health care facilities, and install 246 boreholes and 785 latrines.

We also deliver humanitarian aid through NGOs such as Mediar, Tearfund, GOAL and RedR, which are providing health services for 540,000 people, as well as nutrition, water and sanitation programmes in Darfur and elsewhere. We contribute to the ICRC's work in Sudan which this year will spend approximately 70% on its humanitarian response in Darfur. Due to poor rains and increasing conflict we recently made an exceptional allocation to the UN World Food Programme's emergency operations which will provide food assistance for some 3 million people across Sudan, including Darfur.

We are currently reviewing all our aid, including aid channelled through multilateral agencies to ensure it is as effective as possible and brings real benefit in terms of building peace and delivering assistance to those affected by conflict.

Sudan: Peace Negotiations

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department is taking to support the peace process in Sudan. [1231]

Mr O'Brien: The Department for international Development (DFID) supports the two major peace processes in Sudan.

DFID has provided support for a number of key milestones in the 2005 North-South Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), including civic education, technical preparation, security and conflict management for the 2010 nationwide elections. DFID is also contributing to a programme aimed at the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Resettlement (DDR) of 65,000 male and female troops from both North and South Sudan.

During the ongoing United Nations/African Union process, we are supporting the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation (DDDC), which brings the views of Darfuri civil society to the political peace process and the Darfur Community Peace and Stability Fund which provides small grants to community groups for reconciliation and community development programmes.

We are currently reviewing all our aid, including aid channelled through multilateral agencies to ensure it is as effective as possible and brings real benefit in terms of building peace and delivering assistance to those affected by conflict.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 14 June 2010

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Licensing Laws

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport if he will bring forward proposals to amend the Licensing Act 2003 to prevent last-minute licence reviews of events held once a year; and if he will make a statement. [1906]

John Penrose: The Department will be examining the Licensing Act 2003 and other regulatory regimes in order to consider the scope for streamlining and simplification.

We want to ensure a careful balance between supporting the businesses affected by the regulation and ensuring the public are protected. We will consider the options carefully before making any firm decisions.

Olympic Games 2012: North West

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what he expects the legacy of the 2012 Olympics will be for the north-west region; and if he will make a statement. [1698]

Hugh Robertson: The north-west stands to gain from the wide range of opportunities created by the 2012 games, through businesses winning games-related work, increased tourism and cultural celebrations.

52 of the Olympic Delivery Authority's suppliers are businesses registered in the north-west, and more are winning work in the supply chains of its contractors.

The Old Trafford football stadium will be one of the key non-London venues, hosting football matches, and along with Pre-Games Training Camps will provide an opportunity to create further economic benefits, including inward investment, through the international attention that will follow. 68 facilities in the region are included in the official London 2012 Pre-Games Training Camp Guide, and to date memoranda of understanding are in place with 17 of the Oceania National Olympic Committees, the National Olympic Committee of Thailand and Australia's swimming team, formalising their intentions to use facilities in the region in the run-up to the games.

There are 85 games-inspired projects in the north-west which have been awarded the Inspire Mark and during 2012, as part of the UK-wide cultural celebrations, there will be live sites in Manchester and Liverpool. Additionally, there are several cultural legacy projects in the north-west of which, 'WE PLAY' is one. It combines digital, physical and virtual participation opportunities for people from all walks of life.

Sports Commission

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what steps he has taken to create a Sports Commission; and if he will make a statement. [1919]

Hugh Robertson: We are currently working with Sport England, UK Sport and the Youth Sport Trust on options to bring them together under one roof, while retaining the focus on their individual roles and responsibilities. In addition, the Secretary of State has instigated a series of cross-departmental meetings to discuss sport and Olympic-related issues, for example school sport and Olympic security.

We will be looking at plans for a more formal arrangement, based on the Australian Sports Commission, in due course.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan and Iraq: Peacekeeping Operations

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving soldiers have sustained injuries while on active service in *(a)* Iraq and *(b)* Afghanistan. [1652]

Dr Fox: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) regularly publishes the casualty and fatality statistics on the MOD website. Between 7 October 2001 to 15 May 2010 in Afghanistan, 376 UK personnel sustained a very serious injury or serious injury. From 1 January 2003 to 31 July 2009 in Iraq, 222 UK personnel sustained a very serious injury or serious innjury.

The figures can be found on the MOD website at the following links:

The Iraq (Op Telic) casualty tables up to 31 July 2009:

http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/7E86BD05-D4FF-4677-97AA-CCFBDCFE4E34/0/optelic_31jul09.pdf

The Afghanistan (Op HERRICK) Casualty Tables up to 15 May 2010:

http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/F4FDB0FC-28CB-4133-B615-D7A4E7C77F97/0/opherrickcasualtytablesto15may2010.pdf

Mr MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the US Administration on its proposed changes to the level of US military *(a)* presence and *(b)* engagement in Afghanistan in 2011; and if he will make a statement. [1387]

Dr Fox: I have discussed the security situation in Afghanistan with my US counterpart on a number of occasions. I met Secretary Gates in London on 8 June 2010 where we covered a number of topics, including current and future plans on Afghanistan. We also discussed these issues at the NATO Defence Ministers' meeting in Brussels on 10-11 June 2010.

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the use of armed drones by UK armed forces in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [1530]

Dr Fox: Reaper, operated by the Royal Air Force, is the UK's only armed remotely piloted air system (RPAS). Reaper's primary mission is to provide a persistent intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance capability in support of coalition forces on the ground in Afghanistan. Being armed, Reaper has the capability to respond to requests for support from commanders on the ground and engage emerging targets.

The rules of engagement used for Reaper weapon releases are no different to those used for manned combat aircraft; the weapons are all precision guided, and every effort is made to ensure the risk of collateral damage and civilian casualties is minimised, which may include deciding not to release a weapon. Reaper is not an autonomous system and does not have the capability to employ weapons unless it is commanded to do so by the flight crew.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he plans to take to enable the Afghan Government to increase its authority in Helmand and Kandahar. [2001]

Dr Fox: UK forces, alongside Afghan and International Security and Assistance Force allies, will continue to clear the insurgent presence from central Helmand, holding the ground gained to enable governance and socio-economic development to continue. Election shuras have been well-attended, indicating that locals feel secure enough to engage with the Afghan Government in large numbers.

In Kandahar, the UK will continue to support the Afghan Government-led initiative to better connect governance in Kandahar city with its citizens; to listen and respond to their needs; and to deliver to them improved security, governance, and economic opportunities.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate has been made of the area of Afghanistan under the control of the Taliban *(a)* in June 2009, *(b)* in June 2008 and *(c)* at the latest date for which information is available. [2003]

Dr Fox: It is not possible to provide an accurate or consistent figure for the proportion of Afghanistan that is controlled by the Taliban. However, more of Afghanistan is under the control of the Government of Afghanistan today than it has ever been before.

There remain areas of Afghanistan not under the direct control of the Afghan Government but this does not necessarily mean they are under the control of the Taliban.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to reduce numbers of British casualties in Afghanistan. [2004]

Dr Fox: We take the protection of our armed forces very seriously, and strive to reduce the risk they face and improve their protection. The best force protection involves using a range of equipment, combined with the right training and tactics. The combined effect of our continuous improvements to equipment, better tactics and ongoing research, together with a greater number of helicopter flying hours, and the deployment of a Counter-Improvised Explosive Device (C-IED) Task Force, contribute to managing the threat our troops face.

The biggest challenge we face is the threat from IEDs. On 10 June, the Prime Minister announced that we will spend an additional £67 million on countering the IED threat. This will include more protected vehicles for use by our C-IED teams, more Remote Control Vehicles, and enhancing our military working dog capability. This investment, together with enhancements that have already been made to our IED equipment, training and other capabilities will continue to make a difference.

Afghanistan: Police

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information his Department holds on the proportion of members of the Afghan police force in Helmand province who are of each ethnicity. [2133]

Dr Fox: The ethnicity of members of the Afghan national police is a matter for the Government of Afghanistan. The Ministry of Defence does not hold data on the ethnicity of the Afghan national police in Helmand.

Union Flag

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which his Department is responsible. [1818]

Mr Robathan: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport issues guidance for the flying of the Union flag on UK Government buildings. The guidance encourages the Union flag to be flown 365 days a year, and as a minimum all Departments must fly the Union flag on the 19 special designated days including the Queen's birthday, Remembrance day and other special occasions as required such as the State Opening of Parliament. More information on the guidance is available on the DCMS website

http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/honours/7124.aspx

The Ministry of Defence's main building in Whitehall flies the Union flag every day and it is our policy to fly the Union flag as often as possible from all our buildings capable of doing so.

Departmental Private Education

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent by his Department on private or independent education of children of serving military or defence personnel in each of the last five years. [1624]

Mr Robathan: A payment may be paid to some service personnel, and some Ministry of Defence civilian employees appointed overseas, to allow their children to achieve a stable education. Limits apply in respect of the amount that can be claimed and all claims are subject to a parental minimum contribution of 10%.

For service personnel, details of continuity of education allowance are only held for financial years 2007-08 and 2008-09. The amount paid is shown in the following table:

Financial year	£ million
2007-08	162.2
2008-09	172.8

The amount of civilian schooling allowance paid is in the following table:

Calendar year	£ million
2005	1.0
2006	1.2
2007	1.2
2008	1.0
2009	1.0

Departmental Public Expenditure

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how he plans to reduce his Department's running costs by at least 25 per cent. [1675]

Dr Fox: The Department is considering how the savings will be achieved through its contributions to the strategic defence and security review and the Government's spending review, both of which are expected to report towards the end of the year.

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to his Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff employed by (i) his Department and (ii) its agencies. [632]

Dr Fox: We hold information centrally only on the Department-wide Voluntary Early Release schemes instigated to deliver the Spending Review 2004 and 2007 reductions in the Ministry of Defence's (MOD) civilian staff. The total liability cost averaged some £44 million a year over the period 2005-06 to 2009-10.

Beyond this, a number of smaller-scale voluntary release schemes have been run across the wider MOD to achieve specific business needs. The cost of these is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

As part of the Government's commitment to greater transparency, we plan to publish information on the cost and numbers of exit packages, including redundancy and early retirement, in our Annual Report and Accounts from 2010-11.

HMS Sultan

Caroline Dinenage: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service families based at HMS Sultan School of Navy Engineering are living in married quarters in Gosport constituency. [2207]

Mr Robathan: The number of Service Family Accommodation (SFA) properties in the Gosport constituency is 1,026, of which 840 are currently occupied by service families.

SFA is not reserved for specified units but entitled service families are usually accommodated within 10 miles of their permanent duty station. Therefore, personnel based at HMS Sultan are likely to be accommodated across the wider Portsmouth area.

Luke Coffey

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Mr Luke Coffey has been subject to positive vetting; and whether he will have access to situation reports from military commanders. [1917]

Dr Fox: Mr Coffey has been subject to the necessary security vetting for him to undertake his role as a special adviser. He will have access to documentation appropriate to his appointment and defence vetting status.

Nuclear Weapons

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total planned expenditure for the W-76 warhead life extension programme is; and how much has been spent to date on this programme. [2040]

Dr Fox: The W-76 warhead life extension programme is a US programme and I cannot comment.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to consult trade unions in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies on lost reduction plans. [602]

Dr Fox: We are working with the trade unions in accordance with agreed arrangements. We will consult them regarding the implementation of the Strategic Defence and Security Review, and the implications for staff of the associated settlement for Defence in the wider Government Spending Review.

Trident

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what mechanism he intends to assess the value for money of the renewal of Trident. [1147]

Dr Fox: The Government are committed to a value for money review of the Trident programme within the framework of the Strategic Defence and Security Review. This is aimed at ensuring that the United Kingdom's essential minimum deterrent is maintained as cost-effectively as possible. The Ministry of Defence is working with other Government Departments on this assessment.

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the matter of the renewal of Trident will be included in the Strategic Defence Review. [2062]

Dr Fox: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on 7 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 11W.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the reservation made by his Department to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. [1826]

Mr Robathan: There are no plans to review the reservation made by the Ministry of Defence to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The continuing need for the armed forces' exemption was confirmed when Parliament considered the Equality Act 2010.

The armed forces were exempted from the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. This exemption was secured because all armed forces' personnel need to be combat effective in order to meet a world-wide liability to deploy, and to ensure that military health and fitness remain matters for Defence Ministers based on military advice.

Unmanned Air Vehicles

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the use of drone planes in military operations. [2389]

Dr Fox: Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UASs) continue to have a vital role to play in military operations, and it is our policy to continue to use them in support of forces on the ground in Afghanistan. As with all capabilities, we keep our operational requirements for UASs under constant review to ensure that they continue to meet our mission objectives.

Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what public spending projects within *(a)* Wigan constituency and *(b)* the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan his Department had secured Treasury approval for between 1 January 2010 and the date of his appointment as Secretary of State. [1695]

Mr Robathan: The Government are re-assessing spending approvals granted between 1 January 2010 and the general election to ensure that they offer good value for money and are consistent with the Government's priorities. Further announcements will be made in due course.

World War II: Military Decorations

Caroline Dinenage: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review his Department's policy on the wearing of Atlantic Star medals in order to authorise Arctic Convoy veterans of World War II to attach the Arctic Convoy emblems recently presented to them to such medals for wearing in public. [2079]

Mr Robathan: I have no plans to do so.

The Atlantic Star is the medal that recognises service on the Arctic Convoys. The Arctic Emblem marks the nation's gratitude to those who served on the Convoys for the severe conditions that they faced, but it is a lapel badge and not a medal, a clasp to a medal, bar or rosette. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to wear the Emblem on the medal ribbon of the Atlantic Star.

However, the Arctic Emblem may be worn on the lapel, or above the breast pocket, either on occasions when it is appropriate to wear medals, or on its own with either formal or informal dress.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Carbon Emissions: Business

Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate he has made of the number and proportion of UK-listed companies which reported on their greenhouse gas emissions under his Department's guidance in the financial year 2009-10. [1134]

Mr Paice: I have been asked to reply.

We encourage companies to publicly disclose their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions using the DEFRA/ Department of Energy and Climate Change "Guidance on How to Measure and Report Your Greenhouse Gas Emissions", published in October 2009. As this guidance was published mid-year we do not expect that the majority of companies will have adjusted their reporting to make use of the guidance for the financial year 2009-10. No estimate has been made so far of the number or proportion of UK-listed companies using this guidance during this period. However, we expect preliminary information to become available in autumn 2010.

Union Flag

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what his policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which his Department is responsible. [1816]

Gregory Barker: DECC staff operate from two buildings (3 Whitehall Place, London and Atholl House, 86-88 Guild Street, Aberdeen). Neither of these buildings has a flag pole and therefore the Department does not have a policy on flying the Union flag.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in his Department. [1479]

Gregory Barker: The Department of Energy and Climate Change has four cars allocated to its Ministers. One is a Toyota Prius T Spirit and three are Toyota Prius T 3, all manufactured in Japan.

These arrangements are changing following the publication of the new Ministerial Code which contains changes that affect ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. The Code states that:

> "the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed".

Cabinet Office has provided clarification on how the Code should be interpreted. The expectation is that Ministers not in the Cabinet will use the pool service and that Cabinet Ministers who have an allocated car will wish to consider how that car might be utilised by other Ministers within the Department before calls are made on the Government Car Service Pool.

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with Departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements.

Human Tissue Analysis in UK Nuclear Facilities Inquiry

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change when he expects the report of the Redfern Inquiry into human tissue analysis in UK nuclear facilities to be published. [1915]

Charles Hendry: There is currently no publication date for the report of the Redfern Inquiry into human tissue analysis in UK nuclear facilities. We expect to make an announcement before the summer recess.

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether he has received recent representations from British Nuclear Fuels on the outcome of the Redfern Inquiry into human tissue analysis in UK nuclear facilities; and if he will make a statement. [1953]

Charles Hendry: I have received no representations from British Nuclear Fuels on the outcome of the Redfern Inquiry into human tissue analysis in UK nuclear facilities.

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent discussions he has had with Michael Redfern QC on the outcomes of his inquiry into human tissue analysis in UK nuclear facilities; and if he will make a statement. [1954]

Charles Hendry: I have had no discussions with Michael Redfern QC on the outcome of his inquiry into human tissue analysis in UK nuclear facilities.

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent discussions he has had with families of deceased workers at *(a)* Harwell and *(b)* Sellafield nuclear facilities whose tissue was retained for analysis. [2448]

Charles Hendry: DECC Ministers have had no discussions with families of deceased workers at *(a)* Harwell and *(b)* Sellafield nuclear facilities whose tissue was retained for analysis.

Mining: Languages

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what information his Department holds on the number of miners who do not speak English who are employed in coal mines in the UK. [1762]

Charles Hendry: No such information is held.

Radioactive Waste: Waste Management

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent estimate he has made of the cost of establishing an underground repository for radioactive waste; and if he will make a statement. [1951]

Charles Hendry: The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) is responsible for the decommissioning and clean-up of the UK's civil public sector nuclear sites and has been designated as the body responsible for implementing geological disposal of higher activity radioactive waste.

The cost of disposal is influenced by many different factors, including the inventory of waste, the timing of waste arisings, the geology at the site in question and the design of a geological disposal facility.

NDA's total discounted lifetime cost estimate for the establishment of the geological disposal facility for higher activity wastes is £4.3 billion, of which NDA's share as shown in its Annual Report and Accounts is £3.7 billion with the remainder being funded by other waste producers. This investment will be incurred over a period of many decades and includes costs for research, design, construction, operation and final closure.

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change which local authorities have presented proposals to his Department for the siting of an underground repository for radioactive waste. [1952]

Charles Hendry: In 2008, communities were invited to "express an interest" in entering discussions with Government about a siting process for a geological disposal facility for higher activity radioactive waste.

To date, three "expressions of interest" have been received (Copeland borough council, Cumbria county council and Allerdale borough council) for the areas of Copeland and Allerdale. The authorities are working together in partnership to consider whether to move to the next stage of the process and further information is available on the West Cumbria MRWS Partnership website at:

www.westcumbriamrws.org.uk

The option to express an interest remains open and DECC officials are available to answer questions or advise any community who wishes to seek further information.

Sellafield

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what arrangements are made physically to segregate fissile nuclear material held under international safeguards from non-safeguarded fissile material at the Sellafield reprocessing plant. [2049]

Charles Hendry: The Government announced in April 1995 that the UK had ceased production of fissile material for explosives purposes. As part of the 1998 strategic defence review, it was announced that future reprocessing would be conducted under safeguards. The only non-safeguarded nuclear material on the Sellafield nuclear licensed site is that relevant to the naval propulsion

programme, which is segregated and held in different locations to safeguarded material. There is also non-safeguarded nuclear material on the Windscale nuclear licensed site in Pile 1, which is undergoing decommissioning, and in another building which holds material from the naval propulsion programme. This nuclear material is also segregated from safeguarded material.

Water Power

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what new plans he has to increase electricity generation from marine sources. [2023]

Gregory Barker: The Government are committed to measures to support marine energy technologies. We are currently considering in detail how we progress this, including the role that marine energy parks may be able to play in helping the sector move forward towards commercial deployment.

The Government are currently considering the evidence base from the two-year Severn Tidal Power Feasibility Study and expect to make a decision shortly. Other organisations are investigating the feasibility of tidal range power in a number of other bays and estuaries around the UK, including the Mersey and Solway.

Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change for what public spending projects within *(a)* Wigan constituency and *(b)* the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan his Department had secured Treasury approval between 1 January 2010 and the date of his appointment as Secretary of State. [1694]

Gregory Barker: The Government are re-assessing spending approvals granted between 1 January 2010 and the general election to ensure that they offer good value for money and are consistent with the Government's priorities. Further announcements will be made in due course.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Dangerous Dogs

Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many responses her Department received to its consultation on dangerous dogs; and when she plans to respond to the consultation. [1533]

Mr Paice *[holding answer 10 June 2010]:* We have received approximately 4,250 responses to the consultation on dangerous dogs, which closed on 1 June. We will respond to the consultation once we have had the opportunity to consider these.

Departmental Translation Services

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* documents and *(b)* other information for which (i) her Department and (ii) its associated public bodies are responsible are published or provided in the UK in languages other than English; for what reason each such publication is required to be made available in a language or languages other than English; and what estimate she has made of the cost to the public purse of the translation work so incurred in the latest period for which figures are available. [1769]

Richard Benyon: The Department has published or provided information in a number of languages between April 2009 and May 2010 via our central print contracts. The majority was undertaken as part of the personal food imports campaign aimed at informing the public as to which foods can be brought into the UK from outside the European Union. Other work was undertaken to comply with the Welsh Language Act 1993 and documents were translated into French for an EU event.

All material published from April 2009 to May 2010 is shown in the following list. The total cost of this work for translation and production was £28,978.37.

Detailed spend by the Department's associated bodies is not held centrally and could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

List of associated material produced between April 2009 and May 2010

DEFRA Website update—Foods campaign (Chinese X2)

DEFRA leaflets—Foods campaign (Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali, Farsi, Turkish, Chinese X2 and Arabic)

DEFRA press ads—Foods campaign (Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali, Farsi, Turkish, Chinese X2, Filipino and Vietnamese)

BSE Advisory Notes Welsh Translation

BSE Advisory Notes (Welsh/English)

Drinking Water Inspectorate Wales (in Welsh) Region Report

Survey of Agriculture and Horticulture Welsh Version (Welsh Assembly version)

Survey of Agriculture and Horticulture part 2 Welsh Version (DEFRA version)

BSE Advisory Notes Welsh Translation

Annual Review of Controls on Imports of Animal Products (Welsh)

Scrapie Advisory Notes English/Welsh

Cattle Leaflet (Welsh)

Hedgerow Survey Questionnaire and Letter

Food Strategy Documents—French Translation plus Artwork

New Animal Movement Licensing Welsh forms

Fishing Catches

Mr Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the *(a)* volume and *(b)* monetary value of fish stocks landed by the UK fleet in each year since 2005. [2381]

Richard Benyon: The Marine Management Organisation's (MMO; previously the Marine Fisheries Agency (MFA)) annual "Sea Fisheries Statistics" publication covers the volume and value of all landings, broken down by species, into the UK.

Data for 2005 to 2008 inclusive are available in the MFA's 2008 edition which was placed in the Library of the House.

Provisional data for 2009 are available from the MMO's website:

www.marinemanagement.org.uk

at:

www.marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/statistics/documents/monthly/2009/december.pdf.

The MMO will publish the final figures in the 2009 edition in September.

Land Drainage: Finance

Mr Graham Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will review Environment Agency spending guidelines for the purposes of ensuring the availability of adequate funding for land drainage maintenance. [1570]

Richard Benyon: The Environment Agency's investment programme is prioritised to deliver the flood and coastal erosion risk management targets set by Government. The Environment Agency, internal drainage boards, local authorities, water utilities and landowners have powers to provide drainage of land for purposes such as to improve agricultural production but this is not the objective of the Government's investment in flood risk management. The Environment Agency assists with drainage where it is the most cost-effective way of achieving its flood risk management objectives.

Providing more funding for land drainage would mean less money for the core purpose of the Environment Agency's flood defence grant, which is aimed at managing the risk of flooding and coastal erosion.

The Environment Agency may carry out additional drainage related work where it is given funding to do so.

Livestock: Transport

Miss Anne McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will bring forward proposals to abolish the six-day rule relating to auction marts. [1592]

Mr Paice: The Government have no plans to abolish the six-day standstill rule. Standstills confer real benefits by reducing the speed at which undetected disease can spread. Research has shown that the length of time between disease entering the country and its detection is the biggest single factor in determining the size, and hence the cost, of disease outbreaks.

Mackerel: Conservation

Mr Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to protect mackerel stocks in UK waters. [2380]

Richard Benyon: Sustainable management of the mackerel stock is extremely important. DEFRA officials are fully involved in the ongoing negotiations involving the European Union, Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and the Russian Federation. The most recent round of negotiations took place at the headquarters of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission in London on 28 to 30 May.

Unfortunately, it was not possible for all the parties to come to an agreement on the management of the stock at that meeting, but efforts will continue to reach an agreement in the coming months.

I also intend to raise this issue, and stress its importance, when I meet the European Commissioner, Maria Damanaki, in the near future.

Rivers

Mr Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for improving river quality in England; and if she will make a statement. [1982]

Richard Benyon: River water quality has improved significantly since the early 1990s. Under the Environment Agency's previous method of assessment, the number of rivers described as good increased from around 50% to over 75% between 1990 and 2008.

Under the new classification system brought in under the 2009 EU Water Framework Directive, the number of water bodies now classed as good is 26%. The quality of our rivers has not suddenly decreased, but good status is now significantly harder to achieve and also includes parameters that were not assessed previously. Through the introduction of the River Basin Management Plans, required under the same directive and published on 22 December 2009, we have agreed measures that will improve the number of water bodies classed as good to at least 30% by 2015. The plans also contain over 8,500 investigations to be completed by the end of 2012, which will provide us with the necessary evidence base to require further measures ahead of 2015 and beyond.

Rural Areas: Broadband

Miss Anne McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, on delivering fast-speed broadband in rural areas; and if she will make a statement. [1594]

Richard Benyon: The Secretary of State has both written to, and spoken with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to express her personal support for the initiatives outlined in his speech of 8 June 2010 to take broadband to rural communities. Enabling investment in new high-speed broadband connections is a priority for the Government, and DEFRA officials will continue to work with their counterparts in DCMS and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to implement these initiatives.

Water Abstraction

Mr Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many investigations have been *(a)* conducted and *(b)* completed under the Environment Agency's Restoring Sustainable Abstraction programme to date. [1979]

Richard Benyon: The Environment Agency has conducted and completed preliminary investigations on 305 schemes under the Restoring Sustainable Abstraction programme.

Following these investigations, 148 schemes are being examined to identify the most effective restoration solution that delivers the best environmental improvements. Investigations on the remaining 157 schemes concluded no further action was necessary.

There are another 229 schemes which are undergoing preliminary investigations.

Mr Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has for amending or retracting water abstraction licences. [1980]

Richard Benyon: All abstraction licences are assessed through the Environment Agency's Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies.

Licences identified as potentially impacting the environment undergo further analysis in the Environment Agency's Restoring Sustainable Abstraction programme.

Currently, the Environment Agency has 377 open schemes within this programme, covering 638 abstraction licences.

Restoration solutions can include licence changes as well as in river modifications.

Mr Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether compensation funds will be available for amending or retracting water abstraction licences for sites not covered by the EU habitats directive. [1981]

Richard Benyon: Compensation may be payable under Section 61 of the Water Resources Act 1991, where the Secretary of State has directed the Environment Agency to revoke or modify an abstraction licence.

The Environment Agency's annual water resources abstraction charge includes an Environmental Improvement Unit Charge.

Funds collected via this charge are for potential compensation claims payable for abstraction licence changes at habitats directive sites, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and local undesignated sites, including actions required to deliver Biodiversity Action Plan targets.

Water Companies: Regulation

Miss Anne McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will bring forward proposals for legislation on regulation of the water industry, including competition, metering and water efficiency. [1593]

Richard Benyon: The Government's coalition statement said that we will examine the conclusions of the Cave and Walker reviews, and reform the water industry to ensure more efficient use of water and the protection of poorer households.

Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what public spending projects within *(a)* Wigan constituency and *(b)* the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan her Department had secured Treasury approval between 1 January 2010 and the date of her appointment as Secretary of State. [1690]

Richard Benyon: The Government are reassessing spending approvals granted between 1 January 2010 and the general election to ensure that they offer good value for money and are consistent with the Government's priorities. Further announcements will be made in due course.

HEALTH

Allied Health Professions

Ms Gisela Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the work of his Department's physician's assistants scheme; and whether he expects the scheme to continue. [1377]

Anne Milton: Skills for Health, in their role as the Sector Skills Council for the United Kingdom health sector, have been supporting employers to develop new roles such as the physicians' assistant. The role of physicians' assistant has been particularly successful in London and the west midlands and Skills for Health are sharing this good practice with employers in other areas so that they can consider whether to introduce this new role into their work force.

Given the length of time that the physicians' assistants have been in post, there has been no national evaluation of the role. However, there is to be a formal review of the Competence and Curriculum Framework later this year.

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease: Health Services

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when a chronic obstructive pulmonary disease national strategy is expected to be *(a)* completed and *(b)* implemented in practice. [2142]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department is currently reviewing the 117 responses received to its consultation on a strategy for services for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in England, and is expecting to make further announcements once the review process has concluded.

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS spent on treatment of people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in each of the last five years. [2143]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department publishes best estimates of the totality of its expenditure split by Programme budget on the Department's website at:

http://collections.europarchive.org/tna/20100509080731/http://dh.gov.uk/en/Managingyourorganisation/Financeandplanning/Programmebudgeting/DH_075743

Programme budgeting expenditure at England level is calculated using data from the Department accounts, arm's length bodies within the resource accounting boundary, primary care trusts and strategic health authorities.

The figures for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease fall under Programme Budgeting Category (PBC) Code 11A: Problems of the Respiratory System: Obstructive Airways Disease as shown in the following table.

Gross expenditure

£000

PBC code	*Programme budgeting category*	*2004-05*	*2005-06*	*2006-07*	*2007-08*	*2008-09*
11	Problems of the Respiratory System	3,072,258	3,468,754	3,539,634	3,802,489	4,247,083

Gross expenditure

PBC code	Programme budgeting category	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	£000 2008-09
11A	Problems of Respiratory System—Obstructive Airways Disease	—	—	576,008	592,646	698,132
11B	Problems of the Respiratory System—Asthma	—	—	849,076	967,101	1,035,384
11X	Problems of the Respiratory System—Other	—	—	2,114,551	2,242,742	2,513,568

As the underlying data are subject to yearly changes, the figures should be treated with caution when drawing any conclusions on changes in spending patterns between years. Also, the PBC figures for disease-specific expenditure do not include expenditure on prevention, or general practitioner expenditure, but do include prescribing expenditure. Some expenditure on obstructive airways disease may also be included in the "other" category due to problems with miscoding and difficulties with providing a definitive clinical diagnosis for all patients.

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. [2145]

Mr Simon Burns: The most recent data for 2008-09 published by the NHS Information Centre for health and social care show a total of 834,312 patients were counted on general practitioner practice chronic obstructive pulmonary disease registers as part of the Quality and Outcomes Framework for England.

Community Nurses: Travel

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the average number of miles travelled by community nurses in the latest period for which figures are available. [1401]

Anne Milton: No estimate has been made centrally.

Continuing Care

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish details of the Government's proposed commission on long-term care; whether he intends to ensure that all political parties are represented on the commission; and what consultation he intends to undertake on these matters prior to the appointment of the commission. [1737]

Mr Burstow: Details of the terms of reference and membership of the commission on funding long-term care will be published shortly.

Union Flag

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which his Department is responsible. [1812]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport issues guidance for the flying of the Union flag on United Kingdom Government buildings. The guidance encourages the Union flag to be flown 365 days a year, and as a minimum all Departments must fly the Union Flag on 19 special designated days, e.g. Queen's birthday, Remembrance day, etc., and other special occasions as required, e.g. State Opening of Parliament.

The Department of Health flies the Union flag at its official headquarters building, Richmond House in Whitehall 365 days of the year.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) each of its agencies in the latest year for which figures are available; and what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to the public purse of employing staff of each type at each of those bodies. [538]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department does not employ front-line staff. Its Executive Agency, the Medicines Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), has defined some front-line staff in its core public health operating functions of medicines licensing, pharmacovigilance, inspections, enforcement and its various devices functions as front line.

As at 31 March 2009, the core Department employed 2,630 whole time equivalent civil servants. As at 31 March 2009, the MHRA employed 901 whole time equivalent civil servants. According to its definitions, the MHRA employs 366 front-line whole time equivalent civil servants and 535 'other', whole time equivalent civil servants.

The cost of the core Department's paybill during the 2009-10 financial year was £151.9 million. The MHRA has estimated the annual cost to the public purse of the MHRA employing staff of each type during the 2009-10 financial year was £19.3 million for front-line staff and £33.2 million for 'other' staff.

Since 31 March 2010 there has been only one Executive Agency of the Department: the MHRA.

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which Ministers in his Department have been issued with *(a)* a BlackBerry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1428]

Mr Simon Burns: The only mobile telecoms or personal digital assistant devices that have been issued to Ministers of the Department are BlackBerry devices. These have been provided to Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Anne Milton) and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Earl Howe). The Department does not issue Apple iPhones to staff as these are not approved for Government use by the CESG. CESG is the Information Assurance arm of GCHQ which aims to protect and promote the vital interests of the United Kingdom by providing advice and assistance on the security of communications and electronic data.

Departmental Official Hospitality

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what budget his Department has allocated for entertainment, including alcohol, in each of the next three years. [1316]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department does not allocate budgets for entertainment, including alcohol. The Department's business rules prohibit the use of departmental funds for providing entertainment.

Departmental Official Residences

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any domestic properties in the gift of the Government have been allocated to the use of Ministers in his Department. [1785]

Mr Simon Burns: No domestic properties in the gift of the Government have been allocated for use by Ministers at the Department.

Departmental Translation Services

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of translating information distributed in the UK by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its associated public bodies into languages other than English in the latest period for which figures are available. [1717]

Mr Simon Burns: The total expenditure on translation of departmental leaflets and publications in England in the 2009-10 financial year was £327,532.83. This was significantly higher than in the 2008-09 financial year, for which the total expenditure was £130,020.00.

The translation costs for 2009-10 include a number of exceptional, one-off requirements, including translating essential swine flu information.

To research the costs for all associated public bodies would incur disproportionate costs.

Food Poisoning

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to reduce the incidence of food poisoning, with particular reference to the incidence during the summer months. [2309]

Anne Milton: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) undertakes a range of activities designed to reduce the incidence of food poisoning. These include:

The Foodborne Disease Strategy—a programme for reducing foodborne illness by targeting those pathogens that cause the greatest incidence and burden of disease in the United Kingdom. This programme includes the FSA Food Hygiene Campaign, designed to raise consumer awareness of food safety issues and good food hygiene practices;

The Food Hygiene Delivery Programme—set up to address the recommendations of the report of the Public Inquiry into the 2005 South Wales outbreak of *E. coli* 0157. A primary aim of this programme is to improve awareness and control of food safety hazards by food businesses, food law enforcers and consumers;

Provision of a range of guidance and resources to help catering businesses (particularly small businesses) to comply with the requirements of food hygiene legislation;

Development of a Food Hygiene Ratings Scheme (also known as 'scores on doors') to provide consumers with information on hygiene standards in food premises and encourage these businesses to improve their standards; and

Delivery of official food and feed controls and support for other Government Departments and local authorities' enforcement of food and feed hygiene and food standards.

The number of cases of foodborne illness shows a seasonal summer peak, between May and September. Most cases are due to *Campylobacter*, which has been identified as a priority organism for action in the FSA's Foodborne Disease Strategy. The FSA is working in partnership with industry and retail stakeholders to develop and implement interventions to reduce *Campylobacter* in chicken.

The FSA's Food Hygiene Campaign has been running since 2001 to raise awareness and increase understanding of food hygiene by consumers. The campaign's varied activities have included seasonal activity to address the rise in cases that occurs each summer, focusing on safe summer eating including barbecuing. UK Food Safety Week, a focus for the promotion of food hygiene messages, is held in June each year and has been co-ordinated by the FSA since 2007.

General Practitioners

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what mechanism the relationship between GP commissioning and the commissioning of services by primary care trusts is managed. [1685]

Mr Simon Burns: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 112W, and to the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) on 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 41W.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanism he intends to establish for the operation of GP commissioning. [1707]

Mr Simon Burns: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 112W.

Gosport War Memorial Hospital

Caroline Dinenage: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the operational status is of the oncology clinic at Gosport War Memorial Hospital. [2203]

Mr Burstow: This information is not held centrally. However, the Department is informed by the South Central Strategic Health Authority (SHA) that Hampshire Primary Care Trust (PCT) has temporarily suspended the oncology clinic at Gosport War Memorial Hospital due to staff shortages. The PCT aims to reinstate the sessions as soon as possible. The PCT has assured the Department that its overriding responsibility for patient safety is maintained at all times. The hon. Member may wish to contact South Central SHA for further information.

Health Professions

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* academic clinical fellowships and *(b)* clinical lectureships are funded by the NHS annually; and whether he plans to change the number of such posts so funded. [1682]

Mr Simon Burns: Each year the Department provides funding, through the National Institute for Health Research, for some 250 academic clinical fellowships and 100 post-doctoral clinical lectureships. There are no plans at the current time to change this.

Hospitals: Food

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines are in place for the provision of hospital meals to patients with *(a)* kosher, *(b)* halal, *(c)* vegetarian, *(d)* vegan and *(e)* other dietary requirements. [1767]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department does not provide specific guidelines about provision of these types of meals. However, the Care Quality Commission's publication, "Essential Standards of Quality and Safety"[1] sets out standards of quality that patients have a right to expect in hospital, including those relating to food. In meeting such standards, it requires providers who comply with the regulations[2] to provide choices of food and drink for people to meet their diverse needs, making sure it is nutritionally balanced and supports their health. In particular, patients should have a choice for each meal that takes account of their individual preferences and needs, including religious and cultural requirements.

Menus are devised and managed by hospital trusts locally. Trusts' catering functions have access to professional advice from hospital dieticians. In addition, information and good practice illustrations about delivering specific meals types are available to the national health service through a range of guidance material, in particular, via the Hospital Caterers Association website[3], which accommodates the dish selector guidance and other detailed support to the local NHS.

[1] Published by The Care Quality Commission March 2010.

[2] The guidance relates to providers of services that carry "regulated activities". These are defined in the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2009.

[3] www.hospitalcaterers.org/better-hospital-food/

Hospitals: Waiting Lists

Mr Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his most recent estimate is of average waiting times for hospital treatment in *(a)* Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency, *(b)* the London Borough of Bexley and *(c)* Greater London. [1898]

Mr Simon Burns: The information is not collected in the format requested. The information that is available is shown in the following table.

Average (median) waiting times from referral to treatment (weeks)

	Admitted patients	*Non-admitted patients*
London Strategic Health Authority	7.7	3.5
Bexley Care Trust	8.9	4.5
South London Healthcare NHS Trust	10.7	4.9

Notes:
1. Figures reflect average waiting times for patients treated during the month.
2. Waiting time is from referral to first definitive treatment.
3. Admitted figures are on an adjusted basis, i.e. excluding periods of delay introduced as a result of patients turning down offers of admissions made with reasonable notice.
4. The latest published Referral to Treatment data are for March 2010.

Source:
Department Monthly Referral to Treatment Return

Mental Health Services: Children

Simon Reevell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many child and adolescent psychoanalytic psychotherapists have qualified in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [2317]

(2) how many child and adolescent psychoanalytic psychotherapists worked in each region in the NHS in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [2318]

Mr Simon Burns: The information requested is not collected by the Department.

Simon Reevell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many child and adolescent psychoanalytic psychotherapists he estimates will work in each region of the NHS in each of the next two years; and if he will make a statement. [2319]

Mr Simon Burns: The information requested is not collected by the Department.

Local national health service organisations are best placed to decide what staff are needed that best serve the needs of their local populations and recruit and train the staff required.

NHS: Finance

Mr Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the total health budget was spent on *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary care in the latest period for which figures are available. [2126]

Mr Simon Burns: In 2008-09, 22% of the Department's revenue expenditure was on primary care, and 63.5% on secondary care. These percentages are calculated using summarised primary care trust accounts 2008-09, and final reported outturn expenditure.

NHS: Standards

Heidi Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what each primary care trust scored in the Care Quality Commission's most recent assessment of performance on delayed transfers of care; and what vital signs data are available for each such trust in each of the last 12 quarters. [1621]

Mr Simon Burns: The Care Quality Commission (CQC) uses delayed transfers of care as an indicator within its periodic review of primary care trusts.

The CQC's 2008-09 delayed transfers of care scores are shown in the following table.

A complete set of quarterly vital signs data is not held centrally.

Primary care trust	*2008-09 Delayed transfers of care score*
Ashton, Leigh and Wigan Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Barking and Dagenham Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Barnet Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Barnsley Primary Care Trust	Achieved

Primary care trust	2008-09 Delayed transfers of care score
Bassetlaw Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Bath and North East Somerset Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Bedfordshire Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Berkshire East Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Berkshire West Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Bexley Care Trust	Achieved
Birmingham East and North Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Blackburn with Darwen Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Blackpool Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Bolton Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Bournemouth and Poole Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Bradford and Airedale Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Brent Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Brighton and Hove City Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Bristol Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Bromley Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Buckinghamshire Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Bury Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Calderdale Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Camden Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Central and Eastern Cheshire Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Central Lancashire Primary Care Trust	Achieved
City and Hackney Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
County Durham Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Coventry Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Croydon Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Cumbria Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Darlington Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Derby City Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Derbyshire County Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Devon Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Doncaster Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Dorset Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Dudley Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Ealing Primary Care Trust	Achieved
East and North Hertfordshire Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
East Lancashire Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
East Riding of Yorkshire Primary Care Trust	Achieved
East Sussex Downs and Weald Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Eastern and Coastal Kent Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Enfield Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Gateshead Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Great Yarmouth and Waveney Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Greenwich Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Halton and St Helens Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Hammersmith and Fulham Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Hampshire Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Haringey Teaching Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Harrow Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Hartlepool Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Hastings and Rother Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Havering Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Heart of Birmingham Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Herefordshire Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Hillingdon Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Hounslow Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Hull Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Isle of Wight NHS Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Islington Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Kensington and Chelsea Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Kingston Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Kirklees Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Knowsley Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Lambeth Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Leeds Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Leicester City Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Leicestershire County and Rutland Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Lewisham Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Lincolnshire Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Liverpool Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Luton Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Manchester Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Medway Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Mid Essex Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Milton Keynes Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Newcastle Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Newham Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Norfolk Primary Care Trust	Achieved
North East Essex Primary Care Trust	Achieved
North East Lincolnshire Care Trust Plus	Achieved
North Lancashire Teaching Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
North Lincolnshire Primary Care Trust	Achieved
North Somerset Primary Care Trust	Achieved
North Staffordshire Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
North Tyneside Primary Care Trust	Achieved
North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Northamptonshire Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Northumberland Care Trust	Achieved
Nottingham City Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Nottinghamshire County Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Oldham Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Peterborough Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Plymouth Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Portsmouth City Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Redbridge Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Redcar and Cleveland Primary Care Trust	Achieved

Primary care trust	*2008-09 Delayed transfers of care score*
Richmond and Twickenham Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Rotherham Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Salford Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Sandwell Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Sefton Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Sheffield Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Shropshire County Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Solihull Care Trust	Achieved
Somerset Primary Care Trust	Achieved
South Birmingham Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
South East Essex Primary Care Trust	Achieved
South Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
South Staffordshire Primary Care Trust	Achieved
South Tyneside Primary Care Trust	Achieved
South West Essex Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Southampton City Primary Care Trust	Failed
Southwark Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Stockport Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Stockton-on-Tees Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Stoke on Trent Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Suffolk Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Surrey Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Swindon Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Tameside and Glossop Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Telford and Wrekin Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Torbay Care Trust	Failed
Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Trafford Primary Care Trust	Failed
Wakefield District Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Walsall Teaching Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Waltham Forest Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Wandsworth Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Warrington Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Warwickshire Primary Care Trust	Achieved
West Essex Primary Care Trust	Achieved
West Hertfordshire Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
West Kent Primary Care Trust	Achieved
West Sussex Primary Care Trust	Underachieved
Western Cheshire Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Westminster Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Wiltshire Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Wirral Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Wolverhampton City Primary Care Trust	Achieved
Worcestershire Primary Care Trust	Achieved

Source:
Care Quality Commission website: 2008-09 NHS Performance Ratings

NHS: Working Hours

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to introduce proposals to mitigate the effect on the NHS of the European working time directive; and if he will make a statement. [1683]

Mr Simon Burns: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State supports the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills in taking a robust approach to future negotiations on the revision of the directive including maintenance of the opt-out.

We will not go back to the past with tired doctors working excessive hours, but the way the directive is now applied is clearly unsatisfactory and is causing great problems for health services across Europe. We therefore support efforts to resolve these issues and stand ready to work with the European Commission and other member states on radical and creative approaches to gain additional flexibilities.

Respite Care

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that carers have access to respite care. [1681]

Mr Burstow: We need to examine how effectively existing arrangements are being implemented. We are currently analysing information from strategic health authorities about the priority accorded to supporting carers by primary care trusts. In addition, we will consider how local authority direct payments and personal budgets can be used in ways that enable both carers and the people that they care for access to community support, including respite.

Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for which public expenditure projects in *(a)* Wigan constituency and *(b)* the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan his Department secured Treasury approval between 1 January 2010 and the date of his appointment as Secretary of State. [1742]

Mr Simon Burns: No national health service capital build, information technology or arm's length body schemes above local strategic health authority delegated limits were approved by the Department for the area covered by the local NHS organisations for the period indicated.

Details of schemes that may have been approved by the local NHS according to their delegated limits can be obtained from the NHS organisations concerned.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Petitions

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Leader of the House when he plans to announce mechanisms by which the public may submit petitions to this House for debate. [1637]

Sir George Young: The Government will bring forward new proposals for the public to engage with the House by submitting petitions which will be eligible for debate if they obtain 100,000 signatures, with the petition which attracts the most signatures triggering an opportunity for a Bill to be presented. We will also bring forward proposals for a new public reading stage of Government Bills.

There is clear scope for these proposals to be taken forward together, and in co-operation with the House's wider work on public engagement, in order to ensure that they are implemented in a way that is consistent, coherent and cost-effective.

The final decision about the appropriate mechanism will rest with the House itself and I hope to be able to bring forward proposals soon.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Public Appointments

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments he has made since his appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [365]

Mr Paterson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W, to the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman).

PRIME MINISTER

Andy Coulson and Jonny Oates

Mr Watson: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to the answer of 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 37W, on Andy Coulson and Jonny Oates (1) whether his *(a)* Director of Communications and *(b)* Deputy Director of Communications are subject to the provisions of the Official Secrets Act; whether each has subscribed to its provisions; and whether each is entitled to view Government documents classified as (i) secret and (ii) top secret; [1453]

(2) what the roles and responsibilities of his *(a)* Director of Communications and *(b)* Deputy Director of Communications are; if he will publish details of the salaries of each position in the same format as those published for senior civil servants; for how many people each has management responsibility; on what date each subscribed to the code of conduct for special advisers; and on what date he expects each to declare their external interests relevant to their posts. [1454]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to my written ministerial statement of 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 32WS.

Corruption: Public Service

Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Prime Minister whether he plans to appoint an International Anti-Corruption Champion. [1025]

The Prime Minister: The Government and relevant Departments place anti-corruption in all international dealings at the centre of their strategies. I have appointed the Lord Chancellor my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) as the Government's International Anti-Corruption Champion to take forward the Government's efforts in this area.

Departmental Manpower

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Prime Minister how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers are employed by his Office; and at what civil service pay grade in each such case. [1247]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to my written ministerial statement of 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 32WS. My Office employs 10 civil service press officers, one of whom is in the senior civil service. This figure does not include the Prime Minister's Official Spokesman, a role filled by a senior civil servant.

North East

Mr Anderson: To ask the Prime Minister when he next plans to visit the north-east; and if he will make a statement. [2355]

The Prime Minister: I hope to make visits across the United Kingdom over the coming months.

Regional Planning and Development: West Midlands

Richard Burden: To ask the Prime Minister which Secretary of State is responsible for responding to the second and third reports of the West Midlands Regional Committee of Session 2009-10, HC 421 and HC 528; and when he expects those responses to be made. [2424]

The Prime Minister: The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government is responsible for responding to these reports.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff his Department employed on the most recent date for which figures are available; and what the annual staff cost was. [1571]

Michael Moore: Information on Scotland Office staff numbers and costs are published routinely in the Office's annual report, copies of which are in the House Library.

Devolution

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with the *(a)* Prime Minister, *(b)* Deputy Prime Minister and *(c)* First Minister of Scotland on the implementation of the proposals of the Commission on Scottish Devolution; and if he will make a statement. [2167]

Michael Moore: I am pleased to report to the House that I have had the opportunity to discuss the Government's commitment to implement the recommendations in the Calman Report with the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and the First Minister. I have also spoken with other Cabinet colleagues who have policy interests in the recommendations.

The coalition agreement clearly set out the Government's commitment to implement recommendations from the report. Both I and my ministerial colleagues have made clear that we welcome the involvement and views of the Scottish Government, and I am pleased with the engagement that we have had to date. The Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, First Minister and I all attended the Joint Ministerial Committee meeting on 8 June; there was a positive and constructive dialogue between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations.

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will announce a timetable for implementation of the proposals of the Commission on Scottish Devolution. [2168]

Michael Moore: The coalition Government's commitment to the implementation the recommendations in the Calman Report was clearly signalled by its inclusion within the coalition agreement. This was further underlined by the inclusion in the Queen's Speech of a commitment for legislation in the first Session.

I am clear that we need to make early progress to meet this commitment and I have asked my officials to work for autumn introduction of a Bill to take forward those recommendations that require legislation. Work will continue on the non-legislative recommendations to a similar timetable.

Future Jobs Fund

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people resident in *(a)* Glasgow North East, *(b)* the City of Glasgow and *(c)* Scotland have found employment through the Future Jobs Fund since 2008; and how many young people aged between 18 and 24 years resident in (i) Glasgow North East, (ii) the City of Glasgow and (iii) Scotland will lose entitlement to a job offer or training under the Jobs Guarantee in the first 12 months after the ending of the Future Jobs Fund. [1972]

Michael Moore: Nearly 11,000 jobs in Scotland have been approved for funding through the Future Jobs Fund from October 2008 to March 2011, at least 1,166 of which are in the Glasgow local authority area.

Information for *(a)* and *(b)* is not available. The latest Official Statistics published on 26 May 2010 show that 830 people started Future Jobs Fund jobs in Scotland from October 2009 to January 2010.

In relation to (i), (ii) and (iii), the Young Person's Guarantee will continue to provide a guaranteed offer of a job, training or work experience. The Government will ensure that people continue to have access to employment support prior to the implementation of the new Work Programme outlined in the Programme for Government.

General Elections

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive and Scottish returning officers on plans to hold the next general election on 7 May 2015. [2050]

Michael Moore: The issue was raised when the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and I—together with other Cabinet colleagues—met the First Minister and his counterparts from the other devolved Administrations at the Joint Ministerial Committee on 8 June.

Public Expenditure

Mr Bone: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what his most recent estimate is of the level of per capita public expenditure in Scotland in 2010-11. [1957]

Michael Moore: HM Treasury's Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses provide the most recent estimate for public expenditure per capita in Scotland for 2010-11, but this does not include local authority spending. The most recent estimate for 2010-11 stands at £7,127 per capita.

TREASURY

Child Trust Fund: Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have opened child trust fund accounts in Wigan constituency at *(a)* the standard rate and *(b)* the higher rate; and how much the Government have contributed to such accounts to date. [1744]

Mr Hoban: Statistical information about child trust funds is published on HM Revenue and Customs' website at:

http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/ctf/stats.htm.

This shows that 5,277 children born on or before 6 April 2008 in the then Wigan constituency have a child trust fund account.

Debts: Developing Countries

Tony Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when he expects to publish his Department's review of vulture funds; and if he will make a statement: [1708]

(2) when he expects his Department to complete its review of vulture funds; and what form of consultation he intends to undertake on this matter. [1745]

Mr Hoban *[holding answer 10 June 2010]:* The coalition programme for Government stated:

"We will review what action can be taken against 'vulture funds'."

The Debt Relief (Developing Countries) Act 2010 passed through Parliament in April and will mean that UK courts of law will no longer be used to pursue excessive claims against some of the poorest countries on their historic debts, ensuring that resources are available to tackle poverty. The sunset clause attached to this legislation requires that the Government review within a year whether or not to extend the Act.

Union Flag

Ian Austin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which his Department is responsible. [1814]

Justine Greening: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport issues guidance for the flying of the Union flag on UK Government buildings. The guidance encourages the Union flag to be flown 365 days a year, and as a minimum all Departments must fly the Union flag on the 19 special designated days (e.g. Queen's birthday, Remembrance Day, etc), and other special occasions as required (e.g. State Opening of Parliament).

More information on the guidance is available online at:

http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/honours/7124.aspx

HM Treasury has three buildings throughout England in which this guidance is followed.

Legislative Reform (Industrial and Provident Societies and Credit Unions) Order 2010

Chris Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to lay the Legislative Reform (Industrial and Provident Societies and Credit Unions) Order 2010 before Parliament. [1680]

Mr Hoban: The draft Legislative Reform (Industrial and Provident Societies and Credit Unions) Order 2010 was laid before Parliament on 8 March 2010 using the super affirmative procedure.

Office for Budget Responsibility

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Office for Budget Responsibility will have responsibilities other than those currently undertaken by his Department and the Bank of England. [1581]

Justine Greening: The Terms of Reference for the interim Office for Budget Responsibility were published on 8 June alongside a written ministerial statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Copies of the document are available in the Vote Office and have been deposited in the Libraries of the House.

Chris Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the annual running costs of the Office for Budget Responsibility. [1679]

Justine Greening: The interim Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) is funded from within HM Treasury's existing departmental budget.

Sir Alan Budd, as Chair of the Budget Responsibility Committee, will be advising the Chancellor on the arrangements for the permanent OBR. The annual running costs of the office will depend on decisions taken on the basis of this advice.

Private Finance Initiative

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the liabilities incurred under the private finance initiative between 1997 and 2010 which have not been recorded as comprising a proportion of the public sector net cash requirement. [1653]

Danny Alexander: HM Treasury publishes actual and estimated annual unitary charge payment for each signed PFI contract for each year of operation on the HM Treasury website:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/ppp_pfi_stats.htm

The interim Office for Budget Responsibility will consider the reporting of public sector liabilities, including those relating to the private finance initiative.

Tax Allowances: Vocational Training

Mr Watson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much income tax relief was claimed by self-employed people to meet the costs of training provision in the latest year for which figures are available; [1782]

(2) how many employees claimed a deduction from earnings on expenses that they incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily for the purposes of training under section 336 of the Income Tax (Earnings and Pensions) Act 2003 in the latest year for which figures are available; [1783]

(3) how much companies claimed in income tax relief to meet the costs of expenditure on training for their employees in the latest year for which figures are available. [1784]

Mr Gauke: This information is not available. Neither self-employed individuals nor employers are required to report these amounts separately to HM Revenue and Customs. If amounts are not taxable, employers need not report them at all.

Tax Avoidance and Evasion

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he plans to take to reduce the level of tax *(a)* avoidance and *(b)* evasion; and if he will make a statement. [1580]

Mr Gauke: The Government are committed to tackling tax avoidance and evasion, and will bring forward measures where necessary in future Budgets and pre-Budget Reports to address these risks.

HMRC set out its compliance strategy and the approach to reducing tax gaps in "Protecting Tax Revenues 2009", available at:

http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/pbr2009/protect-tax-revenue-5450.pdf

Unemployment

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account he takes of unemployment statistics in the formulation of fiscal policy. [1582]

Justine Greening: The Chancellor takes account of all relevant economic and financial variables, including the level of unemployment, in the formulation of fiscal policy.

For the 22 June Budget, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) will make an independent assessment of the public finances and the economy, including the labour market. The OBR will publish this assessment on 14 June.

VAT

Mr Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will bring forward proposals to put on a statutory basis the concession whereby small business may pay value added tax in three instalments monthly instead of quarterly. [2425]

Mr Gauke: HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) runs the Business Payment Support Service (BPSS) to help viable businesses in temporary financial difficulties spread their tax payments over a timetable they can afford. The BPSS operates under HMRC's statutory responsibility for the collection and management of VAT and other revenues. Since its launch in November 2008, the BPSS has helped over 200,000 businesses.

HMRC operates two other schemes to help small businesses, whose taxable turnover in the coming year is not expected to exceed £1.35 million, to even out VAT payments:

1. The Annual Accounting scheme allows businesses to spread their VAT payments evenly by paying monthly or quarterly instalments towards their annual VAT bill.

2. The Cash Accounting scheme allows businesses to account for VAT only when they make or receive payment (rather than on the issue of an invoice, under normal accounting rules). This can provide a cash flow benefit, especially where customers pay late.

Both schemes are set out in legislation.

Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) for what public spending projects within *(a)* Wigan constituency and *(b)* the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan his Department secured Treasury approval between 1 January 2010 and the date of his appointment as Secretary of State; [1688]

(2) which public spending projects in *(a)* Wigan constituency and *(b)* the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan for which approval has been granted he is reviewing. [1741]

Danny Alexander: The Government are re-assessing spending approvals granted between 1 January 2010 and the general election to ensure that they are affordable, offer good value for money and are consistent with the Government's priorities. Further announcements will be made in due course.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in the Government Equalities Office. [1492]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government Equalities Office has no cars allocated to its Ministers.

Arrangements are changing following the publication of the new Ministerial Code which contains changes that affect ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. The Code states that:

"the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed".

Cabinet Office has provided clarification on how the Code should be interpreted. The expectation is that Ministers not in the Cabinet will use the pool service and that Cabinet Ministers who have an allocated car will wish to consider how that car might be utilised by other Ministers within the Department before calls are made on the Government Car Service Pool.

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with Departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Future Jobs Fund

Mr Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received on his plans for the future jobs fund; and if he will make a statement. [1859]

Chris Grayling: I have received virtually no direct representations on plans for the future jobs fund.

The future jobs fund has closed to new bids; however, we will continue to create over 100,000 opportunities. The Government will also be investing £150 million to create 50,000 new apprenticeship places. This investment will provide long-lasting benefits rather than temporary changes to unemployment.

Next year we will introduce our new Work Programme, which will bring better targeted and more effective support to young people and the unemployed.

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the future jobs fund in helping the unemployed into work. [1867]

Chris Grayling: The fund is not delivering the numbers it promised—the previous Government funded providers to create 25,000 jobs by the end of January but figures show that they managed fewer than 9,000.

It is also the most expensive element of the young person's guarantee. At up to £6,500 per person, it is over five times more expensive than other elements of the guarantee.

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many young people have found employment as a result of the future jobs fund in *(a)* the west midlands and *(b)* Coventry. [1868]

Chris Grayling: The latest Official Statistics covering the period October 2009 to January 2010 show that 790 young people in the west midlands have started future jobs fund jobs. Information for Coventry is not available.

Liz Kendall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for the future jobs fund in Leicester; and if he will make a statement. [1872]

Chris Grayling: The Government will honour all grants that have been agreed. This includes a number of grant agreements covering Leicester, including from the city and county councils. We will ensure that people continue to have access to employment support prior to the implementation of the Work Programme. This will provide a comprehensive range of targeted and effective support.

Natascha Engel: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment has been made of the effects of his plans for ending the future jobs fund on levels of unemployment of young people. [1874]

Chris Grayling: The future jobs fund has not ended. It will continue to create jobs until March 2011 and create up to 111,000 jobs in that time. Based on evidence from previous job creation schemes, it is unlikely that there will be any discernible impact on youth unemployment as a result of the fund ending.

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent estimate he has made of the likely level of savings arising from the ending of the future jobs fund; and if he will make a statement. [1154]

Chris Grayling: The closure of the future jobs fund to new bids will save £290 million in the 2010-11 financial year.

We will make further efficiencies by improving the grant management process introduced by the previous Government. This will ensure that overpayments are recovered promptly and that providers deliver the jobs on time.

Young People: Long-term Employment

19. **Richard Harrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans his Department has to promote long-term employment for young people. [1869]

Chris Grayling: Youth unemployment is unacceptably high. We will introduce a new single Work Programme in the first half of 2011, which offers young people targeted personalised help. This will be delivered through the best of private and voluntary sector providers. We will ensure that young people continue to have access to employment support prior to the implementation of the Work Programme.

Unemployment

20. **Mr Raab:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on reducing levels of unemployment. [1870]

Mr Duncan Smith: One of our top priorities is to reduce the number of people—nearly 5 million—on incapacity, lone parent or jobseekers benefits.

We will reform the benefits system to make work pay, reassess the position of people on incapacity benefit and introduce the Work Programme, a single, integrated package of support, to give people the personalised support they need to find work.

Early Intervention

21. **Mr Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on measures to promote early intervention. [1871]

Mr Duncan Smith: I have had regular discussions with the Secretary of State for Education, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and other colleagues about measures to promote early intervention and its impact on childhood disadvantage. We will set out our strategy to tackle child poverty by March 2011.

We look forward to working with colleagues and stakeholders to ensure that tackling poverty and disadvantage in the most effective ways is a priority at every level of Government and that all parts of society play their part in achieving our goal. The establishment of the Social Justice Committee will ensure that we take a joined-up approach across Government.

Benefits

23. **Kate Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he plans to take to increase take-up of benefits. [1873]

Steve Webb: Latest estimates of take-up of all income-related benefits in 2008-09 were published on 10 June 2010. The figures show that there was £38.1 billion claimed across all income-related benefits representing between around 75% and 85% take-up by expenditure. Expenditure take-up by pensioners was between 71% and 81%. The Take-Up report is available online at:

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/irb.asp

We want to make sure that everyone is getting all the help that they are entitled to. Our aim is to simplify the benefit system and as a first step we will be looking to conduct a research study into the feasibility of using existing data to make automatic awards of pension credit.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many full-time equivalent staff at each Civil Service grade are employed in the private office of each Minister in his Department. [122]

Chris Grayling: The following full-time equivalent staff were recruited by the previous Administration to work within each Minister's private office as follows:

	Number
Secretary of State	
SCS	1
G7	2
SEO	0
HEO	4
EO	1
Minister of State for Employment	
SCS	0
G7	1
SEO	1
HEO	4
EO	1
Minister of State for Pensions	
SCS	0
G7	1
SEO	0
HEO	3
EO	1

	Number
Minister for Disabled People	
SCS	0
G7	1
SEO	0
HEO	1
EO	3
Lords Minister—Minister for Welfare Reform	
SCS	0
G7	1
SEO	0
HEO	1
EO	3
Temporary staff (interns)	
EO	5
Total	5

Funeral Payments

Gordon Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the maximum amount payable as a funeral payment was last increased. [2089]

Steve Webb: The maximum amount payable to cover disbursements, including funeral directors' fees and items such as the coffin, has been £700 since April 2003. Cremation and burial costs, including the purchase of a grave, are met in full. The average funeral payment awarded in 2009-10 was £1,208.

Future Jobs Fund: West Midlands

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in *(a)* Dudley North, *(b)* the borough of Dudley and *(c)* the west midlands have been placed into employment through the Future Jobs Fund. [1507]

Chris Grayling: The information requested is not available.

Future Jobs Fund: Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people resident in *(a)* Wigan constituency and *(b)* Wigan local authority area are participating in the future jobs fund. [1633]

Chris Grayling: The information requested is not available.

Incapacity Benefit

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects to *(a)* commence and *(b)* complete the reassessment of those in receipt of incapacity benefit; and what recent changes to this timetable there have been. [1907]

Chris Grayling: The process of moving incapacity benefit recipients on to a more active benefit regime and giving them the support they need is a serious priority. We will be doing everything to complete this process as quickly as possible, while ensuring the most vulnerable are supported appropriately.

We will be testing and learning from a small-scale trial, which will run from October 2010. Full migration will begin in early 2011. We expect it to be completed over three years. There have been no recent changes to this timetable.

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the timetable is for the Government's planned re-assessment of all current claimants of incapacity benefit for their readiness to work; and whether any targets have been set for the number of people to be removed from incapacity benefit through this re-assessment. [2162]

Chris Grayling: We will be testing and learning from a small-scale trial which will run from October 2010. Full migration will not begin until April 2011. We expect it to be completed in 2014.

All claimants will be removed from incapacity benefits. No targets have been set regarding which benefit claimants will be placed. They will be moved on to either employment and support allowance or other benefits appropriate to their circumstances.

Industrial Diseases: Compensation

Jim Sheridan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he plans to publish a response to the accessing compensation consultation; and what steps the Government plan to take to ensure that people who are injured or made ill by their work obtain the compensation to which they are entitled. [2529]

Chris Grayling: The public consultation closed on 5 May 2010. We are currently considering the replies we received and we will publish our response to the consultation in due course.

Industrial Health and Safety

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of health and safety incidents reported to the Health and Safety Executive in each year since 2000 were reported by a trade union official. [1961]

Chris Grayling: The information requested is not available.

Industrial Health and Safety: North East

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many industrial health and safety incidents were reported to the Health and Safety Executive in the north-east in each year since 2000; and if he will make a statement. [1962]

Chris Grayling: HSE collects data on workplace health and safety incidents through the RIDDOR reporting system (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations). HSE routinely collates injury data at a regional level for reported workplace injuries. Data are also collected on reported dangerous occurrences and gas safety incidents.

Available figures for the north-east, for incidents reported to HSE, are provided in the following table:

	Number of reported injuries	*Number of reported dangerous occurrences*	*Number of reported flammable gas incidents*	*Number of reported dangerous gas fittings*
2001-02	6,914	174	12	278
2002-03	6,687	144	10	110
2003-04	6,985	175	5	204
2004-05	6,236	143	5	171
2005-06	6,080	205	3	142
2006-07	6,176	176	2	157
2007-08	5,709	188	11	233
2008-09[1]	5,835	158	13	163

[1] Provisional.

Jobseeker's Allowance: North-East

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his most recent estimate is of the amount which will be paid out in jobseeker's allowance over the next *(a)* 12, *(b)* 24 and *(c)* 36 months in (i) the north-east and (ii) Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland constituency. [1966]

Chris Grayling: The information requested is not available.

Social Fund

Dr Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he plans to review the benefits of which those making an application for assistance under the social fund must be in receipt prior to submitting their application. [1889]

Steve Webb: The social fund comprises certain regulated payments and discretionary grants and loans. Access to the social fund is usually dependent on receipt of a qualifying benefit. Qualifying benefits are specified income-related benefits and, for certain payments, tax credits. Crisis loans can be paid to people on and off benefit.

We currently have no plans to make any changes but will be keeping eligibility for the social fund under continuous review.

State Retirement Pensions

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on changing the state pension age. [1713]

Steve Webb: Our objective is to ensure that the state pension remains affordable over time. To help achieve this, the state pension age needs to take account of increases in life expectancy. We have announced we will hold a review to determine when it should be increased to 66.

Mr Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in the UK are in receipt of the state pension. [2129]

Steve Webb: As at November 2009, there were 11,312,350 state pension recipients in Great Britain. Information regarding Northern Ireland is a matter for the Northern Ireland Office.

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:

DWP Information Directorate: Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study

State Second Pension

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what change he expects to propose to state second pension payments in 2010-11. [1518]

Steve Webb: The legislation which governs the annual review of the rates of benefits and pensions requires that state second pension and additional elements of the state pension are increased each year in line with the growth in prices. The fact that they stayed the same in April 2010 was due to negative price inflation. Under this legislation, when prices continue growing as normal, state second pension and additional elements of the state pension must be increased by that growth.

Unemployment Benefits: Disability

Mr Holloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on the provision of support for people who are unable to work as a result of disability. [1852]

Maria Miller: The Government recognise that some people will not be able to work, or prepare for work, because of a disability. These people will receive unconditional support and will be able to have help to find employment on a voluntary basis.

Financial support for those who are unable to work will be through cash benefits, such as disability living allowance and the employment and support allowance (replacing incapacity benefits).

Unemployment Benefits: Pendle

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people of working age in Pendle *(a)* are in receipt of out-of-work benefits and *(b)* have been in receipt of such benefits for at least nine of the last 10 years. [1138]

Chris Grayling: The most recent available information on those people in receipt of out-of-work benefits is in the following table.

Number of claimants in receipt of out-of-work benefits in Great Britain (GB) and abroad, and the Pendle parliamentary constituency as at November 2009

	GB and abroad	*Pendle*
All	4,998,790	8,740
JSA	1,469,920	2,040
IB/SDA/ESA	2,658,880	5,510

Number of claimants in receipt of out-of-work benefits in Great Britain (GB) and abroad, and the Pendle parliamentary constituency as at November 2009

	GB and abroad	Pendle
IS	869,990	1,190

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Benefits are arranged hierarchically and claimants are assigned to the topmost benefit which they receive.
3. JSA—claimant of jobseeker's allowance.
4. IB/SDA/ESA—claimant of incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance or employment and support allowance.
5. IS—income Support claimants include lone parents and those not included in the IB/SDA figure.

Source:
DWP Information Directorate: Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study. Information on those who have been in receipt of out of work benefits for at least nine of the last 10 years is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Union Flag

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what her policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which her Department is responsible. [1811]

Nick Herbert: My Department flies the Union flag on 365 days of the year at those buildings which have flagpoles.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special advisers *(a)* she and *(b)* each named Minister in her Department (i) has appointed to date and (ii) plans to appoint. [319]

Nick Herbert: I refer to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Departmental Public Appointments

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments she has made since her appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [368]

Nick Herbert: I refer to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when and in what form she plans to publish a list of all items of expenditure by her Department over £25,000. [278]

Nick Herbert: The Prime Minister has written to Cabinet Ministers reiterating transparency commitments made in the Coalition Programme for Government, and setting out a timetable for achieving them. In particular, all new items of central Government spending over £25,000 will be published online in an open format from November 2010.

Drugs: Crime

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been *(a)* arrested and *(b)* jailed as a result of offences committed under the terms of the Drugs Act 2005. [2025]

James Brokenshire: The information requested on arrests is not held centrally.

The arrests collection held by the Home Office covers arrests for recorded crime (notifiable offences) only, broken down at a main offence group level, covering categories such as violence against the person and drug offences. From these centrally reported categories it is not possible to separately identify arrests made under the Drugs Act 2005.

Data on immediate custodial sentences under the Act, provided by the Ministry of Justice, can be found in the following table.

Number of immediate custodial sentences under the Drugs Act 2005, 2005-08

	2005	2006	2007	2008
Failure to attend or stay the duration of an initial assessment[1]	0	1	4	1
Failure to attend or stay the duration of a follow up assessment[2]	0	0	3	3

[1] s.12 (3) and (4) Drugs Act 2005
[2] s.14 (3) and (4) Drugs Act 2005

Notes:
1. These figures have been drawn from administrative data systems. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system.
2. These data have been taken from the Ministry of Justice Court Proceedings database. These data are presented on the principal offence basis. Where an offender has been sentenced for more than one offence the principal offence is the one for which the heaviest sentence was imposed. Where the same sentence has been imposed for two or more offences the principal offence is the one for which the statutory maximum is most severe.
3. Excludes data for Cardiff magistrates court for April, July, and August 2008.

Source:
Justice Statistics—Analytical Services, Ministry of Justice
Ref: SENT(JSAS)164-10 (09/06/2010)

Firearms

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* firearm registrations and *(b)* gun-related crimes there were in 2008-09; [2012]

(2) if she will take steps to ensure that the eligibility criteria for a shotgun certificate are brought into line with those for a firearm certificate so that a justification for ownership is required to be provided at the time of application; [2015]

(3) if she will bring forward proposals to reduce the period of time for which a firearm ownership certificate is valid; [2017]

(4) what assessment she has made of the merits of a limit on the number of firearms that can be owned under one firearms certificate. [2000]

James Brokenshire: I refer to the statement given by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 592. The Government will lead a full debate about our current gun laws once we know more about the tragic shootings in Cumbria.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what her most recent estimate is of the percentage of gun-related crimes in which the intentional use of firearms has resulted in death; [2014]

(2) what percentage of firearm-related crime resulted in fatal or serious injury in 2008-09; and what percentage of such crime involved *(a)* rifles and *(b)* shotguns. [2016]

James Brokenshire: Firearms (including air weapons) were reported to have been used in 14,250 recorded crimes in 2008-09. Firearms are taken to be involved in a crime if they are fired, used as a blunt instrument or used as a threat. A fatal or serious injury was incurred in 3% of these offences (431 offences), including 0.06% that involved rifles (eight offences) and 0.51% that involved shotguns (72 offences).

From information collected centrally it is not possible to determine whether or not firearms had been used intentionally, though it is worth noting that the firearm offences database includes only those incidents that police forces have initially recorded as crimes.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of recorded crime involved a firearm in 2008-09; [2064]

(2) how many recorded crimes involving a firearm there were in *(a)* 2008 and *(b)* 2009; [2065]

(3) what percentage of recorded crime involving a firearm involved *(a)* shotguns, *(b)* rifles and *(c)* imitation weapons in 2008-09. [2066]

James Brokenshire: Available information was included in the most recent chapter on offences involving firearms, published in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin 01/10 in January 2010. Firearms are taken to be involved in a crime if they are fired, used as a blunt instrument or used as a threat.

Firearms (including air weapons) were reported to have been used in 14,250 recorded crimes in 2008-09. These accounted for 0.3% of all recorded crimes, or one in every 330. Firearm offences as a proportion of all recorded crime by principal weapon category are shown in the table.

Offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used[1], by weapon type: England and Wales, 2008-09

Principal weapon	*Number of offences*	*% of all recorded crime*
Shotgun	619	0.01
Handgun	4,275	0.09
Rifle	89	0.00
Imitation firearm	1,511	0.03
Unidentified firearm	953	0.02
Other firearm	761	0.02
All firearms excluding air weapons	8,208	0.17
Air weapon	6,042	0.13
Total	14,250	0.30

[1] By weapon being fired, used as a blunt instrument or as a threat.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for possession of a firearm were *(a)* rejected and *(b)* rejected due to mental health issues in 2008-09. [2067]

James Brokenshire: The Home Office does not use the term "rejection" but publishes the number of refusals of firearm certificates. In the period between 1 April 2008 and 31 March 2009, 133 new applications, 24 renewal applications and 22 variation applications were refused. Thus, in total 179 applications for firearm certificates were refused. The Home Office does not hold any information on the reasons for the refusals.

All available data are published in the National Statistics Bulletin "Firearm Certificates in England and Wales 2008/09" at the following link:

http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/hosb0510.pdf

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) in how many cases in 2008-09 those owning a firearm and wanting to renew their licence have had it revoked; and of these cases, what number have been related to mental health; [2068]

(2) how many holders of a licence for the possession of a firearm had their licence *(a)* revoked and *(b)* revoked due to mental health issues when seeking to renew their licence in 2008-09. [2069]

James Brokenshire: The Home Office only holds data on the total number of revocations. In the period between 1 April 2008 and 31 March 2009, 260 firearm certificates were revoked. The Home Office does not hold any information on the reasons for the revocations.

All available data are published in the National Statistics Bulletin "Firearm Certificates in England and Wales 2008/09" at the following link:

http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/hosb0510.pdf

Forced Marriage

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate she has made of the number of forced marriages which occurred in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* England in each of the last five years. [1036]

Mr Jeremy Browne: I have been asked to reply.

Due to the underground nature of forced marriage it is very difficult to estimate the scale of this practice in the UK and it is therefore likely that many cases go unreported.

The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), a joint unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Home Office, was established in 2005 as the 'one-stop shop' for dealing with forced marriage policy, outreach and casework. It operates both inside the UK, where support is provided to any individual, and overseas, where consular assistance is provided to British nationals, including dual nationals.

The FMU collects data on (i) the number of reports it receives relating to possible forced marriages and (ii) the number of cases where the FMU provides direct support to a victim in the UK or overseas. Data on the number of reports made to the FMU relating to possible forced marriages were not collected prior to 2008. Data collected since then are recorded by UK region (where

this is known) and are not broken down further. Data on the number of cases where the FMU provided direct support are available from 2005. Details are as follows:

Reports to the FMU relating to possible forced marriage

In 2008: 1,618 total reports across the UK. Of these, 1,252 reports were from England (where the region was known) and 197 of these reports originated from the north-west of England (where the region was known).

In 2009: 1,682 total reports across the UK. Of these, 1,200 reports were from England (where the region was known) and 210 originated from the north-west of England (where the region was known).

Cases where the FMU gave direct support to victims of forced marriage in the UK or overseas

In 2009: 377 cases, including both assistance and immigration cases.

In 2008: 430 cases, including both assistance and immigration cases.

In 2007: 262 cases, including both assistance and immigration cases.

In 2006: 197 cases, including both assistance and immigration cases.

In 2005: 152 cases, including both assistance and immigration cases.

Incitement: Internet

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether a Ministerial cross-Government champion on reducing incitement on the internet has been appointed. [2061]

James Brokenshire: The Home Office is looking at the challenges posed by hate crime on the internet. As part of this process, we will look at how work on this issue is led across Government.

Independent Police Complaints Commission

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many former police officers are engaged by the Independent Police Complaints Commission to undertake investigations into their former forces; and if she will take steps to end that practice. [1715]

Nick Herbert: The Independent Police Complaints Commission has a team of investigators from varying backgrounds. The way in which they are deployed is an operational matter for the IPCC, which will write to the hon. Member direct.

Independent Police Complaints Commission: Standards

Mr Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long on average it took the Police Complaints Commission to investigate and report on complaints in each of the last three years. [1892]

Nick Herbert: The Home Office does not hold this information. This is a matter for the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). The IPCC will write to the hon. Member about the information sought.

Passports: Fraud

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the outcome was of the investigation by the Serious Organised Crime Agency into the use of counterfeit British passports in the killing of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh on 19 January 2010; what co-operation the Agency received from the Government of Israel; what discussions *(a)* officials and Ministers of her Department, *(b)* officials of the Identity and Passport Service and *(c)* officials of the Serious Organised Crime Agency have had on the issue with representatives of the Government of Israel; what the outcome of such discussions was; and if she will make a statement. [1805]

Nick Herbert *[holding answer 10 June 2010]:* The outcome of the Serious Organised Crime Agency's investigation was reported by the then Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary in his statement to the House of 23 March.

An officer of the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) had discussions with the Israeli police but there were no discussions between representatives of the Government of Israel and Home Office Ministers, officials of the Department, officials of the Identity and Passport Service, or officers of SOCA.

Police: Training

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average cost to the public purse of training a police recruit to the point of joining a police force as an officer was in the latest period for which figures are available. [896]

Nick Herbert: There is no fixed training cost for training for police officers. The responsibility for delivery of training to new officers was devolved to police forces in England and Wales in 2006.

TRANSPORT

A31: Ferndown

Mr Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve traffic flows at the Canford Bottom roundabout on the A31. [2402]

Mike Penning: Various studies have been undertaken by the Highways Agency, and a scheme is being developed to install traffic signals on the Canford Bottom roundabout and to create a two-way dual carriageway through the central island. These alterations are designed to reduce congestion on the A31 east and westbound carriageways on the approach to the roundabout. Traffic modelling indicates that traffic flows at peak times on local roads converging at this junction would also improve.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is on the use by Ministers in his Department of cars allocated from *(a)* his Department's pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured

in the UK; whether Ministers in his Department are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [2423]

Mike Penning: Most Departments have no car pool of their own. The sole exceptions are the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of Defence.

The Government's policy is that Ministers may make use of the Government Car Service (GCS) under the terms of the recently announced ministerial code. This states that

"the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service pool as needed".

Departmental Ministers without an allocated car will be expected to make use of the Secretary of State's allocated car, if there is one available, before calling on the car pool.

UK manufactured cars make up a relatively small proportion (around 16%) of the current GCS fleet, most of which is comprised of low carbon emission hybrid vehicles manufactured abroad. Changed rules for allocation of cars and the need to reduce the cost of operating the Government Car Service mean that vehicle replacement is likely to be restricted in the immediate future, necessarily limiting the options for reconfiguring the fleet without incurring additional cost. For reasons of efficient and economic fleet management, it is not practical for Ministers to specify a particular vehicle or type of vehicle for a journey in a pool service car.

Departmental Public Appointments

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments he has made since his appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [363]

Mr Philip Hammond: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much funding per capita his Department has allocated to each region for the next 12 months. [1084]

Mr Philip Hammond *[holding answer 8 June 2010]:* My Department does not allocate funding on a per capita basis. Part of the available funding is allocated on a regional basis and other funding is allocated to specific projects according to national priorities.

Driving Tests

David Mowat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans to undertake a review of all driving test centre closures. [1996]

Mike Penning: We have no plans to undertake a general review of all driving test centre closures.

We are committed to operating a public service for driver testing that offers good value for money and reasonable access to candidates.

The location of particular centres will continue to be determined by the operational suitability of the location, the local demand for the service and the cost of operating there.

Midland Main Railway Line

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the future funding of improvements to the Midland Main Line to reduce journey times between London, St Pancras and Sheffield. [1254]

Mrs Villiers: Network Rail currently has plans to make substantial improvements to the line by 2014. The plans include measures to enhance the capability of the infrastructure on the Midland Main Line to deliver faster journey times.

Railways: Construction

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will include within the High Speed Two Exceptional Hardship Scheme consultation people affected on tunnelled stretches of the proposed route. [2154]

Mr Philip Hammond: The Government are currently consulting on an Exceptional Hardship Scheme in relation to the proposed high speed line from London to the west midlands. The consultation is due to end on 17 June and we have received a number of responses from people living over or near tunnelled sections of the route. We will look carefully at the suggestions made by all respondents in deciding how to proceed.

Road Traffic: Harlow

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate his Department has made of levels of traffic congestion in Harlow constituency in each year from 1997 to 2009. [2008]

Mike Penning: Estimates of congestion are available for local authorities, but not at lower levels of geography such as parliamentary constituencies.

Estimates are available for the county of Essex, which includes Harlow constituency, but excludes the Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock unitary authorities.

These estimates show that in 2008-09 the average vehicle journey time during the morning peak on key local authority routes was unchanged from 2007-08, at 2 minutes and 11 seconds per mile.

Estimates prior to 2007-08 are not available, but more information and estimates for all local authorities in England are available on the Department's website at:

http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/roadstraffic/traffic/qbtrafficgb/2010/q12010

Shipping: Minimum Wage

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made by the working group convened by his Department to consider the

respective legal advice received by the Department and trade unions on applying the national minimum wage to seafarers working on non-UK registered vessels travelling between UK ports; and if he will make a statement. [2261]

Mike Penning: There have been no meetings of the working group mentioned. I wish to look afresh at the issues and evidence presented before taking further steps.

Speed Limits

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has considered the responses to his Department's speed limit consultation of December 2009, with particular reference to 20mph zones; and if he will produce a revised speed limit circular in accordance with the proposals in the consultation. [1987]

Mike Penning: I am considering the previous Government's proposals on local speed limit guidance, and responses received to those proposals. We will set out our position on road safety and speed policy over the coming months, including how we will work with local authorities on implementing these policies.

Traffic Management Act 2004

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to bring into force each of those provisions of the Traffic Management Act 2004 which have not yet been brought into force. [1988]

Norman Baker: I am considering the appropriateness and timing of the implementation of the remaining Traffic Management Act 2004 provisions, in the context of the Government's fundamental review of regulations.

Travel: Energy

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions his Department had with the Energy Saving Trust on the environmental effects of the materials used in the Trust's marketing campaign promoting a free travel energy check. [1716]

Norman Baker: The Department for Transport has not had any discussions with the Energy Saving Trust (EST) about this matter. EST has a corporate sustainability policy that looks to minimise the environmental impact of all marketing materials it commissions. The transport energy check materials have been printed on 100% recycled and chlorine-free paper which is sourced from paper mills with approved environmental systems.

WALES

Departmental Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the URL is of each website managed by her Department. [2357]

Mr David Jones: The information is as follows:

www.walesoffice.gov.uk

and

www.swyddfa.cymru.gov.uk

Departmental Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff her Department employed on the most recent date for which figures are available; and what the annual staff cost was. [1572]

Mrs Gillan: As at 31 March 2010, 58 staff (of a total staff complement of 65) were employed in the Wales Office; and the annual staff cost was £3,641,984.

Departmental Meetings

Owen Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what meetings she has had with the Wales Trades Union Congress since her appointment. [2596]

Mrs Gillan: A meeting has been arranged for 15 June.

Owen Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what meetings she has had with CBI Wales since her appointment. [2597]

Mrs Gillan: I met CBI Wales in Cardiff on 28 May 2010. It has also been arranged for me to speak at the CBI Wales annual lunch on 18 June 2010.

Owen Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what meetings she has had with the Federation of Small Businesses Wales since her appointment. [2601]

Mrs Gillan: My senior officials met the Federation of Small Businesses Wales on 11 June during which arrangements were set in motion for me to meet them in the near future.

Owen Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what meetings she has had with the Welsh Local Government Association since her appointment. [2602]

Mrs Gillan: I met the Welsh Local Government Association on 28 May in Cardiff.

Owen Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what meetings she has had with the First Minister of Wales since her appointment; and what was discussed at those meetings. [2603]

Mrs Gillan: I have met the First Minister five times since my appointment and we have had numerous telephone conversations. We have discussed a wide range of issues.

Owen Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times she has met with the Deputy First Minister of Wales since her appointment; and what was discussed in those meetings. [2604]

Mrs Gillan: I have met the Deputy First Minister on four occasions and had one telephone conversation with him. Discussions focused on a range of issues affecting Wales.

Owen Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what meetings she has had with the Welsh Assembly Minister for Heritage since her appointment; [2605]

(2) what meetings she has had with the Welsh Assembly Government Minister for Rural Affairs since her appointment; [2606]

(3) what meetings she has had with the Welsh Assembly Government Deputy Minister for Housing since her appointment. [2607]

Mrs Gillan: I asked the First Minister if I could meet the Assembly Cabinet. This has been arranged for 5 July 2010.

Departmental Pay

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was paid in bonuses to civil servants in her Department in 2008. [2182]

Mrs Gillan: In 2008 the total amount paid to civil service staff in bonuses was £8,150.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Armed Conflict: Diamonds

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme in ensuring that trade in diamonds does not fund violence. [2075]

Mr Bellingham: Neither the Government nor the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) have formally reviewed the effectiveness of the KPCS in preventing the trade in diamonds from funding violence. However, compliance with KPCS requirements is monitored and evaluated through a 'peer review' system. Teams of experts representing KPCS Governments, civil society groups and industry visit selected KPCS states every year to review implementation of the KPCS and if necessary investigate reports of diamonds contributing to violence. Review reports are discussed by KPCS members at the annual plenary and intersessional meetings. Action can be taken against states shown to be persistently failing to implement the KPCS, including suspension. The June 2010 KPCS intersessional in Tel Aviv will include looking at ways the KPCS can be more effective. The UK is attending as part of the EU delegation.

Colombia and Peru: EU External Trade

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will bring forward proposals for the House to participate in the formulation of EU free trade agreements with *(a)* Colombia and *(b)* Peru. [1385]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The negotiations for the EU Multi-Party Trade Agreement with Colombia and Peru were concluded in March. The Agreement will now undergo legal scrubbing and will then be translated. It will have to be determined whether the final agreement will need to be concluded by the EU and ratified by national Parliaments. Once the final text is available European Council legal advisers will determine whether it needs to be concluded by the EU and ratified by national Parliaments. In any event the Council decision on signature and conclusion of the agreement by the EU will be deposited for scrutiny with the EU Scrutiny Committee in both Houses.

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1250]

Alistair Burt: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its agencies paid 98.8% and 98.3% of supplier invoices within 10 days of receipt in March 2010 and April 2010 respectively.

Union Flag

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which his Department is responsible. [1813]

Mr Bellingham: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) issues guidance for the flying of the Union flag on UK Government buildings. The guidance encourages the Union flag to be flown 365 days a year, and as a minimum all Departments must fly the Union flag on the 19 special designated days, for example HM the Queen's birthday, Remembrance Day, etc and other special occasions as required, for example, the State Opening of Parliament. More information on the guidance is available on the DCMS website:

http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/honours/7124.aspx

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, flies the Union flag 365 days of the year on buildings in the United Kingdom. At our posts overseas the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961) provides in article 20 that:

"The mission and its head shall have the right to use the flag and emblem of the sending state on the premises of the mission, including the residence of the head of mission, and on his means of transport".

Missions in Commonwealth countries fly the Union flag; the Diplomatic flag is flown at diplomatic posts and the Consular flag is flown at consular posts.

We advise our posts that the flag, whether that be Union, Diplomatic or Consular, be flown at the Chancery building on all working days during office hours. Flags at the Head of Mission's residence should be flown only on days of local celebration or mourning, on the 19 special designated days and during the stay of one of Her Majesty's ships.

Departmental Manpower

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff are employed in each ministerial office in his Department. [1097]

Alistair Burt: I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe's response of 7 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 22W.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in his Department. [1482]

Mr Lidington: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has five cars allocated to its Ministers. Three Toyota Prius that were manufactured in Japan, one Vauxhall Vectra Diesel manufactured in Germany and one Jaguar XJL manufactured in the UK.

These arrangements are changing following the publication of the new Ministerial Code which states that:

"the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed".

Cabinet Office has provided clarification on how the Code should be interpreted. The expectation is that Ministers not in the Cabinet will use the pool service and that Cabinet Ministers who have an allocated car will wish to consider how that car might be utilised by other Ministers within the Department before calls are made on the Government Car Service Pool.

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with Departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements.

Departmental Official Hospitality

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what budget his Department has allocated for entertainment, including alcohol, in each of the next three years. [1314]

Alistair Burt: In 2010-11 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has currently budgeted £7.67 million on a wide range of activities designed to establish and cultivate contacts throughout its network of over 250 overseas posts as well as diplomatic activity in the UK. This represents under 0.9% of our annual discretionary departmental budget. Activities funded from this budget include working meetings with Ministers in the UK, meetings with senior political and military figures from host countries and events hosted for political and business delegations (including those in support of UKTI) abroad, to promote and defend wider British interests.

Budgets in the FCO are devolved and funds currently earmarked for business hospitality purposes can and will be used to fund other activities in pursuit of FCO and wider Government objectives, both in the UK and in our posts overseas. These budgets were originally set earlier this year and are subject to review and further adjustment as part of our internal Quarterly Budget Review process.

No budgets have been set for 2011-12 or 2012-13 and the FCO will decide allocations for these years in the light of the Spending Round that is expected to be conclude this autumn.

Any expenditure on business hospitality is kept under rigorous scrutiny to ensure value for money and effectiveness and is incurred in accordance with the principles of Managing Public Money and the Treasury handbook on Regularity, Propriety and Value for Money.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to the public purse of the ministerial private offices in his Department. [1096]

Alistair Burt: In 2010-11 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has currently budgeted £3.272 million for the administrative and civil service pay costs of ministerial private offices. This figure excludes the costs of ministerial travel which are published to Parliament on an annual basis. FCO budgets are subject to review and further adjustment as part of our internal Quarterly Budget Review process. All expenditure is kept under rigorous scrutiny to ensure value for money and effectiveness and is incurred in accordance with the principles of Managing Public Money and the Treasury handbook on Regularity and Propriety.

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what cost *(a)* reductions and *(b)* savings his Department will be making in 2010-11. [1731]

Alistair Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) on 7 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 23W.

Embassies: Buildings

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent estimate he has made of the monetary value of the property occupied by each UK embassy and diplomatic post in the EU. [1122]

Alistair Burt: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) estate was most recently valued in March 2010. The estimated book value of owned office buildings in EU posts is set out in the following table. Leasehold properties have a nil book value to the FCO, and are therefore not included.

The FCO does not hold the freehold on its offices in the EU countries not listed on the table (Bulgaria, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia).

Country	*Post*	*Book value as at 31 March 2010 (£)*
Austria	Vienna	5,537,600
Belgium	Brussels	421,900
Cyprus	BHC Compound	2,258,300
Northern Cyprus	Shakespeare Avenue Compound	2,141,400
Czech Republic	Prague	1,864,200
Denmark	Copenhagen	4,073,500
Irish Republic	Dublin	9,197,500
Estonia	Tallinn	655,300
Finland	Helsinki	8,206,900
France	Marseilles	517,300
France	Paris	59,715,500
Germany	Berlin	22,715,500

Country	Post	Book value as at 31 March 2010 (£)
Greece	Athens	3,353,800
Italy	Rome	22,399,800
Latvia	Riga	869400
Lithuania	Vilnius	1,073,300
Netherlands	Amsterdam	2,140,800
Netherlands	The Hague	3,237,000
Poland	Warsaw	27,424,200
Portugal	Lisbon	3,069,500
Portugal	Portimao	616,700
Romania	Bucharest	2,799,100
Slovakia	Bratislava	1,338,000
Spain	Alicante	241,800
Spain	Barcelona	1,441,200
Spain	Bilbao	847,400
Spain	Ibiza	139,300
Spain	Las Palmas	265,500
Spain	Palma	384,300
Sweden	Stockholm	7,939,600
Total		196,292,600

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he plans to sell part of his Department's overseas estate. [1123]

Alistair Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) on 9 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 164W.

EU Countries: Embassies

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost was of his Department's presence in each of the 27 member states of the EU in the latest period for which figures are available. [1725]

Mr Lidington: The net cost of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office presence in each of the 27 member states of the EU is provided in the following table.

Net cost of FCO presence for financial year 2008-09

Country	£
Austria	[1]6,781,395
Belgium	[2]7,515,191
Bulgaria	4,067,114
Cyprus	5,648,812
Czech Republic	4,425,612
Denmark	4,774,473
Estonia	1,391,670
Finland	4,208,696
France	[3]23,263,634
Germany	21,858,061
Greece	7,222,219
Hungary	4,733,193
Ireland	[4]-3,176,461
Italy	15,427,918
Latvia	1,926,962
Lithuania	1,996,889
Luxembourg	1,394,414
Malta	2,141,074
The Netherlands	2,516,000
Poland	7,751,832
Portugal	5,225,734
Romania	4,680,311
Slovakia	1,947,497
Slovenia	1,834,833
Spain	[4]-27,091,905
Sweden	4,232,479

[1] The figure for Austria includes the cost of the British embassy in Vienna. However it does not count the cost of the UKDEL Vienna and UKMIS Vienna missions. The budgets of those representations are held separately.
[2] The figure for Belgium includes the cost of the British embassy in Belgium and the joint management office in Brussels. However, it does not count the cost of the UKREP Brussels and UKDEL Brussels (NATO) missions. The budgets of those representations are held separately.
[3] The figure for France includes the cost of the British embassy in Paris, and the British consulate network in France. It also includes the costs of the UK delegation to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), based in Paris.
[4] The figures for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office presence in Ireland and Spain are both negative due to net proceeds from the sale of property.
Notes:
1. The full cost of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office presence in each country is provided. This includes both British embassies/high commissions and subordinate posts (eg: British consulates).
2. These figures also include the costs of the operations of other Government Departments, within our network of posts in the European Union—eg UK Trade and Investment/UK Borders Agency activities.

Government Hospitality: Wines

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the value is of the Government wine cellar. [1729]

Mr Bellingham: The Government wine cellar is valued in accordance with guidelines issued by the National Audit Office and currently has an estimated value of £864,000, a reduction of approximately £13,000 since this question was tabled by the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) in December 2009.

Kashmir

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is towards Kashmir; and if he will make a statement. [2273]

Alistair Burt: The long-standing position of the UK is that it is for India and Pakistan to find a lasting resolution to the situation in Kashmir, one which takes into account the wishes of the Kashmiri people. It is not for the UK to prescribe a solution or to mediate in finding one. We welcome the positive steps being taken by India and Pakistan to build trust and confidence between them.

Pakistan: Religious Freedom

Jo Swinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Government of Pakistan on religious discrimination in that country and the effects of section 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code on Ahmadi Muslims. [1985]

Alistair Burt: The Government condemn all forms of unfair discrimination, including those based on religion. We regularly raise our concerns with the Government of Pakistan, both bilaterally and through the EU. We have raised our concerns with regard to section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code which deals with the offence of blasphemy. We believe this law should be amended to prevent its abuse, and also that it should not attract the death penalty.

Jo Swinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government have made to the Government of Pakistan on the attacks on Ahmadi Muslims in Lahore, Pakistan on 28 May; what response has been received; and if he will make a statement. [1986]

Alistair Burt: The Government condemn all forms of violence and discrimination against individuals or groups, irrespective of their faith or belief. The attacks on the Ahmadiyya mosques in Lahore on 28 May were a tragic example of the discrimination faced by the Ahmadiyya community.

Our high commissioner in Islamabad has raised the attacks and the discrimination suffered by the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan with the Chief Minister of Punjab along with his EU colleagues, and the issue has also been raised by our high commission with the Pakistani Ministries of Interior and Minorities.

The Government of Pakistan at federal and provincial level have underlined how seriously they take these attacks, and are overseeing an immediate police investigation into the incident.

Palestinians: International Assistance

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has received a response from the Government of Israel to his statement of 5 June 2010 calling for an end to the closure of Gaza. [1991]

Alistair Burt: We continue to discuss these issues with the Government of Israel and our international partners—including members of the Quartet and the EU. There has been a slight easing in some of the items allowed into Gaza which we welcome. But we continue to call for more significant steps to lift Gaza's closure. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made clear, it is important that there is unfettered access to meet the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza and to enable the reconstruction of people's homes, livelihoods and trade.

Palestinians: Politics and Government

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest assessment is of the political situation in Gaza; and if he will make a statement. [2077]

Alistair Burt: The UK is extremely concerned by the humanitarian, economic and political situation in Gaza. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made clear, it is essential that there is unfettered access not only to meet the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza but to enable the reconstruction of people's homes, livelihoods and trade.

At the same time it is important to remember that Hamas continues to pursue an ideology of violence which directly undermines prospects for peace in the region. We call on Hamas to take immediate and concrete steps towards the Quartet principles and to release Gilad Shalit unconditionally.

Thailand: Politics and Government

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest assessment is of the political situation in Thailand; and if he will make a statement. [2074]

Mr Jeremy Browne: I am deeply concerned by the recent violence and loss of life in Bangkok. As a friend of Thailand, the UK wishes to see all sides engage in an urgent process of national reconciliation to address the underlying social, economic and political causes of the recent violence and instability. I welcome the announcement by Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva that an independent inquiry will take place into the violence that took place. I also welcome Prime Minister Abhisit's announcement of efforts to address the underlying causes of the violence through a five-point reconciliation road map, which includes commitment to tackle economic disparities and inequality, and the involvement of all parties in the process of reconciliation. We are encouraging the Thai authorities to take forward this process as a matter of urgency.

We underlined our concern in a statement to the Human Rights Council on 31 May. On 21 May the High Representative of the European Union, Baroness Ashton, also made a statement on behalf of the EU.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Regional Spatial Strategies

Matthew Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what progress he has made on the ending of regional spatial strategies. [1559]

Greg Clark: We committed in the Queen's Speech to abolishing regional strategies. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to all council leaders saying that he expects them to have regard to this as a material planning consideration in any decisions they are currently taking.

Advantage West Midlands

Karen Lumley: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps are being taken to ensure even distribution of funding across the west midlands by the Advantage West Midlands regional development agency. [2010]

Mr Prisk: I have been asked to reply

It is for the RDA to determine the level of spend in line with local and regional priorities and these are set out in the corporate plan. In agreeing these priories, the RDA has a duty to consult with regional partners and stakeholders including local authorities.

Karen Lumley: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what assessment his Department has made of the value for money of funding provided by Advantage West Midlands for residents of Redditch. [2011]

Mr Prisk: I have been asked to reply

There have not been any value-for-money assessments specific to Redditch. The National Audit Office (NAO) led an independent performance assessment in 2006-07 which judged AWM to be performing well. The report highlighted in particular AWM's consistent achievement of targets and its strong evidence base. An independent supplementary review of all RDAs is also being carried out by the NAO which is due to be published soon.

Community Development: Northamptonshire

Andrea Leadsom: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on the future of *(a)* the West Northamptonshire Development Corporation and *(b)* the West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit. [1975]

Andrew Stunell: The Government will be reviewing West Northamptonshire Development Corporation's (WNDC's) future work programme against the Government's priorities taking account of the previously announced wind-up date of 2013-14 and the potential for transition to a local authority-led regeneration body. The Government are committed to decentralisation and achieving efficiencies and WNDC will be contributing to the efficiency savings planned by the Department of Communities and Local Government.

The West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit (WNJPU), which is entirely separate from WNDC, was constituted at the request of the three local planning authorities and Northamptonshire county council under section 29 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The Act provides that the joint committee can be dissolved at the request of a constituent authority.

Electoral Register

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many convictions for non-completion and return of the annual registration form for the Register of Electors there *(a)* were in 2009 and *(b)* have been in 2010. [1313]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not collected centrally. Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) have a statutory duty to compile and maintain a complete and accurate electoral register and they have a number of mechanisms available to them in achieving this. It is a decision for individual EROs to decide what action to take in relation to non-completion of an individual annual canvass form.

Housing: Construction

Stephen Gilbert: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what assessment he has made of the effect of ending the south-west regional spatial strategy on active house building in Cornwall. [2063]

Greg Clark: We are absolutely committed to abolishing regional strategies, including regional housing targets and will introduce legislation in the first Session to do so. The Secretary of State has written to all local authority leaders and the Planning Inspectorate confirming the Government's intention and that letter can be used as a material consideration in planning decisions.

Cornwall council will now be able to make its own decisions on housing supply. We will introduce strong incentives so that the benefits of growth in jobs, investment and housing are enjoyed by local people.

Stephen Gilbert: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what new criteria for housebuilding will be put in place after the ending of regional spatial strategies. [2070]

Greg Clark: As the coalition agreement makes clear, local councils will be responsible for decisions on housing and planning after the abolition of regional spatial strategies. I expect decisions to be based on sound local plans, which have regard to national planning policy statements and reflect co-operation with neighbouring authorities on issues that cross local authority boundaries. They will be taken in the context of powerful financial incentives so that the benefits of development are shared with local people.

Stephen Gilbert: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether the proposed numbers of houses in the eco-town development at St Austell will count towards the total housing need in the mid-Cornwall area. [2071]

Grant Shapps: Cornwall council will be able to make its own decisions on the level of housing supply to plan for, based on its own evidence. The St Austell eco-town will help to meet their needs like any other new development.

Stephen Gilbert: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what assessment he has made of the appropriateness of local authority housing targets in Cornwall in light of the ending of the south-west regional spatial strategy. [2072]

Greg Clark: It is for local authorities to assess the appropriateness of local housing targets in the context of preparing and maintaining local plans whose soundness is subject to the public scrutiny through examination in public.

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will call in planning applications 09/00013/COND10, 09/00014/COND8, 09/00018/COND6, 09/00023/COND10, 09/00023/COND8, 09/00029/COND6 and 09/01301/OUT for decision by his Department on the ground that they are applications to build on green belt land; and if he will make a statement. [2404]

Robert Neill: The planning applications referred to have yet to be considered by Tewkesbury borough council, the local planning authority, and it would be inappropriate to comment on them. However, the local planning authority has confirmed that none of the land subject to these planning applications involves land designated as green belt.

The borough council has the discretion to review the scale of housing development required in the borough since the intention to abolish RSS was confirmed by the Secretary of State in letter of 27 May to all council leaders.

Local Government Finance: Sheffield

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the likely change to his Department's capital investment allocation for Sheffield in *(a)* percentage and *(b)* cash terms in 2010-11; and if he will make a statement. [2140]

Robert Neill: The announcement on 24 May set out the immediate savings of over £6 billion that needed to be made as down-payment on the public deficit. We continue to review the position on all budgets and any further decisions on funding for 2010-11 will be taken at the Emergency Budget on 22 June. A full review of capital projects will be undertaken once the final funding position for 2010-11 is clear.

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the likely change to his Department's aggregate external finance allocation for Sheffield in *(a)* percentage and *(b)* cash terms in 2010-11; and if he will make a statement. [2141]

Robert Neill: I refer the right hon. Member to the written ministerial statement which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State laid in the House on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 15-17WS.

Travellers: Caravan Sites

Mr Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has to withdraw ODPM 01/06 instructing planning inspectors to presume in favour of otherwise illegal Gypsy encampments. [1912]

Andrew Stunell: In the coalition agreement the Government stated that they will publish and present to Parliament a simple and consolidated national planning framework covering all forms of development. An announcement on how we propose to take forward the national planning framework and the implications for specific areas of planning policy will be made in due course.

The Secretary of State wrote to all local authority chief planners prior to the Whitsun bank holiday weekend to remind them of the potential risks of unauthorised development and to draw their attention to the existing enforcement powers at their disposal to deal with such breaches of planning control.

Damian Hinds: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps he plans to take to prevent the use of the retrospective planning application process in relation to unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller sites. [2324]

Andrew Stunell: The new Government are working on proposals to strengthen the powers that local authorities have to enforce against breaches of planning control and to limit the opportunities for retrospective planning applications in relation to any form of unauthorised development.

EDUCATION

Academies and Free Schools

Ed Balls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what procedures he plans to use to evaluate potential sponsors of *(a)* academy schools and *(b)* free schools. [1209]

Mr Gibb: I am currently considering a range of options to ensure that sponsors of academies and those involved in free schools have the capacity and capability to support the provision of high quality education for their pupils.

British Educational Communications and Technology Agency

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his most recent estimate is of the savings to the public purse arising from the closure of BECTA. [1411]

Mr Gibb *[holding answer 8 June 2010]:* We expect that the closure of BECTA will save £10 million in 2010-11 after all costs have been met, and that savings in subsequent years will be in the order of £65 million per year.

Building Schools for the Future Programme

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what representations he has received from Birmingham city council on the prospects for the Building Schools for the Future programme in Birmingham since his appointment; [1066]

(2) what discussions he has had with Birmingham city council on the applicability to the city of Birmingham of the £100 million funding envelope applied to the most recent invitations to bid under the Building Schools for the Future programme; [1178]

(3) with reference to the oral answer of 8 March 2010, *Official Report*, columns 16-17, on Building Schools for the Future, what plans he has for funding of the projects for the *(a)* 30 schools being redeveloped or planned for redevelopment and *(b)* other schools in Birmingham planned to be included in future phases of the Building Schools for the Future programme. [1253]

Mr Gibb: The Secretary of State has not received any representation or held any discussions with Birmingham city council on the prospects for the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme in Birmingham; or the applicability to the city of Birmingham of the £100 million funding envelope.

The Department has not taken any decisions on BSF. Any future roll-out decisions will be announced in due course.

Education Maintenance Allowance

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for the future of education maintenance allowance payments. [871][1]

Mr Gibb *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* The Government are committed to retaining the education maintenance allowance (EMA). The budget for 2010-11 is £564 million, enabling young people aged 16 to 19 in England who meet residency criteria and have a bank account to receive EMA payments if their household income is under £30,801 (based on evidence from the last full financial year).

Free Schools

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether he plans to provide support to parents and groups to transfer to the status of free schools *(a)* existing state schools and *(b)* schools planned for closure; and if he will make a statement. [212]

Mr Gibb *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* We have yet to take decisions about whether to do so and, if so, what level of support will be provided to free schools. We will make this information available in due course.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will ensure that capital and revenue funding for free schools will not be taken from local education authorities' *(a)* current and *(b)* future budgets; and if he will make a statement. [252]

Mr Gibb: We have yet to take decisions on the funding for free schools. We will make this information available in due course.

GCSE

Kelvin Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will ensure that all schools and GCSE candidates receive GCSE results for the examinations in 2010 in hard copy. [914]

Mr Gibb: It is for individual examination awarding bodies and schools to organise timely and appropriate communication of the results of public examinations, taking into account the needs of their recipients.

Primary Education: Admissions

Mr Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many and what proportion of children of primary school age in each local education authority attend a school other than that of their parents' first choice. [2209]

Mr Gibb: The information requested in respect of primary schools is not collected centrally.

Pupil Premium

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what criteria he plans to use to disburse the pupil premium to *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* individual schools. [684]

Mr Gibb: The Government published the document "The Coalition: our programme for government" on 20 May 2010, which set out our intention for a pupil premium to support disadvantaged children. The pupil premium will target extra funding specifically at deprived pupils to enable them to receive the support they need to reach their potential. We will publish our proposals with details of how we plan to distribute the pupil premium in due course.

Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency

Ed Balls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the *(a)* cost and *(b)* savings to the Exchequer arising from the abolition of the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency in (i) 2010-11, (ii) 2011-12 and (iii) 2012-13. [1199]

Mr Gibb *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* QCDA's budget for 2010-11 is £128 million. From that we expect to generate savings of at least £8 million in this financial year. We are now working with QCDA to plan its orderly winding down including estimates of costs and further savings to the Exchequer in this and subsequent years. The extent of these will depend upon decisions as to the future of each of QCDA's functions.

School Leaving

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for the level of the compulsory participation age in relation to education and training in *(a)* 2013 and *(b)* 2015; and if he will make a statement. [95]

Mr Gibb: We have set out in "The Coalition: our programme for government" our plans for education policy over the coming months and years. We are currently developing plans for specific policy areas. We will be able to give further details in due course.

Schools: Admissions

Ed Balls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his policy is on the application of the Schools Admissions Code to *(a)* maintained and *(b)* academy schools. [1208]

Mr Gibb: All maintained schools must act in accordance with the School Admissions Code.

The Government have been clear that all new academies will have an inclusive admissions policy. For existing academies and maintained schools, this means having clear admission arrangements; giving priority to children in care; not adopting any new selection by ability; being able to adopt any lawful admission criteria, such as by sibling, distance or catchment, if oversubscribed (ie more applications than available places). Those schools adopting academy status will be able to retain their existing admission arrangements, which should already be compliant with the code.

Schools: Standards

Michael Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will reduce the number of school policies that each school is required to adopt. [1468]

1. *[Official Report, 6 July 2010, Vol. 513, c. 2MC.]*

Mr Gibb *[holding answer 8 June 2010]:* This Government are strongly committed to freeing all schools from unnecessary bureaucracy so that they can focus on their core purpose of raising standards for all children.

We will shortly be outlining a package of measures to reduce the bureaucratic load on schools, including a substantial reduction in the number of policies schools are required to produce.

Sixth Form Education: Disadvantaged

Kelvin Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what proportion of pupils aged 16 to 18 years in sixth form colleges and school sixth forms were from highly deprived backgrounds in *(a)* 2007-08 and *(b)* 2008-09; [915]

(2) what proportion of pupils aged 16 to 18 years in further education colleges were from highly deprived backgrounds in *(a)* 2007-08 and *(b)* 2008-09. [917]

Mr Gibb: The information requested is shown in the following table. Eligibility for free school meals in the final year of compulsory schooling has been used as the indicator of deprivation. The denominators are all those 16 to 18-year-olds[1] studying in school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, or FE colleges for whom information was available on their free school meals status at age 15 (i.e. those who had been in maintained schools at age 15).

Percentage of 16 to 18-year-old students known to be eligible for free school meals at age 15

	School sixth forms	*Sixth form colleges*	*FE Colleges*
			Percentage
2007-08	7.7	10.4	16.1
2008-09	7.4	10.1	15.9

[1] Based on academic age—the age of the young person at the beginning of the academic year, 31 August.

Sure Start Programme

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will undertake public consultation before any change is made to the priorities of the Sure Start programme. [204]

Sarah Teather *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* The coalition document published on 20 May states that the Government will take Sure Start back to its original purpose of early intervention, increase its focus on the neediest families, and better involve organisations with a track record of supporting families; investigate ways of ensuring that providers are paid in part by the results they achieve; and refocus funding from Sure Start peripatetic outreach services, and from the Department of Health budget, to pay for 4,200 extra Sure Start health visitors. In implementing these priorities for Sure Start Children's Centres, the Government will follow their normal protocols, including public consultation where appropriate.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Central America: Storms

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment his Department has made of the effects of tropical storm Agatha in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. [2076]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The Department for International Development (DFID) made an assessment of conditions on the ground caused by tropical storm Agatha in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, through consultations with the Red Cross, other aid agencies in Central America and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) colleagues. Our assessment was that Guatemala suffered the most damage and loss of life. The storm affected some of the country's poorest rural indigenous communities. We found that 5,000 families in Guatemala were in need of immediate humanitarian assistance and made a rapid allocation of £100,000 to the Guatemalan Red Cross relief appeal.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many special advisers *(a)* he and *(b)* each other Minister in his Department (i) has appointed and (ii) plans to appoint. [308]

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments he has made since his appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [367]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: I refer the hon. Members to the written ministerial statement made by the Prime Minister on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 32WS.

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which Ministers in his Department have been issued with *(a)* a BlackBerry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1426]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The Minister of State and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Department for International Development (DFID) have each been issued with a BlackBerry.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in his Department. [1485]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The Department for International Development (DFID) inherited three cars allocated to its Ministers: one Toyota Prius T Spirit and two Toyota Prius T3. All three cars were manufactured in Japan.

These arrangements are changing following the publication of the new Ministerial Code which contains changes that affect ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. The code states that "the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed".

Cabinet Office has provided clarification on how the code should be interpreted. The expectation is that Ministers not in the Cabinet will use the pool service and that Cabinet Ministers who have an allocated car will wish to consider how that car might be utilised by other Ministers within the Department before calls are made on the Government Car Service Pool.

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with Departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements.

Departmental Translation Services

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what *(a)* documents and *(b)* other information for which (i) his Department and (ii) its associated public bodies are responsible are published or provided in the UK in languages other than English; for what reason each such publication is required to be made available in a language or languages other than English; and what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of the translation work so incurred in the latest period for which figures are available. [1773]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: Information about the Department for International Development (DFID) and our activities in individual countries has in the past occasionally been made available in local languages to the UK public on the DFID website and through events with diaspora communities. It is not possible to disaggregate the costs of translating these documents without incurring disproportionate costs.

The Government are committed to making information on aid spending transparent to citizens in both the UK and recipient countries. As part of the new UKaid Transparency Guarantee, we will publish detailed information about all new DFID projects and programmes on our website. Information will be published in English and with summary information in major local languages in a way that is accessible to citizens in the countries in which we work.

Overseas Aid

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when he expects the target of 0.7% of gross national income to be allocated to development aid to be met. [2146]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: This Government are committed to achieving, from 2013, the UN target of spending 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) on Official Development Assistance (ODA), and will enshrine this commitment in law.

We are on track to meet this commitment.

Overseas Aid: Public Consultation

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development by what mechanism the public will be able to influence the way in which elements of his Department's budget are spent; to what proportion of his Department's budget this will apply; and what consultation he plans to undertake on this proposal. [1738]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The commitment to "create new mechanisms to give British people a direct say in how an element of the aid budget is spent" was laid out in "The Coalition: our Programme for Government". Further details are being developed and will be shared with Parliament in due course.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Apprentices: West Midlands

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what plans he has to increase the number of manufacturing apprenticeships in *(a)* the West Midlands and *(b)* Coventry; [2187]

(2) what plans he has to increase the number of engineering apprenticeships in *(a)* the West Midlands and *(b)* Coventry. [2186]

Mr Hayes: To build an advanced manufacturing economy we need advanced skills in technology and engineering. That's why the Government are committed to increasing the number of apprenticeships, in particular, Advanced Apprenticeships, that confer technician status. We are also committed to ensuring, through Sector Skills Councils, that all apprenticeship frameworks meet the needs of the real economy. The Government's decision to redeploy £150 million of Train to Gain funds for 2010-11, creating an additional 50,000 adult places, demonstrates our commitment to high quality skills.

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what plans he has to work with small and medium-sized enterprises to ensure that apprenticeship places in *(a)* the West Midlands and *(b)* Coventry are filled. [2188]

Mr Hayes: The Department is working with the National Apprenticeship Service and the Skills Funding Agency to implement the redeployment of £150 million of Train to Gain funds which will support adult apprenticeship places including those in small and medium-sized enterprise. Further details will be provided shortly.

Apprenticeships are founded on partnerships so it is important that employers, including those in manufacturing and engineering, take up these new opportunities and offer apprenticeship places to secure a new generation of highly skilled employees.

Banks: Loans

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what his most recent assessment is of levels of bank lending to small and medium-sized enterprises in *(a)* the North East and *(b)* Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland constituency; and what steps he plans to take to increase those levels. [1959]

Mr Prisk: The Government have made it clear that ensuring the flow of credit to SMEs is essential for supporting growth and is a core priority.

Bank lending data are not collated at regional or constituency level by the Department. However, the Department does receive national level lending data from four banks comprising around 85% of the lending market. This shows that over £9 billion of loans have been drawdown by small and medium sized enterprises since the beginning of 2010. Further to this, businesses in the north-east have been offered nearly £30 million under the Enterprise Finance Guarantee, with over £500,000 to businesses in the Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland constituency.

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what his most recent assessment is of levels of bank lending to small and medium-sized enterprises in Denton and Reddish constituency; and if he will take steps to increase those levels. [2315]

Mr Prisk: The Government has made it clear that ensuring the flow of credit to SMEs is essential for supporting growth and is a core priority.

Bank lending data are not collated at regional or constituency level by the Department. However, the Department does receive national level lending data from four banks comprising around 85% of the lending market. This shows that over £9 billion of loans have been drawdown by small and medium sized enterprises since the beginning of 2010. Further to this, businesses in Denton and Reddish have been offered nearly £2 million under the Enterprise Finance Guarantee.

Business: Bexley

Mr Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent steps his Department has taken to assist small and medium-sized businesses in developing their competitiveness in *(a)* Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency and *(b)* the London Borough of Bexley. [1306]

Mr Prisk: The policies and actions of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), and its predecessors have focused, working through regional development agencies, on building a competitive economy and on delivering prosperity and sustainable economic growth.

The London Development Agency funds Business Link in London (BLiL) to act as a central gateway for the delivery of its business advice and support products. BLiL provides free impartial advice to London's SMEs, including advice on how to increase competitiveness.

The following figures represent the number of unique clients, irrespective of how many times they access BLiL services. Data are only collected at borough, not constituency level.

Between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010 BLiL provided information and advice to 2,940 businesses in the borough of Bexley, and more intensive assistance to 84 businesses.

Each of the 84 businesses that have benefited from intensive assistance has received a minimum of two hours of support from a business adviser during which, typically, a bespoke action plan designed to improve business productivity and address areas of concern or opportunity for the business is developed. Following this, businesses also receive a minimum of two follow up activities within 12 months.

Mr Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills with which business organisations in *(a)* Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency and *(b)* the London Borough of Bexley his Department has held discussions in the last 12 months. [1686]

Mr Prisk: The Department does not generally liaise directly with business organisations, but works through the regional development agencies. In London, the London Development Agency contracts with Business Link in London (BLiL) to provide business support services. The implementation of BIS policy in the London borough of Bexley has been taken forward primarily by the London Development Agency, working in partnership with the local authority and other bodies.

Data protection rules mean that specific businesses receiving support cannot be identified, but examples of BLiL engagement in Bexley in 2009-10 include:

BLiL partnership managers meeting LB Bexley to provide briefings about BLiL support activities, referrals and the needs of businesses in the borough. Formal briefings and updates on activity have also occurred on a quarterly basis.

Familiarisation activities to ensure BLiL works together with key local partners (e.g. LB Bexley, Thames Innovation Centre and Gateway to London) to provide informed referrals and co-ordinate business support. These activities continue to include a further round of strategic meetings to discuss referrals and business support, liaison between business advisers in BLIL and LB Bexley.

A 'Guided Business Tour of Bexley' involving BLiL business advisers, TIC and LB Bexley officers, where a tour of the local industrial and business areas was undertaken.

BLiL ensuring that LB Bexley has access to its Stakeholder Forum and providing LB Bexley partners with local economic data and research on business demand trends.

BLiL working with South East London Chamber of Commerce to deliver workshops marketed to their Bexley business members.

Delivering a 'Mastering Networking and Nurturing Relationships' workshop to South London Business members and contacts in Bexley in February 2010.

Supporting the launch events of 'Innovate London Showcase' in January 2010 and the Bexley 'Enterprise Fund' in July 2009.

Attending a South East London Chamber of Commerce event with my hon. Friend for Bexleyheath and Crayford in December 2009 to discuss support for Bexley businesses during the recession.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of the *(a)* implementation of penalty clauses and payments in its contracts and *(b)* potential legal action arising from the deferral and cancellation of contracts and projects under his Department's plans to achieve cost savings; and whether those estimates are included in the total cost savings to be achieved by his Department. [566]

Mr Davey: Estimates will be made at a future date to align with the Office of Government Commerce (OGC)'s work to review major projects and support the renegotiation of contracts on behalf of central Government to seek

efficiencies in the region of £1.7 billion. The analysis of contingent liabilities, in order to achieve maximum savings, is a core part of the review methodology. The OGC will be taking into account the potential costs of deferment or cancellation.

Education: Middlesbrough

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many people from Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland constituency began a *(a)* higher education course, *(b)* further education course and *(c)* modern apprenticeship in each year since 1996. [1960]

Mr Willetts: Table 1 covers entrants to Higher Education courses from Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland parliamentary constituency. Figures are taken from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student record. Figures for the 2009/10 academic year will be available in January 2011.

Table 2 shows the number of Apprenticeship Programme Starts in Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, 2003/04 to 2008/09. 2003/04 is the earliest year for which comparable data is available and 2008/09 is the latest year for which full year data is available.

Table 3 shows the number of Further Education courses started in Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, 2002/03 to 2008/09. 2002/03 is the earliest year for which comparable data is available and 2008/09 is the latest year for which full year data is available.

Table 1: Entrants[1] from Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland parliamentary constituency[2], English Higher Education Institutions[3]— academic years 1996/97 to 2008/09

	Entrants
1996/97	910
1997/98	1,040
1998/99	1,100
1999/2000	1,315
2000/01	1,710
2001/02	1,485
2002/03	1,715
2003/04	1,605
2004/05	1,485
2005/06	1,565
2006/07	1,760
2007/08	1,480
2008/09	1,480

[1] Covers entrants to all levels and modes of study.
[2] Figures do not include entrants where the constituency of the student cannot be established due to missing or invalid postcode information.
[3] Excludes the Open University due to inconsistencies in their coding of entrants across the time series.
Note:
Figures are based on a snapshot as at 1 December to maintain consistency across the time series.
Source:
Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Table 2: Apprenticeship Programme Starts for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland parliamentary constituency, 2003/04 to 2008/09

	Starts
2003/04	600
2004/05	610
2005/06	500
2006/07	530
2007/08	600
2008/09	680

Notes:
1. Volumes are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Parliamentary constituency is based upon the home postcode of the learner.
Source:
Individualised Learner Record

Table 3: Starts in Further Education colleges in Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland parliamentary constituency, 2002/03 to 2008/09

	Starts
2002/03	21,100
2003/04	21,690
2004/05	21,590
2005/06	18,610
2006/07	16,660
2007/08	15,300
2008/09	14,480

Notes:
1. Volumes are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Parliamentary constituency is based upon the home postcode of the learner.
3. Figures include all starts on Further Education courses at Further Education colleges or institutions.
4. It is not possible to uniquely identify learners. Learners starting more than one course in the academic year will be counted more than once.
Source:
Individualised Learner Record

Employment Agencies: EU Law

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether he plans to seek any amendment to the EU Agency Workers Directive. [1659]

Mr Davey: The agency workers directive was proposed by the European Commission in 2002, it was finally adopted by the European Council of Ministers in June 2008 and by the European Parliament in October 2008.

The final version of the directive was published in December 2008 and has to be implemented by all member states into national law by December 2011. Therefore we do not intend to seek any amendment as the directive has already been finalised.

The directive does foresee a review by the European Commission in December 2013 in consultation with member states and social partners at European level to review the application of the directive. This may result in proposals for amendments. This is normal practice for similar directives.

EU External Trade: Peru

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent discussions his Department has had with the European Commission on its decision to continue multiparty trade agreement negotiations with Peru; and if he will make a statement. [2328]

Mr Davey: Negotiations for an EU-Colombia-Peru multiparty trade agreement were concluded in March 2010, and the agreement is likely to enter into force in late 2011.

Officials from this Department and DFID have liaised closely with the European Commission throughout the negotiations, and last discussed the agreement with the Commission at the EU Trade Policy Committee on 21 May 2010.

Higher and Further Education: Admissions

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what plans he has to encourage underprivileged individuals to enter into *(a)* higher and *(b)* further education. [761]

Mr Willetts *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* The need to attract more students from disadvantaged backgrounds into higher education is written into the coalition agreement. This makes clear that once Lord Browne's review of student finance has reported, its proposals will be judged against the coalition's agreed criteria, which include increasing social mobility and attracting more students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This Government's aim is to create a society where everyone, regardless of background, has the chance to fulfil their talents and ambitions. We envisage creating clear progression ladders, re-engaging young people into work. This will be through a wide range of routes into further education, including high quality apprenticeships. By refocusing employer-responsive budgets this year, we will allocate £150 million for 50,000 new, high quality additional apprenticeship places focused on SMEs.

Higher Education: Manpower

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what estimate he has made of the change in the number of staff in universities in the West Midlands between academic years 2009-10 and 2010-11. [1451]

Mr Willetts: The Department does not hold an estimate of the change in the number of staff in universities in the West Midlands between academic years 2009/10 and 2010/11. Data on the number of staff in individual universities is published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). However, data for academic year 2009/10 will not be published by HESA until 2011, and for 2010/11 not until 2012. HESA do not publish staff numbers specifically by region.

Higher Education: Student Numbers

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what estimate he has made of the likely change in the number of student places in universities in the North West between academic year 2009-10 and 2010-11. [1662]

Mr Willetts: The number of students in each institution will depend upon the recruitment decisions taken by individual institutions. However, we are making available funding for an additional 10,000 places in academic year 2010/11 which will be allocated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Post Offices

Jeremy Lefroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what plans he has to enable post offices to offer a wider range of services; [R] [2198]

(2) what evaluation he has made of potential new sources of revenue for post offices; and when he expects to make an announcement on the possible creation of a post office bank. [R] [2199]

Mr Davey: I am fully committed to delivering the policy set out in "The Coalition: our programme for government" of ensuring that post offices are allowed to offer a wide range of services in order to sustain the network, and we are working with Post Office Ltd to develop new sources of revenue, including considering the case for a post office bank.

Regional Development Agencies

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Advantage West Midlands; and if he will make a statement. [2385]

Mr Prisk: An Independent Performance Assessment (IPA) conducted by the National Audit Office in 2006/07 assessed AWM as performing well. The NAO, on behalf of my Department, is currently undertaking an Independent Supplementary Review of RDAs and is due to report shortly.

Mrs Riordan: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what reduction is planned to take place in funding by Yorkshire Forward provided through the single-pot budget *(a)* in total and *(b)* in Halifax constituency in 2010-11. [2392]

Mr Prisk: No decisions have been made on how projects/programmes currently delivered by Yorkshire Forward will be affected by the £270 million savings from the RDAs budget. We are working closely with Yorkshire Forward and the rest of the RDA network to minimise the impact on priority programmes in line with Government priorities. Stakeholders and delivery partners involved in affected programmes and projects will be kept fully informed as specific decisions are made and plans are developed.

Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills for what public spending projects within *(a)* Wigan constituency and *(b)* the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan his Department secured Treasury approval between 1 January 2010 and the date of his appointment as Secretary of State. [1664]

Mr Prisk: The Government are re-assessing spending approvals granted between 1 January 2010 and the general election to ensure that they offer good value for money and are consistent with the Government's priorities. Further announcements will be made in due course.

Window Blinds: Safety

Gordon Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills when he expects the joint statement from the EU, USA and Canada on safety and looped blind cords to be made. [2405]

Mr Davey: The Department has been informed by the Commission that they are in discussions with Health Canada and the US Consumer Product Safety Commission about the release of a joint letter to the relevant standardisation organisations in the different jurisdictions, urging them to come to a swift and ideally harmonised response to the risks of certain window blinds. We are not sure exactly when this letter may be made public.

The Department will continue to work closely with industry and others to consider the case for further action to improve the safety of looped blind cords. We will be writing shortly to major retailers to ensure they are aware of the standard and ensure they educate consumers about the possible dangers posed to young children by internal blind cords.

Working Hours: EU Law

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether he plans to seek any amendment to the EU Working Time Directive. [1658]

Mr Davey: The coalition agreement made clear the Government's commitment to limit the application of the working time directive in the UK. In that context the Government were pleased to note the emphasis in the European Commission's recent consultation document on the need to consider adapting the legislation in order to better meet the needs of 21st century labour markets. We will be happy to work with them and other member states on this with a view in particular to resolving the problems caused by the SiMap/Jaeger Judgments on on-call time and compensatory rest.

But it will remain an absolute red line that we retain at least the level of flexibility provided by the individual opt-our from the 48-hour week. The opt-out gives people crucial flexibility and choice over their working hours. Millions of people are better off because of that choice.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Manpower

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers are employed by his Office; and at what pay grade. [1239]

The Deputy Prime Minister: On special advisers I refer the hon. Member to the statement given by the Prime Minister on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 33-34W.

Cabinet Office Communications directorate provides press office support to me from within existing Cabinet Office press office posts at a range of pay grades.

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he has been issued with *(a)* a Blackberry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Cabinet Office. [1437]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office today.

Departmental Official Hospitality

John Mann: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what budget has been allocated for entertainment, including alcohol, for the Privy Council Office in each of the next three years. [1318]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Privy Council Office has no budget for entertainment.

General Elections

Mr Evennett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effects on electoral administration of general election counts taking place the day after polling. [1304]

Mr Harper: The Electoral Commission is currently preparing its report on the administration of the elections that took place in May 2010. We will consider the report carefully when it is published and look closely at any findings which emerge from the report on the timing of the count.

House of Lords: Reform

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has for the future *(a)* purpose and *(b)* function of the second Chamber. [990]

Mr Harper: As announced by the Deputy Prime Minister on 7 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 47, the Government have established a Committee to bring forward proposals for a wholly or mainly elected second Chamber. The Committee will make specific recommendations on these and other issues by the end of the year.

Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 22-23WS, on machinery of government: departmental organisation, what responsibilities he has in relation to Government policy on the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. [1908]

Mr Harper: The Deputy Prime Minister has policy responsibility for the legislative framework (as set out in the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, as amended) under which the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) operates. This includes matters in respect of the status and statutory functions of IPSA and of the Compliance Officer. How IPSA and the

Compliance Officer discharge their statutory functions and other matters in respect of the internal workings of IPSA are for the authority and the Compliance Officer as the case may be.

Lobbying

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he plans to publish details of his plans for a statutory register of lobbyists. [1639]

Mr Harper: Ministers will meet with representatives of the UK Public Affairs Council shortly to discuss how to create the most effective register, on a statutory footing. We hope to publish detailed plans in the autumn.

Monarchy: Succession

Mr Bain: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he plans to bring forward proposals to amend the parts of the Act of Settlement which discriminate against Roman Catholics. [2251]

Mr Harper: There are no current plans to amend the Act of Settlement.

Primary Elections

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what criteria will be used to determine those constituencies where state funding will be provided for all-postal primaries for the selection of parliamentary candidates by political parties. [1635]

Mr Harper: The Government have announced that they will fund 200 all-postal primaries over this Parliament, targeted at seats which have not changed hands for many years. These funds will be allocated to all political parties with seats in Parliament that they take up, in proportion to their share of the total vote in the last general election. Further details will be announced in due course.

Voting Rights: British Nationals Abroad

Michael Fallon: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will review the appropriateness of the time limit applicable to voting rights in general elections to UK citizens resident overseas for 15 years or more. [2202]

Mr Harper: The Representation of the People Act 1985 provided for British citizens resident overseas to be able to register to vote in general and European parliamentary elections in the UK. However, the voting rights of "overseas electors" did not continue indefinitely, but was for five years from the time when the UK citizen was last resident and on the electoral register in the UK. The length of the time limit has subsequently fluctuated, first increasing to 20 years, then being reduced to 15 years from 1 April 2002.

The Government have not yet considered the way forward on this issue.

JUSTICE

Burglary: Self-defence

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has to change the rights of householders to defend themselves against intruders; and will he make a statement. [1705]

Mr Blunt: We are reviewing the law and its interpretation carefully and will explore all options before bringing forward proposals. We must make sure that the responsible citizen acting in self defence or the prevention of crime has the appropriate level of legal protection.

Communications Act 2003: Prosecutions

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many prosecutions there have been under section 127(1)(a) of the Communications Act 2003; and if he will make a statement. [1905]

Mr Blunt: The number of proceedings at magistrates courts in England and Wales for offences under section 127(1) (a) of the Communications Act 2003 from commencement (25 July 2003) to 31 December 2008 (latest available) is 2,671.

Court proceedings data for 2009 are planned for publication on 31 October 2010.

Union Flag

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what his policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which his Department is responsible. [1809]

Mr Blunt: The information requested is as follows and covers the Ministry of Justice estate including HM Prisons, HMCS and Tribunal Services buildings that have functioning flag poles.

The Ministry of Justice has no corporate policy for flag flying in place. Instead we follow the Department for Culture, Media and Sport guidance for the flying of the Union flag on UK Government buildings. The guidance encourages the Union flag to be flown 365 days a year, and as a minimum all Departments must fly the Union flag on the 19 special designated days, e.g. Queen's birthday, Remembrance Day, etc. and other special occasions as required, e.g. State Opening of Parliament.

The Ministry of Justice flies the Union flag 365 days of the year, with the exceptions being flag pole maintenance, flag cleaning and special instruction from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) each of its agencies in the latest year for which figures are available; and what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to the public purse of employing staff of each type at each of those bodies. [541]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: In 2009, it is recorded that 27,500 employees were employed in the Ministry of Justice and its agencies, Her Majesty's Court Service and the Tribunals Service and The Office of the Public Guardian (but excluding NOMS).

It is not possible to clearly distinguish front line staff from other staff as many staff in local offices, courts and tribunals across England and Wales work in both

public facing and back office roles. However, we can confirm that of the above 27,500 staff, 21,130 worked in Her Majesty's Court Service, 2,990 worked in the Tribunals Service and 370 were employed in the Office of the Public Guardian all of which have primarily a public service delivery or "front line" functions. The annual cost to the public purse of employing staff in the Ministry of Justice and its agencies (excluding NOMS) from August 2008-09 is £736,269,325.

The remaining 3,010 staff are employed in the Ministry of Justice corporate functions, including Ministerial Offices, Finance, HR, Legal, Criminal Justice Policy and Communications.

The National Offender Management Service is an Agency of the Ministry of Justice. Information on the number and cost of directly employed NOMS civil service staff (i.e. not including Probation Trust employees) at 31 December 2009 shows that 45,538 staff were employed in Public Sector Prisons and therefore in "front line" roles. The employment cost of these staff was £1,405,000,000. Non front line staff (including those working in shared operational support, area support and central headquarters) totalled 4,198 and the employment costs were £181 million.

All the salary details above are calculated from average salaries, including Earnings Related National Insurance Contributions and Accruing Superannuation Liability Contributions.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in his Department. [1486]

Mr Blunt: The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) were allocated four cars to its Ministers. One is a Jaguar XJ TDVi Sovereign and manufactured in the UK, one is a Toyota Prius T3 and manufactured in Japan and two are Honda Civic ES Hybrid and manufactured in Japan.

The Home Office provide the arrangements in relation to the Minister of State for Policing and Criminal Justice, who also has ministerial responsibilities at the Ministry of Justice.

These arrangements are changing following the publication of the new Ministerial Code which contains changes that affect ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. The code states that

"the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed".

Cabinet Office has provided clarification on how the code should be interpreted. The expectation is that Ministers not in the Cabinet will use the pool service and that Cabinet Ministers who have an allocated car will wish to consider how that car might be utilised by other Ministers within the Department before calls are made on the Government Car Service Pool.

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with Departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements.

Electoral Register

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment has been made of the Electoral Commission's ability to *(a)* monitor and *(b)* increase the electoral registration rates of individual local authorities in the last 10 years. [111]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have not made such an assessment. The Government have announced their intention to speed up the implementation of a system of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in Great Britain. We will be considering the electoral registration system in the context of the move to IER.

Responsibility for registering electors lies with individual electoral registration officers (EROs) based within local authorities. The Electoral Commission provides guidance to EROs in undertaking electoral registration, and sets and monitors performance standards for EROs. It also undertakes work to promote public awareness of electoral registration.

The Electoral Commission published research on electoral registration and a report on ERO's performance in March 2010: 'The completeness and accuracy of electoral Registers in Great Britain; and the Report on Performance Standards for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain'.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what research his Department has commissioned on *(a)* postal ballot fraud and *(b)* under-registration in the last 10 years. [728]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have not commissioned research on postal ballot fraud in the last 10 years. However, the Electoral Commission has addressed the issue of the integrity of the electoral process, including in relation to postal voting, in its statutory reports on elections in accordance with section 5 of the Political Parties and Elections Act 2000. In addition, the Electoral Commission also undertook detailed analysis of case files held by the Crown Prosecution Service which covered the period 2000-06, and published their findings in its reports, "Allegations of electoral malpractice in England and Wales 2000-2006" and "Further analysis of CPS files on allegations of electoral malpractice in England and Wales 2000-2006". More recently, the Electoral Commission in conjunction with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has published the reports "Allegations of electoral malpractice at the May 2008 elections in England and Wales" and "Analysis of allegations of electoral malpractice at the June 2009 elections". These reports give details of allegations of electoral malpractice reported to police during the elections in 2008 and 2009.

The Government have not commissioned research on under-registration in the last 10 years. However, in 2005, the then Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) made use of existing research to inform work aimed at identifying an evidence base for policy development and service targets. More recently, the Electoral Commission published their report, "The completeness and accuracy of electoral registers in Great Britain", in March 2010.

This, their latest of several studies on this subject, was based on a range of national data sources and case studies of eight local authorities across Great Britain. Among its key findings, the report found that,

"Recent social, economic and political changes appear to have resulted in a declining motivation to register to vote among specific social groups".

The social groups to which the report referred are those most likely to move home. Specifically among these, its case studies identified 17 to 24-year-olds, private sector tenants and black and minority ethnic (BME) groups as having higher than average rates of under-registration.

General Election 2010: Absent Voting

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how long was provided for postal ballot papers for the recent general election to be *(a)* issued and *(b)* delivered to UK citizens residing overseas. [705]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply.

Ballot papers cannot be printed before the deadline for the close of nominations. At a UK parliamentary election, under the Representation of the People Act 1983, this is 11 working days before polling day. Postal ballots are not issued before the last date for existing postal voters to cancel or vary their arrangements. For UK parliamentary elections this is also 11 working days before polling day.

The returning officer will issue ballot papers to be delivered to postal voters as soon as possible after this date, within a period of approximately one to two weeks prior to polling day. Postal ballot papers are printed before those to be used in polling stations on polling day, and the Electoral Commission guidance to administrators recommended that postal ballot papers to be sent overseas should be issued first.

Legal Aid Scheme: Finance

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice with reference to the speech by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 24 May 2010 on public spending reductions, whether part of the £325 million in-year reduction in his Department's budget will be met by a reduction in the legal aid budget. [2151]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, column13W.

Each area of the Department is contributing to the delivery of these savings (including arm's length bodies). These savings will be achieved by reducing discretionary spend, reducing capital and IT spend and stopping or deferring planned change programmes. When identifying these savings we have sought to ensure that they will not adversely affect services.

We will be in a position to announce full details of the savings plans at the time of the Budget on 22 June 2010.

Mental Health: Tribunals

Mr Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he has made of the effect on the provision of services to those appearing before mental health tribunals of recent changes in civil legal aid; and if he will make a statement. [1913]

Mr Djanogly: A fixed fee scheme for legally aided mental health work was introduced in January 2008. The provision of publicly-funded mental health services, including those related mental health tribunals, is monitored through the monthly collection of reports from legal aid providers by the Legal Services Commission (LSC). The LSC is confident that the provision of and access to mental health services including mental health tribunals remained good following those changes. This is evidenced by the increasing numbers of cases allocated to and started by mental health providers.

A recent tender exercise has been carried out by the LSC for new mental health contracts commencing in October 2010. The tender exercise has been significantly oversubscribed in all strategic health authorities.

Prisoners

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps he plans to take to reduce the prison population. [2024]

Mr Blunt: The Government believe that we need enough prison places for those whom the courts judge should receive a custodial sentence.

The Government will conduct a full review of sentencing and will introduce a "rehabilitation revolution", under which rehabilitation will be at the heart of a truly fit-for-purpose and cost-efficient prison system.

Long-term decisions on prison capacity programmes will be taken in the light of these policy developments.

Prisons: Education

Mr Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has to increase levels of literacy and numeracy among the prison population. [1974]

Mr Blunt: The Ministry of Justice works closely with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to provide prisoners with the skills they need to secure employment on release. That includes the literacy and numeracy skills that underpin so much else. Education and employment are critical factors in turning prisoners away from crime. The Government's priority on rehabilitation—"The rehabilitation revolution"—will mean that tackling prisoners' learning requirements, including those related specifically to increasing literacy and numeracy, will be high on our agenda.

Prisons: Food

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what guidelines are in place for the provision of meals in prisons to inmates with *(a)* kosher, *(b)* halal, *(c)* vegetarian, *(d)* vegan and *(e)* other dietary requirements. [1766]

Mr Blunt: Prisons offer a range of meals that enable prisoners to make preferred choices using a multi-choice menu system, including meals suited to their dietary, religious or cultural needs, including kosher, halal, vegetarian, vegan and other dietary requirements. Menu choices should reflect the establishment's population ethnicity.

Full guidance, including mandatory requirements, is set out in Prison Service Order 5000—the Prison Service Catering Manual.

Rape

Kate Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what proportion of those convicted of rape in England and Wales in each of the last five years were known to their victims. [1586]

Mr Blunt: The Court Proceedings Database held by the Ministry of Justice contains information on defendants proceeded against, found guilty and sentenced for criminal offences in England and Wales. Other than where specified in a statute statistical information available centrally does not include the circumstances of each case. It is therefore not possible to separately identify those defendants found guilty of rape who were known to their victim.

CABINET OFFICE

Cabinet Committees: Public Finance

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the estimated cost will be of establishing a Star Chamber. [1964]

Mr Maude: "The Spending Review Framework" published on 8 June 2010 announced that the Prime Minister has appointed a Committee of senior Cabinet Ministers, the Public Expenditure Committee (PEX), to advise the Cabinet on high level decisions that will need to be taken in the Spending Review.

It is not possible to isolate costs associated with individual Cabinet Committees; however, as a committee of Cabinet, costs incurred by PEX will be met from the Cabinet Secretariat's existing resources.

A copy of "The Spending Review Framework" will be placed in the Library of the House.

Civil Servants: Recruitment

Jo Swinson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps he plans to take to increase the number of central Government job vacancies published online. [1605]

Mr Maude: The Government expect the number of central Government vacancies to reduce as a result of the recruitment freeze announced as part of £6 billion savings this year. Where external vacancies do arise, these will all be published online on the civil service jobs site.

Jo Swinson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what effect the planned freeze on civil service recruitment will have on the civil service fast-stream graduate recruitment programme. [1606]

Mr Maude: The Fast Stream is exempt from the recruitment freeze, and we are proceeding to place successful candidates from the 2010 competition as normal. We also plan a 2011 intake, details of which will be announced on the Fast Stream website:

www.civilservice.gov.uk/jobs/faststream

later this year.

The exemption of the Fast Stream acknowledges the importance to the civil service of an uninterrupted supply of some of the country's best graduates.

Deaths: Cancer

Mr Wallace: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many deaths attributable to cancer there have been in each age group in Wyre and Preston North constituency in each year since 1999. [1799]

Mr Maude: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the Authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated June 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many deaths attributable to cancer there have been in each age group in Wyre and Preston North Constituency in each year since 1999. (1799)

The table attached provides the number of deaths where cancer was the underlying cause of death by age group, in Wyre and Preston North constituency, for the years 1999 to 2009 (the latest year available).

Table 1. Number of deaths where cancer was the underlying cause of death[1,2], by age group, in Wyre and Preston North constituency[3], 1999 to 2009[4]

Deaths (persons)

Year	*<45*	*45-49*	*50-54*	*55-59*	*60-64*	*65-69*	*70-74*	*75-79*	*80-84*	*85+*	*All ages*
1999	5	2	15	16	12	23	44	52	39	43	251
2000	3	3	8	10	22	37	31	39	37	48	238
2001	7	5	6	11	18	34	51	44	42	32	250
2002	7	5	3	16	17	31	40	41	41	54	255
2003	6	7	2	14	15	29	40	45	44	47	249
2004	4	5	6	17	25	26	38	49	43	40	253
2005	4	3	7	13	26	30	43	37	51	44	258
2006	4	6	9	22	12	27	46	36	61	50	273
2007	4	6	10	15	19	22	51	54	50	49	280
2008	3	6	7	13	28	34	59	55	46	60	311
2009	5	2	6	12	17	22	42	49	46	57	258

[1] Cause of death for cancer was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD- 9) codes 140-208 for the years 1999 to 2000 and Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes C0O-C97 from 2001. The introduction of ICD-10 in 2001 means that the numbers of deaths from cancer before 2001 are not completely comparable with later years.
[2] Cause of death for 2009 is provisional.
[3] Based on boundaries as of May 2010.
[4] Figures are for deaths registered in each calendar year.

Deaths: Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office for how many deaths the primary cause of death was recorded as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in each of the last five years. [2144]

Mr Maude: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated June 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking for what number of deaths the primary cause of death was recorded as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in each of the last five years. (2144)

The table attached provides the number of deaths where chronic obstructive pulmonary disease was the underlying cause of death in England and Wales, for the years 2005 to 2009 (the latest year available).

The number of deaths registered in England and Wales each year by sex, age and cause are published annually on the National Statistics website at:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15096

Number of deaths where chronic obstructive pulmonary disease[1] was the underlying cause, England and Wales,[2] 2005-09[3,4]

	Deaths (persons)
2005	24,179
2006	23,319
2007	23,727
2008	24,816
2009	23,318

[1] Cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes J40-J44.
[2] Figures for England and Wales include deaths of non-residents.
[3] Figures are for deaths registered in each calendar year.
[4] Deaths registered in 2009 are provisional.

Departmental Manpower

Chris Bryant: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many full-time equivalent staff of each grade are employed in his Department. [2116]

Mr Maude: There is an established practice whereby information concerning how many full-time equivalent officials are employed at each grade in Cabinet Office is published on the Office for National Statistics website:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/Civil-service-tables-2009-final.xls

A copy of the most recent table (No. 20) has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office which Ministers in his Department have been issued with *(a)* a Blackberry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1418]

Mr Maude: The Cabinet Office have issued Blackberry devices to myself, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform. No iPhone, other mobile phone or personal digital assistants have been issued to any Ministers in the Cabinet Office.

Departmental Official Hospitality

John Mann: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what budget has been allocated for entertainment, including alcohol, for the *(a)* Prime Minister's Office, *(b)* Office of the Leader of the House and *(c)* Cabinet Office in each of the next three years. [1317]

Mr Maude: Cabinet Office budgets for the next three financial years (i.e. 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14) will only be determined following the comprehensive spending review commencing autumn 2010.

Any Cabinet Office expenditure on entertainment, including alcohol is made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on principles set out in "Managing Public Money" and the Treasury handbook on "Regularity & Propriety".

Foreign Investment in UK: Pakistan

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what estimate he has made of the level of foreign direct investment in the UK from Pakistani investors in each of the last five years. [1116]

Mr Maude: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking 'what estimate has been made of the level of foreign direct investment from Pakistani investors in each of the last five years' (1116).

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) produces estimates for UK Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) based on survey data collected by the ONS and Bank of England. Headline figures from the annual surveys are published in a Statistical Bulletin, "Foreign Direct Investment", which is available from the UK National Statistics website. The latest figures available at the level of counterpart country are for the year 2008.

Data on inward investment flows and positions (levels) from Pakistan to the UK for 2004 to 2008 are provided in the attached table.

Net foreign direct investment in the UK by Pakistan, United Kingdom, 2004-08

£ million

	Investment flows	Investment position (level)[1]
2004	.[2]	.[2]
2005	9	72
2006	9	84
2007	4	97

Net foreign direct investment in the UK by Pakistan, United Kingdom, 2004-08

£ million

	Investment flows	Investment position (level)[1]
2008	[3]	98

[1] Position at end of each year. [2] Indicates figure is suppressed to avoid disclosure of information relating to individual enterprises. [3] Indicates nil returns. *Source:* Annual Inward Foreign Direct Investment surveys.

Government Departments: ICT

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 26 May 2010, *Official Report*, columns 2-3WS, on savings (2010-11), in respect of which *(a)* IT projects and *(b)* contracts with each company the £95 million savings in IT spending are to be made. [846]

Mr Maude: As part of the Government's response to addressing the financial shortfall in the public sector and to contribute to the £6 billion savings required for 2010-11, we have instructed Departments, agencies and NDPBs to carry out a review of ICT projects in order to reduce costs. Each project will need to be reviewed individually to ascertain if the project should be stopped, reshaped or continue, as a result targets by project have not been set.

The review of ICT projects will be followed by a contract renegotiation exercise which will be undertaken at supplier level and will focus on those suppliers who have the largest overall revenues from UK public sector contfacts. Targets by contract have not been defined as each will need to be individually reviewed and negotiated.

Dr Pugh: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent estimate he has made of the likely level of savings to be made consequent on specifying compliance with open standards in Government IT procurement. [1224]

Mr Maude: I have not made any estimate on the likely level of savings that will accrue from specifying compliance with open standards in Government IT procurement. The coalition Government have made a clear manifesto pledge to open up Government procurement and reduce costs.

As part of the forward work programme, the Efficiency and Reform Group within the Cabinet Office has already begun work to review and simplify ICT procurement including an increased focus on the use of open standards. Once this programme is under way we will be define the targets for savings from this activity and these will be published.

Government Departments: Publications

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has for the open document standard in which future data releases are to be published; and if he will make a statement. [1936]

Mr Maude: I will be seeking the advice of the Public Sector Transparency Board on the open standardised formats to be used for future data releases; they in turn will involve and engage developers and others likely to use the data. Where possible we will use recognised open standards including Linked Data standards.

However I do not wish discussion of standards to delay the initial release of key datasets, and so for these we will where necessary use widely accepted basic formats (such as Delimiter Separated Variable format, as used for the Treasury COINS database) and listen to feedback from developers and data users in improving the formats for subsequent releases.

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office whether he plans to authorise departments to publish data sets in a machine readable format. [1937]

Mr Maude: Departments do not need authorisation to publish data sets in machine readable formats and some already do so. The Government's policy is that this should be the norm for all datasets published by all public bodies, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already asked Government Departments and agencies to ensure that any information published includes the underlying data in an open standardised format for July 2010.

National Security Council

Mr Ellwood: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office who the members are of the National Security Council. [2149]

Mr Letwin: The National Security Council is chaired by the Prime Minister. Permanent members are the Deputy Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence, the Secretary of State for International Development, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the Minister for Security and myself.

Other Cabinet Ministers are invited to attend as required. The Chief of the Defence Staff, the heads of the intelligence agencies and other senior officials also attend as required.

Public Bodies

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the answer of 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 52W, on non-departmental public bodies, whether his Department holds a list of the names and addresses of all *(a)* non-departmental public bodies and *(b)* agencies. [1946]

Mr Maude: The names of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are published in the annual Cabinet Office report "Public Bodies" copies of which are in the Libraries of the House. These reflect the bodies established by the last Administration. Regarding the addresses of the NDPBs, I refer to the answer of 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 52W. Names and addresses of UK agencies will be published shortly in the "List of Ministerial Responsibilities".

Public Sector Transparency Board

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) which Ministers will attend Public Sector Transparency Board meetings; and if he will make a statement; [1929]

(2) how many officials have been allocated to work for the Public Sector Transparency Board; [1930]

(3) what budget he has allocated to support the work of the Public Sector Transparency Board; and how often the Board will meet; [1931]

(4) who the members of the Public Sector Transparency Board are; [1932]

Mr Maude: I will chair the Public Sector Transparency Board myself and Sir Tim Berners-Lee, Professor Nigel Shadbolt and Mr Tom Steinberg will be members. Further initial external members of the Board will be announced shortly. Ministers, officials and others may also be invited to attend meetings if they can help on particular issues the Board is considering.

The Board will also involve and engage the wider community of experts, developers and advocates on transparency and open data, as well as working with Ministers and officials in Government Departments and other public bodies. I envisage that the Board will meet formally as necessary, and at least quarterly, but that most of its work will be through its members working together, individually and with others on transparency, open data and standards issues.

The secretariat and initial budget for the Board itself will be drawn from the existing resources of the Cabinet Office. The overall budget for the Board's work, which will be from within existing departmental allocations, will be settled once I have the Board's advice on the work which is necessary and its priority.

Senior Civil Servants: Pay

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the salary is of each civil servant appointed since 1 April 2010 who earns more than £150,000 per annum. [1989]

Mr Maude: On 21 May we announced the appointment of Peter Housden, currently Permanent Secretary for Communities and Local Government, as Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government. Mr Housden will take up his appointment later this month and his salary will be disclosed in the same way as for other senior civil servants earning £150,000 or more per annum. I am not aware of any further appointments at this pay level.

Swine Flu

Paul Flynn: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when his Department will publish the results of its investigation into the swine influenza pandemic. [2080]

Mr Maude: The independently chaired review of the UK response to the 2009 H1N1 ("swine flu")pandemic is aiming to publish its report on 1 July 2010.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 15 June 2010

WALES

Departmental Policy Advisers

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many special advisers *(a)* she and *(b)* the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (i) has appointed and (ii) plans to appoint. [325]

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments she has made since her appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [362]

Mrs Gillan: I refer the hon. Members to the written ministerial statement made by the Prime Minister on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 32WS.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Pay

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was paid in bonuses to civil servants in her Department in *(a)* 2008-09 and *(b)* 2009-10. [2175]

Richard Benyon: An element of DEFRA's overall pay awards is allocated to non-consolidated variable pay related to performance. These payments are used to drive high performance and form part of the pay award for members of staff who demonstrate exceptional performance, for example by exceeding targets set or meeting challenging objectives.

Non-consolidated variable pay awards are funded from within existing pay bill controls, and have to be re-earned each year against pre-determined targets and, as such, do not add to future pay bill costs. The percentage of the pay bill set aside for performance-related awards for the SCS is based on recommendations from the independent Senior Salaries Review Body.

The following table provides details of how much was paid in non-consolidated performance pay in DEFRA and its Executive Agencies in 2008-09 and 2009-10.

Data for DEFRA covers staff at grade 6 and below in core-DEFRA and those Executive Agencies covered by the core-department's terms and conditions at the time i.e. Animal Health, Veterinary Medicines Directorate and the Marine and Fisheries Agency. It also includes senior civil servants in core DEFRA and its Executive Agencies (Animal Health, Veterinary Medicines Directorate, Marine and Fisheries Agency, Rural Payments Agency, Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Centre for the Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science and the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA). FERA was created on 1 April 2009. Data for 2008-09 relates to its predecessor, the Central Science Laboratory.

£

	2008-09	*2009-10*
DEFRA	3,072,554	3,021,583
Rural Payments Agency	507,572	464,308
Veterinary Laboratories Agency	47,409	253,853
Food and Environment Research Agency	264,280	378,777
Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science	773,747	798,000

Fisheries: Quotas

Mr Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she had *(a)* with the government of (i) Norway, (ii) Iceland and (ii) the Faroe Islands and *(b)* at EU level on fishing quotas in relation to the North Sea. [2382]

Richard Benyon: Neither I nor the Secretary of State have had recent, direct discussions with the Governments of Norway, Iceland or the Faroe Islands on North sea fishing quotas. DEFRA officials, however, have recently taken part in discussions and negotiations on this matter with these countries, and participated in internal EU meetings this year as follows:

EU/Norway—28 to 30 May;

EU/Iceland—26 and 27 May; and

EU/Faroe Islands—14 and 15 January.

In addition, on 28 to 30 May this year, DEFRA officials also took part in negotiations, involving delegations from the EU, Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands, on the management of mackerel stocks.

Forests

Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria are being used by Forestry Commission England to assess the biodiversity and public benefits of the public forest estate as part of a portfolio analysis. [2018]

Mr Paice: The Forestry Commission is using a range of attributes, each of which has either an individual or range of values. These give a points score to every area of woodland greater than 0.5 hectares on the public forest estate. These points are then used for the analysis.

For Natural Environment, which includes biodiversity, the attributes being scored are:

Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites.

Veteran Trees

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

National Nature Reserve, Special Protection Area, Special Area of Conservation

Presence of European Protected Species

Bird of Prey breeding or feeding area

Forestry Commission butterfly priority area

Red Squirrels

Other protected species

Management plan for other specific species

National Park/Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

For Quality of Life, which includes direct public benefits, the attributes being scored are:

Population (Number and distance to component part)

Freehold/Leasehold and Access

Visitor Numbers

Visitor Facilities

Local 'Friends' and other groups using the woodland

Community Forest (including National Forest and Coalfield areas)

Priority Areas (Index of Multiple Deprivation)

Growth Areas

Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans there are for a repositioning exercise of the public forest estate and programme of land sales by Forestry Commission England. [2019]

Mr Paice: The Forestry Commission is conducting a study into the future long-term sustainable role for the public forest estate. It is expected to make recommendations later this year about any necessary changes to improve its ability to deliver relevant priorities in the Strategy for England's Trees Woods and Forests and contribute to other Government objectives. The outcome of the study and the future role of the Forestry Commission will inform any repositioning.

Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Public Forest Estate Strategic Plans will be revised to meet the English forestry strategy. [2020]

Mr Paice: Strategic plans are prepared at a forest district level. The current arrangements, put in place following the review of the approach in 2008, is that forest districts may delay their revision in order to take into account the evolving operating environment. This included when to convert woods and forests to open habitats, published in March 2010, and the results of the ongoing study of the long-term role of the public forest estate in England, expected later this year. Currently more than half the forest districts have competed a revised plan.

Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to produce the Public Forest Estate implementation plan for the Government's policy on when to convert woods and forests to open habitats in England. [2021]

Mr Paice: When the Forestry Commission published the policy on when to convert woods and forests to open habitats in England they indicated that they would develop the delivery mechanisms and publish a strategy for open habitats on the Forestry Commission Public Forest Estate during 2010-11.

Incinerators

Mr Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to provide guidance to local authorities on the use of incinerators for municipal waste; and if she will make a statement. [1911]

Richard Benyon: A cross-Department energy from waste (EfW) project led by DEFRA and the Department of Energy and Climate Change was established last year. The overarching aim of the project is to consider the role of EfW in waste management and renewable energy generation. As part of that, the project is considering the current state of the EfW market, the relationship between EfW technologies and feedstock choice, the contribution EfW can make to the green economy and how best to communicate EfW policy. We intend to bring forward policy proposals towards the end of 2010.

It is the responsibility of local authorities not central Government to decide how waste is best managed in their respective areas. Local authorities need to be free to adopt such technologies as part of an integrated waste management solution if they deem it appropriate.

Wood: EU Action

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy in discussions at EU level to support the introduction throughout the EU of severe penalties on those responsible for importing illegally logged timber. [2131]

Mr Paice: The UK is negotiating legislation to eliminate the flow of illegal timber onto the EU market—commonly called the Due Diligence Regulation. Agreement on this at an EU level is expected in July. Inclusion of a prohibition to prevent illegal timber from entering the EU market would be an important component of this regulation which we are working to achieve. Infringements of the final regulation will need to be sanctioned by effective, proportionate and dissuasive penalties. The UK will put in place such penalties, and will encourage colleagues in the EU to do the same.

Wood: Imports

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she plans to take to prevent the importation into the UK of timber obtained from illegal logging. [2335]

Mr Paice: The UK is negotiating legislation to eliminate the flow of illegal timber onto the EU market—commonly called the due diligence regulation.

Agreement on this at an EU level is expected in July. Inclusion of a prohibition to prevent illegal timber from entering the EU market would be an important component of this regulation which we are working to achieve.

The UK is also providing support to voluntary bilateral trade agreements between timber producing countries and the EU. These agreements require timber imports from signatory countries to be licensed to prove that they have been legally harvested.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Pay

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was paid in bonuses to civil servants in his Department in *(a)* 2008-09 and *(b)* 2009-10. [2172]

David Mundell: All staff in the Scotland Office are on secondment from the Scottish Government or the Ministry of Justice. Staff may be eligible for non-consolidated performance payments in different ways. Firstly, through end of year performance payments under their parent bodies' performance management arrangements. The Scotland Office does not itself make the end of year awards and does not hold information centrally on end of year non-consolidated performance payments made to its secondees.

Secondly, under the Special Bonus Scheme of the Scottish Government and the Reward and Recognition Scheme of the MoJ, the Office may directly authorise non-consolidated performance payments (or in the case of the MoJ scheme, small and instantaneous awards, e.g. vouchers) in recognition of special effort, achievement and commitment. The following table shows the number and cost of non-pensionable payments made under these schemes.

Financial year	*Total number of payments*	*Total cost of payments (£)*
2008-09	8	2,900
2009-10	17	2,925

Departmental Reviews

Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to the answer of 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 137W, on Government departments: reviews, what reviews his Department is undertaking; and what the *(a)* purpose and *(b)* timescale of each is. [2578]

David Mundell: My Department is not undertaking any reviews. It will contribute to other reviews being undertaken across Government in accordance with its policy responsibilities.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Union Flag

Ian Austin: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities what her policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which the Government Equalities Office is responsible. [1822]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government Equalities Office is based in a building Eland House occupied by Communities and Local Government. CLG's policy is to fly the flag 365 days a year.

Departmental Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Minister for Women and Equality what her estimate is of the cost to the public purse of proposed reductions in numbers of non-front line staff in the Government Equalities Office and its agencies. [500]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government Equalities Office is not proposing to cut any staff numbers in 2010-11.

Mr Anderson: To ask the Minister for Women and Equality how many *(a)* front-line and *(b)* other staff were employed by (i) the Government Equalities Office and (ii) each of its agencies in the latest year for which figures are available; and what her most recent estimate is of the annual cost to the public purse of employing staff of each type in that office. [543]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government Equalities Office is a small policy department and our main function is supporting Ministers, for example in developing legislation, rather than delivering front-line services. GEO employed on average130 staff in 2009-10 in this role, at a cost of £7.4 million. The Government Equalities Office does not have any agencies.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities what her policy is on the use by Ministers in the Government Equalities Office of cars allocated from *(a)* its pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured in the UK; whether Ministers in that Office are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [2399]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government Equalities Office does not have a pool of cars for use by its Ministers.

Arrangements are changing following the publication of the new Ministerial Code which contains changes that affect ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. The code states that

"the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed."

Cabinet Office has provided clarification on how the code should be interpreted. The expectation is that Ministers not in the Cabinet will use the pool service and that Cabinet Ministers who have an allocated car will wish to consider how that car might be utilised by other Ministers within the Department before calls are made on the Government Car Service Pool.

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with Departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements.

Departmental Official Residences

Ian Austin: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities whether any domestic properties in the gift of the Government have been allocated to the use of Ministers in her Department. [1794]

Lynne Featherstone: No domestic properties have been allocated to Ministers by the Government Equalities Office.

Departmental Translation Services

Ian Austin: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities what *(a)* documents and *(b)* other information for which (i) the Government Equalities Office and (ii) its associated public bodies are

responsible are published or provided in the UK in languages other than English; for what reason each such publication is required to be made available in a language or languages other than English; and what estimate she has made of the cost to the public purse of the translation work so incurred in the latest period for which figures are available. [1770]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government Equalities Office has arranged for the following documents and information to be published in Welsh: Equality Bill:

Framework for a Fairer Future; Equality Bill Consultation (Age)—Easy read; and Public Appointments cards.

The Government Equalities Office has also arranged for the Forced Marriage fact sheet in Urdu and Arabic; and the Female Genital Mutilation fact sheet in Somali.

The translations were produced in the appropriate language because the documents provide advice or policy statements that could have a bearing on those people whose first language is not English. The estimate cost of the above translations is £19,251.24.

The Women's National Commission (WNC) has arranged for documents to be published in Welsh at the request of WNC partners as part of our regular outreach activities. In September-October 2007, two Welsh events were held which required the translation of some documents for use on the day. This work amounted to £69.45 in total. In February 2008, event documentation was translated into Welsh costing £178.70.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission uses its Welsh Language Scheme to assess the need to publish documents in the Welsh language. Publications are assessed on a case by case basis. Criteria used will include the extent to which publications are to be used by the general public and stakeholders in Wales.

On average the Commission spends between £120,000 and £140,000 per year on all Welsh translation.

The Commission rarely translates its publications into other languages. This is again assessed on a case by case basis, with consideration given to the objectives of the project and needs of the target audience. For example, the Commission's recent inquiry into employment and recruitment in the meat processing industry took evidence from migrant workers who predominantly only spoke eastern European languages. Therefore additional translation of materials was undertaken. The cost of this translation was less than £5,000 in total.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan: Peacekeeping Operations

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Talisman route clearance system is *(a)* fully operational and *(b)* being used. [2132]

Peter Luff: The Talisman route clearance system is being used in Afghanistan and has been fully operational since April 2010.

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the timetable is for the entry of the Watchkeeper air system into service in Afghanistan. [2517]

Peter Luff: Watchkeeper is planned to be introduced into Afghanistan incrementally during 2011.

Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made towards awarding Afghan campaign medals to those who have served in the aero-med teams; and if he will make a statement. [2639]

Mr Robathan: The case for awarding the operational service medal (Afghanistan) to aero-medical evacuation teams is being actively considered.

Armed Forces Day

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to mark Armed Forces Day; and if he will make a statement. [2082]

Mr Robathan: Armed Forces Day is an annual opportunity for the nation to show their support for the men and women of the armed forces community: from currently serving troops to service families; and from ex-service personnel to cadets. This year the national event will take place in Cardiff and will begin with a parade from Cardiff castle to the millennium centre followed by many other events, including: a drumhead service; a fly past from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight and the Red Arrows; a Campaign Reunion centre; displays and exhibitions from the Royal Marines Commando display team; as well as many non-military, family orientated activities, culminating with a firework display in Cardiff Bay.

Other initiatives include 'Fly the Flag', in which Government Departments and local councils are encouraged to fly the Armed Forces Day flag from 21 June until Armed Forces Day. Retail flags and window stickers are available to members of the public, there will be uniform to work and uniform to school days, and a special magazine is being produced. We are also making use of the internet and are happy to be supported by platforms such as Twitter, Flickr and YouTube, among others.

Across the country people are getting involved in hundreds of different events. Further information about these events or how individuals can organise their own can be found at

http://www.armedforcesday.org.uk/

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which events Ministers of his Department will attend in connection with Armed Forces Day; and if he will make a statement. [2150]

Mr Robathan: On current plans, the Secretary of State for Defence will be attending the National Event in Cardiff on 26 June; the Minister for the Armed Forces will be attending the events in Plymouth; the Minister for International Security Strategy will be attending the events in Nottingham while the Minister for Defence Equipment, Support and Technology will be attending the events planned in Manchester. I will be attending a flag raising event in London on 21 June. Ministers will continue to examine the possibility of being involved in other events to show support for the service community where the opportunity arises.

Armed Forces: Contraceptives

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent on condoms for members of the armed forces in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and for what reasons. [2377]

Mr Robathan: The Ministry of Defence's Defence Health Strategy (DHS) has as one of its targets the promotion of sexual health across the armed forces. This makes an important contribution to the aim of maximising the number of personnel fit to perform the tasks required of them. Within the Surgeon General's Department (SGD), the Defence Sexual Health Working Group provides guidance and promotes a range of promotional initiatives.

Since August 2008, SGD has held a health promotion budget to support the DHS, and has spent a total of around £80,000, £45,000 in 2008-09 and £35,000 in 2009-10, on provision of condom machines in service clubs and messes, as well as on individual packages of condoms for distribution throughout the armed forces. Further campaigns may have been funded by the single services, or even more locally at unit level, but expenditure in these areas is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Armed Forces: Dogs

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dogs of each breed there are in each service of the armed forces; and what functions they carry out. [2056]

Mr Robathan: There are 399 military working dogs across the armed forces. Animal records are kept by function rather than by breed. Information by breed could be provided only at disproportionate cost, but breeds used are primarily labradors, German shepherd dogs, mallenots and English springer spaniels. The numbers of dogs are split across the services as follows:

	Navy	*Army*	*Number RAF*
Protection	0	71	159
Search	0	111	58

There are a further 503 dogs within the Ministry of Defence Police and Guarding Agency and other guarding organisations.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether dogs are permitted in officers' messes; and if he will make a statement. [2060]

Mr Robathan: It is for the local commander to establish clear guidelines on the keeping of pets in messes.

Armed Forces: Health Services

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the Army Recovery Capability; and if he will make a statement. [2637]

Mr Robathan: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) remains committed to the Army Recovery Capability, as set out at the launch on 11 February this year. This new capability marks a further step forward in the support to our armed forces and will ensure the best possible care and management is provided to our wounded, sick and injured personnel.

The MOD has committed £30 million over the next four years to manage and deliver the Army Recovery Capability in partnership with the Royal British Legion and Help for Heroes, who have both generously committed £20 million towards the operational and build costs.

The Army Recovery Capability will bring together a range of separate services, such as the NHS, the charitable sector and other Government Departments, into a single coherent programme and will either return individuals to duty or prepare them for civilian life, however long that takes. For those who leave the armed forces, it will provide the right training, civilian employment advice and work placements.

A key element of the concept is the provision of purpose built centres. These will build on the experiences of the Pathfinder Centre that was established in Edinburgh on 17 August 2009. It is currently envisaged that there will be four centres, in Colchester, Catterick, Tidworth/Bulford and in Edinburgh. They will be located near or in Army garrisons to allow personnel the use of Army facilities and support from the Army. Members of all three services will be able to access them.

Armed Forces: Horses

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many times horses in the armed forces have been transported abroad in the last 12 months; and for what reasons; [2057]

(2) how many horses there are in each of the armed services; and how many carry out each function. [2058]

Mr Robathan: Neither the Royal Navy nor the Royal Air Force own any horses. There are a total of 485 horses in the Army, all of which are used for ceremonial purposes. 71 of these are based at the Defence Animal Centre for training and to provide a reserve to cover injury and sickness.

In the last 12 months horses have been transported abroad twice. A breakdown is shown in the following table:

Date	*Purpose*	*Number*
July 2009	Basle Military Tattoo	29
October 2009	Abu Dhabi International Equestrian Exhibition	30

In both cases there was no additional charge to the public purse as costs were met by the event organisers.

Armed Forces: Housing

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent upgrading single living service accommodation in each of the last five years. [2642]

Mr Robathan: As part of a £1.4 billion investment programme, since 2003 some 40,000 new or improved

single living accommodation (SLA) bed-spaces have been delivered. A further 20,000 are planned by 2013, subject to future funding decisions.

The programme is being delivered through various initiatives across the Department, including private finance initiative projects where SLA improvements are only one element of the work. Exact expenditure by year cannot be separately identified and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the Armed Forces Shared Equity scheme; and if he will make a statement. [2644]

Mr Robathan: The pilot of the Armed Forces Home Ownership Scheme is due to last four years. The Ministry of Defence will continue to monitor and evaluate the scheme through the Homes and Communities Agency.

Plans to continue beyond the pilot will be determined by take-up rates, feedback as to whether the scheme meets the aspirations of service personnel, value for money and affordability.

Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department *(a)* spent in each of the last five years and *(b)* intends to spend in each of the next two years upgrading armed forces housing. [2647]

Mr Robathan: The following has been spent upgrading service family accommodation properties in the last five financial years:

Financial year	*Spend (£ million)*
2005-06	32.4
2006-07	16.4
2007-08	16.9
2008-09	35.5
2009-10	64.0

While the Department plans many more upgrades in future years, expenditure on this, as with other areas of defence spending, will be subject to the future funding decisions.

The coalition Government will look at whether there is scope to refurbish the armed forces' accommodation from efficiencies within the Ministry of Defence.

Armed Forces: Mental Health Services

Mike Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in the review of the six NHS mental health pilot schemes for former armed forces personnel; when he expects to publish the conclusions of the review; and what plans he has to allocate funding in support of the review's conclusions. [2648]

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the six NHS mental health pilot schemes for former armed forces personnel; and if he will make a statement. [2636]

Mr Robathan: The Government are committed to providing effective, through-life, mental health services for our service and ex-service personnel. The Department of Health and devolved Administrations, with support from the Ministry of Defence, are currently undertaking community mental health pilots for ex-service personnel at six NHS trusts across the UK. The final pilot in Scotland is due to be completed in April 2011.

Initial findings suggest that a variety of different approaches can be used to meet ex-service personnel needs including optional pathways into care not dependent on traditional GP referrals; that NHS processes and interventions benefit from medical personnel with an understanding and interest in veterans and who are able to carry out rigorous client assessment and case formulation.

MOD has provided some £500,000 towards the setting up and evaluation of the pilots. Evaluation of the pilots will be undertaken in the autumn. Subject to the findings, best practice will be identified and will provide input for planning future provision by the NHS of mental health services across the UK from 2011-12.

Armed Forces: Royal Household

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armed forces personnel of each rank from each service are attached to the Royal Household; and at what cost in the latest period for which figures are available. [2035]

Mr Robathan: In order to provide service knowledge and assistance to six senior principal members of the royal family in their service appointments, 13 members of the armed forces are permanently attached to the royal household at a total cost of approximately £960,000 per annum. Each post is rotational through the three services. The current breakdown is as follows:

1 Wing Commander (RAF)
1 Lieutenant Commander (RN)
1 Major (Army)
1 Captain (Army)
1 Warrant Officer Class 2 (Army)
1 Staff Sergeant (Army)
1 Petty Officer (RN)
1 Lance Sergeant (Corporal) (Army)
2 Corporal (Army)
1 Corporal (RAF)
2 Lance Corporal (Army).

Armoured Fighting Vehicles

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Mastiff, *(b)* Ridgeback and *(c)* other armoured vehicles are on order; and what the timetable is for their entry into theatre. [2520]

Peter Luff: The following Mastiff, Ridgback and other armoured vehicles are on order:

Vehicle	*On order*
Warthog	101
Talisman Mastiff 2	1
Talisman Buffalo	1
Talisman high mobility excavator (HMEE)	4
Ridgback	20
Mastiff	32

Vehicle	On order
Wolfhound	48
Husky	30

The figures are limited to complete platforms and do not include enhancements to existing vehicles. The figures used represent the number of armoured vehicles on contract less those vehicles reported as already having been delivered to the Ministry of Defence as at 10 June 2010.

Details on the timetable for delivery of entry into theatre are being withheld as the information is likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of the armed forces.

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the timetable is for delivery of the second batch of light patrol protected vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [2543]

Peter Luff: Industry responses to the invitation to tender for the initial batch of light protected patrol vehicles (LPPV) are due to be returned on 15 June. As a contract for the LPPV requirement has yet to be let, delivery details cannot be confirmed at this stage as they are still subject to commercial negotiations. Delivery of a second batch of LPPV will also be subject to commercial negotiations once the full requirement has been refined.

Astute Class Submarines

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the timetable is for the delivery of each Astute class submarine; and how many have been ordered in the last five years. [2516]

Peter Luff: Since June 2005, contracts have been awarded that relate to three Astute class submarines. These are as follows:

Boat	Contract	Date
4	Long lead items	May 2006
4	Initial build	May 2007
5	Long lead items	December 2007
5	Initial build	March 2010
6	Long lead items	March 2010

The Strategic Defence and Security Review will define the future shape and role of the armed forces and the equipment that they will need. The impact on any specific equipment projects, including the Astute programme, will be announced in due course. Furthermore, the Astute programme is currently being re-baselined, so the delivery timetable can only be confirmed once detailed joint planning and cost analysis work has been completed.

Chinook Helicopters

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the timetable is for the entry into service of the first of the new Chinook helicopters; and how much has been spent from the public purse on the development of the new Chinook helicopters in the last five years. [2521]

Peter Luff: In December 2009, the Ministry of Defence announced the intention to procure 22 new Chinook helicopters. The date for entry into service of the first Chinook will be confirmed as part of the main investment decision later this year, although the first ten of the new Chinook are planned to be delivered during the course of 2012 and 2013. A contract valued at £68 million for development and long lead component manufacture was awarded to Boeing in March 2010 and up to the end of May work to the value of approximately £8 million has been completed.

Defence

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which defence projects are awaiting approval. [2539]

Peter Luff: The Government are reassessing spending approvals granted between 1 January 2010 and the general election to ensure that they offer good value for money and are consistent with the Government's priorities. This includes a number of approvals relating to Defence equipment projects and further announcements will be made in due course.

Defence Animal Centre

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his plans are for the future of the Centre for Defence Animals at Melton Mowbray; and if he will make a statement. [2036]

Mr Robathan: Under current plans the Defence Animal Centre at Melton Mowbray will continue to provide training for all military working animals and their handlers.

Defence Medical Services

Mike Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the relocation of Defence Medical Services to Lichfield; and if he will make a statement. [2649]

Mr Robathan: The relocation of elements of the Defence Medical Services, namely Headquarters Surgeon General (HQ SG) and major components of the Joint Medical Command (JMC), is proceeding to plan. The new HQ, named Coltman House, has been built and is now fully occupied. Alongside HQ SG, the elements of the JMC now at Whittington comprise the Defence Medical Group (DMG) and JMC HQ (previously located at Gosport); Director Healthcare (previously located in London); Defence Dental Service (previously located at RAF Halton); and the Defence Postgraduate Medical Dean (previously located in Birmingham).

We anticipate announcing a preferred bidder for the next phase of the project, known as "Increment 2", this summer. This will include new training facilities, a new learning centre, a new lecture theatre, new messes for officers and for warrant officers and senior NCOs, and a new junior ranks dining and leisure facility. "Increment 3", running in parallel with "Increment 2", will provide modern living accommodation, and is being run as part of the MOD-wide Project SLAM (Single Living Accommodation Modernisation).

Departmental Official Hospitality

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what budget his Department has allocated for entertainment, including alcohol, in each of the next three years. [1319]

Mr Robathan: We use official entertainment to pursue UK security policy interests, facilitate a wider public understanding of the armed forces, and enhance professional contacts within the UK and with other nations. Expenditure on official entertainment must be modest and is incurred according to business need.

Expenditure in each of the last three years has been approximately £4 million. Departmental expenditure plans for 2011-12 and beyond have not yet been agreed, but we expect the amount spent to reduce.

Currently no new official entertainment can be arranged without the prior approval of nominated senior civil servants.

Ex-servicemen: Military Decorations

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many veterans' lapel badges have been issued to former members of the armed forces to date. [2083]

Mr Robathan: As of 9 June 2010, 790,650 veterans lapel badges have been issued to former members of the armed forces and their entitled dependants since their introduction on 10 April 2004.

Ex-servicemen: Radiation Exposure

Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what steps he plans to take on the issue of nuclear test veterans; and if he will make a statement; [2638]

(2) what his latest assessment is of research undertaken into the health of nuclear test veterans and their families. [2640]

Mr Robathan: This Government recognise and are grateful to all the service personnel who participated in the British nuclear testing programme. Their contribution ensured that the UK was equipped with an appropriate nuclear deterrent during the cold war which, thankfully, we never needed to use.

MOD has previously commissioned considerable research into investigating health issues relating to nuclear test veterans.

We will continue to look at any health issues raised by nuclear test veterans. We are currently considering a health needs audit of nuclear test veterans' health needs. The aim is for this project to be of practical relevance to veterans with results delivered to a reasonable time scale. The assistance and support provided by the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association in this process is greatly appreciated and we will continue to work with them going forward.

HMS Sultan

Caroline Dinenage: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military staff at HMS Sultan School of Navy Engineering have informed his Department that they will not move to RAF St. Athan; and what the estimated cost is of replacing them with equivalent personnel. [2205]

Nick Harvey *[holding answer 14 June 2010]:* Under current plans the relocation of Defence Training Rationalisation elements at HMS Sultan will take place by 2020. The appointment of military staff to posts in St Athan will be conducted through the normal military system nearer to the move of HMS Sultan. Civilian staff currently working at HMS Sultan will transfer across to Metrix at the start of the contract in 2011 and therefore they will be Metrix employees when the move to St Athan occurs in 2015 at the earliest. Civilian staff have yet to be approached to determine who will wish to move to St Athan; that consultation will take place nearer the time.

Caroline Dinenage: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the cost of moving HMS Sultan School of Navy Engineering to RAF St Athan in Wales. [2206]

Peter Luff *[holding answer 14 June 2010]:* Under current plans HMS Sultan will be the last training organisation to move to St Athan which will occur by 2020. At this early stage in the development of the project, it is not possible to provide the specific costs relating to the move.

Military Aircraft

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many C-17 Globemaster Aircraft have been delivered for use by the armed forces in the last five years. [2518]

Peter Luff: In the last five years two C-17 Globemaster aircraft have entered service with the RAF. There are a total of six aircraft in service with a seventh expected to enter service in January 2011 against an approved in-service date of May 2011.

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what change there has been in the number of UK military airframes available to commanders in the last three years. [2519]

Peter Luff: Officials are collating the information requested, across the armed forces, and I will write to the hon. Member shortly when this work is complete.

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the seventh C-17 Globemaster 111 aircraft to enter into service. [2542]

Peter Luff: The seventh C-17 Globemaster III aircraft is expected to enter service with the RAF in January 2011 against an approved in-service date of May 2011.

Military Aircraft: Helicopters

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many helicopters are under order from his Department; and when he expects them to be delivered into theatre. [2541]

Peter Luff: The Ministry of Defence has 62 new Lynx Wildcat helicopters on order from Augusta Westland. 34 Lynx Wildcat (Army variant) are due to be delivered incrementally between 2012 and 2016, with the remaining

28 Lynx Wildcat (Navy variant) being delivered between 2013 and 2017. Subject to operational requirements, the Lynx Wildcat should be available for deployment to theatre in 2015.

On 15 December 2009, the previous Defence Secretary announced the intention to buy an additional 22 new Chinook as part of a new Rotary Wing Strategy. These aircraft are not yet on contract.

It should be noted that under the Strategic Defence and Security Review, work has been set in hand to review all major equipment and support contracts to ensure the future programme is coherent with future defence needs and can be afforded.

Military Decorations

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he bring forward proposals to review the case for a National Defence Medal; and if he will make a statement. [2514]

Mr Robathan: The Government have announced its intention to conduct a review of the rules governing the award of medals. However, there are no current plans specifically to review the case for a National Defence Medal.

Ministry of Defence Guard Service: Finance

Sandra Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of the Ministry of Defence Guard Service. [1901]

Mr Robathan: The forecast cost of the Ministry of Defence Guard Service for the current financial year is £112 million.

Nuclear Weapons

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the US-UK Mutual Defence Agreement will be renewed during the life of this Parliament; and when discussions on renewal of the agreement are scheduled to commence. [2037]

Mr Gerald Howarth: While no expiry date applies for the agreement as a whole, Article III bis of the Agreement, an article relating to the transfer of Materials and Equipment which was introduced in 1959, is periodically reviewed. It was last reviewed in 2004 and expires in December 2014. At this stage, no specific timetable for any discussions on a further extension has been agreed.

Copies of the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement and its subsequent amendments are in the Library of the House.

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the next stocktake meeting between the Government and the US Administration under the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement is scheduled to take place; and where the meeting will be held. [2041]

Mr Gerald Howarth: Arrangements have not been finalised but it is intended that the next stocktake meeting will take place in mid September in the US.

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the exchange programme between the Ministry of Defence Police and Guarding Agency Special Escort Group and the United States Office of Secure Transportation remains in force; how many *(a)* US and *(b)* UK staff have undertaken exchange visits under the terms of the programme; and whether the programme took place under the auspices of the 1958 US-UK Mutual Defence Agreement. [2042]

Mr Gerald Howarth: There is no formal exchange programme. The Ministry of Defence Police and Guarding Agency Special Escort Group and United States Office of Secure Transportation (OST), who have similar national roles, have, over the last five years taken part in short visits and meetings to share best practice and to discuss matters of common interest.

During this period, 10 Special Escort Group Personnel have visited OST. The number of OST personnel who have visited the UK is not held in the format requested. However, I can confirm that the visits took place under the auspices of the 1958 UK/US Mutual Defence Agreement.

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator's inspection programme for 2010. [2047]

Peter Luff: There is no overarching Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator (DNSR) annual inspection programme. Instead, each of the bodies or activities regulated by the DNSR have specific regulatory intervention strategies and plans in place, which are tailored to their individual circumstances.

Radioactive Materials: Transport

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many operations involving the movement of defence nuclear materials the Ministry of Defence Police and Guarding Agency Special Escort Group undertook during 2009-10. [2048]

Peter Luff: These details relate to the operational programme for transporting defence nuclear materials. I am therefore withholding the requested information, because its release would, or would be likely to, prejudice national security.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Members: Correspondence

Keith Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General for what reasons a reply has not been sent to the letter from the right hon. Member for Leicester East concerning Mr Martin Wheelwright and the Serious Fraud Office. [1999]

The Solicitor-General: A letter was sent to the right hon. Member for Leicester East on 9 June 2010.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Afghanistan: Peace Negotiations

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he received on the recent peace talks held by tribal leaders in Kabul; and if he will make a statement. [1949]

Alistair Burt: The UK welcomed the Consultative Peace Jirga held in Kabul on 2-4 June 2010 as an important and positive step on the path towards concluding an enduring political settlement. The Jirga's declaration called on the insurgents to put an end to the fighting and begin a process of negotiation. We are pleased that the Government of Afghanistan now has a mandate to take this forward. We hope that the Jirga marks the start of a comprehensive and genuinely representative political process that engages the Afghan people. The UK will support the Government of Afghanistan in this effort.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has sought to make contact with Taliban leaders to hold peace talks. [2002]

Alistair Burt: No. Enduring stability in Afghanistan will require a political process that is led by the Afghans themselves, in parallel to the military and development effort. Towards that end, the UK welcomed the Consultative Peace Jirga held in Kabul on 2-4 June 2010 as a step on the path towards concluding a lasting political settlement.

Antarctic

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he plans to take to introduce legislation on the Antarctic following the consultation on the draft Antarctic Bill. [2112]

Mr Bellingham: The Government announced their legislative programme in the Queen's Speech and will consider other legislative priorities in due course.

Departmental Official Cars

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK-based officials in his Department have the use of an official car and driver. [2114]

Mr Bellingham: No UK-based officials in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) have a dedicated car or driver.

FCO Services, a Trading Fund of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, operate a small pool of vehicles and security cleared drivers used mainly for transportation of diplomatic bags and other classified material.

Certain senior officials (including the Permanent Under-Secretary) are able to draw on this pool for official and operationally necessary travel, on a pay for use basis with bookings made in advance. Use of the FCO Services car pool is subject to operational need and governed by strict internal guidelines.

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consular and diplomatic vehicles his Department has purchased since 12 May 2010; and at what cost. [2115]

Alistair Burt: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has purchased no consular and diplomatic vehicles in the UK since 12 May 2010. Records relating to the purchase of vehicles by our missions overseas is not held centrally and to obtain the information would incur disproportionate cost.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when and in what form he plans to publish a list of all items of expenditure by his Department over £25,000. [276]

Alistair Burt: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has written to Cabinet Ministers reiterating transparency commitments made in the coalition programme for government, and setting out a timetable for achieving them. In particular, certain new items of central Government spending over £25,000 to be published online from November 2010. We are working with our colleagues across Government to come up with a consistent approach to this for all UK spend.

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 7 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 23-24W, on departmental public expenditure, what changes he expects to make to his Department's programme spend in 2010. [2107]

Alistair Burt: As per my reply of 7 June 2010 to the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), *Official Report*, columns 23-24W, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is currently leading a review of programme spend within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Until the review is complete, it would be premature to speculate on any likely changes to Foreign and Commonwealth Office programme spend.

Diplomatic Service: Housing

Mr MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to ensure that members of the Diplomatic Service pay back to the public purse any increase in the value of their properties in the UK rented out while serving abroad. [1887]

Alistair Burt: No. The arrangements that employees of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office make for their private housing in the UK is a matter for them and there would be no legal basis for introducing such a policy.

EU Countries: British Nationals Abroad

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British nationals are resident in each of the member states of the EU. [1723]

Mr Lidington: The number of British nationals resident in the member states of the EU totals 1,830,105. The latest figures available were collected in March 2007 and are as follows:

	Number
Austria	7,369
Belgium	39,867
Bulgaria	1,700
Cyprus	60,000
Czech Republic	3,183
Denmark	13,183
Estonia	220
Finland	4,350
France	381,000
Germany	115,554
Greece	31,470
Hungary	2,640
Ireland	112,548
Italy	71,990
Latvia	400
Lithuania	250
Luxembourg	4,480
Malta	6,000
Netherlands	73,600
Poland	2,531
Portugal	34,624
Romania	6,000
Slovakia	1,000
Slovenia	157
Spain	840,989
Sweden	15,000

In January 2009 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office commissioned a study, "Making the most of the British Diaspora" by the Institute of Public Policy Research. This study includes and estimate of the number of British citizens abroad by country and will be published and available online at

http://www.ippr.org.uk/publicationsandreports

on Monday 28 June.

EU Institutions

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he plans to take to increase the number of civil service fast streamers working in European Union institutions. [2336]

Mr Lidington: This autumn will see the first intake of a relaunched Civil Service European fast-stream. European fast stream candidates will take up positions in the civil service, with a view to them undertaking the entrance exams for the European Institutions—the Concours—before the end of 2012.

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he plans to take to increase the number of British nationals working in European Union institutions. [2337]

Mr Lidington: I have discussed this issue with Cathy Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security and Vice President of the Commission and Maros Sefcovic, Commissioner for Inter-Institutional Relations and Administration. The Government are taking forward the 'success in the EU project' aimed at the increasing the number of British nationals working in the European Union institutions. Initiatives under the project include the relaunch of the European fast stream and working closely with the European Personnel Selection Office, EPSO, in the UK to encourage more British nationals to undertake the EU entrance exams—the Concours. The project is also seeking to improve the mechanisms for secondments from the UK civil service to the EU institutions. I will shortly be considering options for next steps for the project.

European Parliament

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he raised the question of the European Parliament's seat in Strasbourg with his French counterpart on his recent visit to Paris. [1732]

Mr Lidington: I discussed the matter with my French counterpart in our first bilateral. I also put forward the Government's position during my first visit to the European Parliament on 1 June.

European Union: Parliamentary Scrutiny

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he plans to bring forward proposals for amending the House's Scrutiny Reserve Resolution for the European Scrutiny Committee. [1727]

Mr Lidington: This Government want to increase democratic and parliamentary control, scrutiny and accountability over EU decision making. The Government attach great importance to allowing the Parliament to be able to scrutinise EU business in good time. Getting the scrutiny system right is a top priority for us. We expect to engage with the European Scrutiny Committee on the Scrutiny Reserve Resolution as soon as the Committee has been established.

Falkland Islands: Oil

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the likelihood of the presence of commercially extractable quantities of oil in Falklands Islands waters. [1726]

Mr Jeremy Browne: Hydrocarbons exploration resumed in Falkland Islands waters in February 2010. Rockhopper Exploration announced an oil discovery in their Sea Lion prospect in the North Falklands Basin on 6 May 2010. This well has been suspended for future testing. So far, there has been no confirmation of any find of hydrocarbons in commercially viable quantities. Exploration is continuing.

Government Hospitality: Wines

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidance is issued to Government departments on the use of wine from the Government Wine Cellar; and if he will make a statement. [1761]

Mr Bellingham: Government Hospitality (GH) does not issue guidance to Departments on the use of wines from the cellar except as part of the overall service offered by Government Hospitality. All Ministers and Departments are advised of the availability of the GH service soon after the appointment of the Government.

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost to the public purse was of bottles of wine purchased for the Government wine cellar since 6 May 2010. [1942]

Mr Bellingham: Government Hospitality (GH) in Protocol Directorate of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has responsibility for the management of the stock in the Government wine cellar. Apart from beverage wines that are bought on an ad hoc basis, GH usually buys new stock on two or three occasions each year, as advised by the GH Advisory Committee for the Purchase of Wine. GH buys wines young, when first available in the retail market and relatively less expensive, and stores them until they are ready to use. It purchases throughout the year according to its requirements, market rates, availability and value for money. Since 6 May 2010 Government Hospitality has spent £17,698 on new stock for the cellar. None of these wines has yet been used.

Careful management of the Government wine cellar enables GH to provide wine for high profile events at significantly below the current market rate, making substantial savings for the taxpayer. Government Hospitality is also able to recoup money from other Government Departments for events it manages on their behalf, helping to offset the costs of new stock. In financial year 2009-10 GH was able to reclaim £47,000 of the total annual expenditure on the cellar of £80,662. This was itself a reduction on the 2008-09 figure of over 30%.

Pakistan: Religious Freedom

Mr Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response his Department made to reports of attacks on two Ahmadiyya Muslim mosques in Lahore on 28 May 2010. [2490]

Alistair Burt: The UK shares the deep concern felt about these terrible attacks which killed over 90 people, and injured over 100. On 28 May 2010, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Hague) said

"the British Government utterly condemns the attacks in Lahore, which have led to the loss of so many innocent lives. Our thoughts are with the victims and their families. The attacks are a reminder of the importance of the international community working with Pakistan to tackle the threat of violent extremism".

Our consular staff at our high commission in Islamabad provided support to the family of the British national who was killed in the attack. Senior officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) have met with representatives of the Ahmadiyya community in the UK. I will be meeting the leadership of the community at the FCO in the near future to discuss the concerns of the Ahmadiyya community in detail.

Our British high commissioner in Islamabad has raised the attacks and the discrimination suffered by the Ahmadiyya community with the Chief Minister of Punjab alongside his European Union colleagues. We have raised the issue bilaterally with the Pakistani authorities, including with the Ministries for Minorities and of the Interior.

Palestinians: International Assistance

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Middle East Quartet on securing free access to Gaza for the purposes of providing humanitarian aid, construction material and other non-military supplies. [1990]

Alistair Burt *[holding answer 14 June 2010]:* Both my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have discussed these issues recently with their Israeli counterparts. We also continue to discuss these issues with our international partners, including during the Foreign Secretary's recent visits to EU capitals—and with Quartet Representative Tony Blair. We welcome Quartet consideration of these important issues.

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the establishment of an international investigation into the interception of the Free Gaza movement flotilla. [1992]

Alistair Burt *[holding answer 14 June 2010]:* We have underlined the need for a full, credible, impartial and independent investigation into the events of 31 May. We have made clear that we want to see a process that ensures full accountability and commands the confidence of the international community.

Israel has launched an internal military investigation and announced on 14 June a separate inquiry headed by former Supreme Court judge Yaakov Tirkel and including David Trimble and Ken Watkins as international observers. This is a positive step. We will await details of the inquiry's conduct and findings before drawing further conclusions.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has also announced an inquiry panel, led by former New Zealand Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer, though no further details have been announced on the membership or composition of this panel.

Passports: Fraud

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assurances he has received from the government of Israel that it will not sanction the misuse of British passports. [2515]

Alistair Burt: I have not yet received any formal assurance from Israel. An assurance that British passports will not be misused, would be a positive step from Israel both in its engagement with this new Government and in helping to re-establish the trust of the British passport holders.

Russia: Espionage

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent estimate he has made of the number of Russian Federation intelligence officers operating in the UK. [1124]

Nick Herbert: I have been asked to reply.

It is the long-standing policy of HM Government not to comment on security and intelligence matters.

Russia: Human Rights

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he or other Ministers in the Department have had with their Russian counterparts; and whether they raised human rights issues during those discussions. [1728]

Mr Lidington: Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers have not yet held substantive discussions with their Russian counterparts. However, the Government remain deeply concerned about Russia's poor human rights record and will continue to raise this with them. The Government will press for an end to the apparent impunity for those that perpetrate human rights abuses, stressing that those involved should be brought to justice in trials which meet international standards. The Government will continue to work with Russia on addressing ongoing human rights issues, including through our bilateral human rights dialogue.

South Africa: Football

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British nationals he expects to visit South Africa during the World Cup Finals; and what provisions his Department is making to assist them. [2109]

Mr Bellingham: It is difficult to provide a precise figure for the number of fans that will travel to South Africa for the World Cup. It is likely to be in the tens of thousands. We anticipate this number will be bolstered by last-minute bookings if England reach the later stages of the tournament.

The safety and welfare of British nationals is our paramount concern. We launched the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) "Be on the Ball" travel safety campaign in November 2009. This campaign's objective is to provide clear, concise travel advice and tips to travelling fans and to inform them what consular staff can and cannot do to help them. We have also encouraged fans to visit our webpage

www.fco.gov.uk/worldcup

This provides further information ranging from advice on the rules of the road and crime avoidance to what to do on match days.

Since October 2009 a dedicated football liaison officer at the British high commission in Pretoria has been working closely with the South African authorities, the Football Association, supporters groups and the UK police to ensure that arrangements are in place to help visiting fans. The consular network in South Africa has been reinforced with additional staff from the region to deal with an expected increase in consular cases, such as lost passports and victims of traffic accidents or crime. A mobile consular team will travel to each of the venues that England will play in, to enable staff to respond quickly as issues arise.

While we expect the majority of problems to be routine, we are also prepared to respond in the event of a larger incident. Our high commission in Pretoria and the consulate general in Cape Town took part in a World Cup specific exercise in February that tested their preparedness to respond to a major incident. We also have on stand-by in London a rapid deployment team of specially trained staff who can be sent out to South Africa quickly, to reinforce the response capability of our team on the ground.

Sudan: Olympic Games 2012

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has been notified as to whether the President of Sudan plans to attend the London 2012 Olympics. [2110]

Mr Bellingham: Invitations for the London 2012 Olympics have not yet issued. We have no information on proposed attendance from any country.

Thailand: Press Freedom

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has received reports on the use of the lèse majesté laws by the government of Thailand in respect of news web sites in that country; and if he will make a statement. [1948]

Mr Jeremy Browne: We understand the particular reverence the people of Thailand have for the monarchy. The Government attach importance to freedom of expression and the respect of fundamental human rights. It should be possible to discuss political reform without fear of coming under the purview of laws that were designed for non political purposes. Human rights groups continue to raise concerns about the use of the 2007 Computer Crimes Act to interfere with the internet on grounds of national security, which has been deemed to include criticism of the monarchy. A significant number of websites were also blocked during recent political unrest under the provisions of the State of Emergency. Our ambassador in Bangkok has raised the issue of freedom of expression a number of times with the Thai authorities. We welcome statements by the Thai Prime Minister that lèse majesté laws should not be used inappropriately.

Unmanned Air Vehicles

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the use of drone planes in military operations by the governments of other countries. [2388]

Alistair Burt: As is the case in the UK, the Governments of other countries use unmanned aerial vehicles in a range of roles and scenarios.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Children: Maintenance

Michael Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reasons the upper earnings limit for Child Support Agency assessments has not been uprated since its introduction; and if he will make a statement. [2545]

Maria Miller: The Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission is responsible for the child maintenance system. I have asked the Child Maintenance Commissioner to write to the hon. Member with the information requested and I have seen the response.

Letter from Stephen Geraghty:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency, the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Child Maintenance Commissioner as the Child Support Agency is now the responsibility of the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reasons the upper earnings limit for Child Support Agency assessments has not been uprated since its introduction; and if he will make a statement. [2545]

The upper limit for the statutory child maintenance schemes is a net weekly income of £2,000 per week. It was set at a level sufficiently high to ensure that all children benefit from a reasonable level of maintenance and only those who are already likely to have more complicated financial arrangements are affected. In these cases, the courts are able to make a top-up of maintenance order. This is an important safeguard to ensure that children continue to share in the living standards of non-resident parents when the non-resident parent's income exceeds the upper limit.

Whilst inflation has meant that a greater number of non-resident parents earn more than the upper earnings limit, their number is still very small and it has therefore not been thought necessary to amend legislation.

As a consequence of moving from net to gross weekly income in the future scheme we propose that the maximum amount of weekly income taken into account in a maintenance calculation will increase to £3,000. This is broadly the same as the current cap in net income terms and in keeping with the objective that there should not be major differences in liabilities when comparing current scheme and future scheme rules.

I hope you find this answer helpful.

Departmental Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the URL is of each website managed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each non-departmental public body and agency for which his Department is responsible. [2359]

Chris Grayling: The information is as follows:

(a) The following URLs are for the websites currently being managed by DWP:

URL	*Website*
www.dwp.gov.uk	DWP Corporate
www.emetaskforce.gov.uk	Ethnic Minority Employment Task force

(b) The following URLs are for the websites of the non-departmental public bodies and agencies for which DWP are currently responsible:

URL	*Website*
www.pensionsadvisoryservice.org.uk	The Pensions Advisory Service
www.pensions-ombudsman.org.uk	The Pensions Ombudsman
www.pensionprotectionfund.org.uk	The Pension Protection Fund
www.ppfo.org.uk	The Pension Protection Fund Ombudsman
www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk	The Pensions Regulator
www.ilf.org.uk	Independent Living Funds
www.padeliveryauthority.org.uk	Personal Accounts Delivery Authority
www.jobbrokersearch.gov.uk	New Deal Disabled People Job Broker Search
www.workingforhealth.gov.uk	Working for Health
www.remploy.co.uk	Remploy
www.hse.gov.uk	Health and Safety Executive
www.cmoptions.org	Child Maintenance Options
www.childmaintenance.org	Child Maintenance Enforcement Commission
www.csa.gov.uk	Child Support Agency
www.officefordisability.gov.uk	Office for Disability Issues
www.esf.gov.uk	European Social Fund
www.iiac.org.uk	Industrial Injuries Advisory Council
www.ssac.org.uk	Social Security Advisory Committee
www.ind-case-exam.org.uk	Independent Case Examiner

Directgov is a cross-government website, the URL is

www.direct.gov.uk

Like all Government Departments, DWP publishes content onto

www.direct.gov.uk

although this URL is managed by Directgov.

DWP are currently implementing the Sir David Varney Transformational Government recommendations for Website Rationalisation. 20 websites have already closed including the Pension Service website which closed September 2009 and Jobcentre Plus which closed March 2010. Content and online services for these websites have moved to

www.direct.gov.uk

www.businesslink.gov.uk

and

www.dwp.gov.uk

simplifying access to DWP information.

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which Ministers in his Department have been issued with *(a)* a Blackberry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1420]

Chris Grayling: The following Ministers have been allocated a departmental BlackBerry:

Chris Grayling

Maria Miller

Steve Webb

No iphones or PDAs have been issued to Ministers.

Departmental Official Cars

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Government *(a)* cars and *(b)* drivers are allocated to Ministers in his Department. [305]

Chris Grayling: The DWP has introduced new arrangements with the Government Car Service to run a pool of four cars for use by the Department's five Ministers. Where necessary this is supplemented with additional Green Car Services. This will be reviewed over the forthcoming months to ensure value for money.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on the use by Ministers in his Department of cars allocated from *(a)* his Department's pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured in the UK; whether Ministers in his Department are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [2400]

Chris Grayling: The information requested is as follows:

(a) The DWP has arranged with the Government Car Service (GCS) to run a pool of four cars and four drivers for use by the Department's five Ministers and the Permanent Secretary. This will be reviewed over the forthcoming months to ensure value for money.

(b) Ministers may make use of the GCS under the terms of the recently announced Ministerial Code. This states that

"the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service pool as needed."

For reasons of efficient and economic fleet management, it is not practical for Ministers to specify a UK manufactured vehicle for a journey in a pool service car. The proportion of UK manufactured vehicles in the GCS fleet used by DWP is 25%, with the remainder being Japanese hybrid models.

Departmental Public Appointments

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments he has made since his appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [361]

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many special advisers *(a)* he and *(b)* each other Minister in his Department (i) has appointed to date and (ii) plans to appoint. [314]

Chris Grayling: I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W, and the subsequent publication of the list of special adviser appointments on 10 June 2010.

Since my appointment the following expert advisers have been seconded to my Department:

Charlotte Pickles, from the Centre for Social Justice Reform, for a period of six months;

Stephen Brien (part-time) and Jon Tippell from Oliver Wyman, for a period of three months.

Financial Services: Education

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps the Government is taking to increase levels of financial capability of members of the public. [1904]

Mr Hoban: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are committed to ensuring people have the advice they need to look after their finances and save for the future.

The Government's coalition agreement announced plans for a free national financial advice service, funded by a social responsibility levy on the financial services industry. This will include a free annual financial healthcheck.

Under the requirements of the Financial Services Act 2010, the Financial Services Authority established a new independent Consumer Financial Education Body in April 2010. This body has responsibility for raising levels of financial capability across the UK.

Future Jobs Fund

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of young people who have been placed in training, employment or work experience through the Future Jobs Fund in Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland *(a)* are disabled, *(b)* are women, *(c)* are from ethnic minorities, *(d)* have mental health problems and *(e)* were brought up in care. [1969]

Chris Grayling: The information requested is not available.

Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much funding has been allocated from the Future Jobs Fund to organisations in Chesterfield constituency. [2122]

Chris Grayling: The information requested is not available.

Future Jobs Fund: North East

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his most recent assessment is of the effect on levels of employment in *(a)* the North East and *(b)* Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland of ending the Future Jobs Fund. [1970]

Chris Grayling: At up to £6,500 per placement, the Future Jobs Fund is five times more expensive than other aspects of the Young Persons Guarantee, making it poorer value for money. As we emerge from a recession with a huge budget deficit, it is right that the Government take decisive steps to secure long lasting benefits rather than temporary changes to unemployment. Next year we will introduce our new Work Programme, which will bring better targeted and more effective support to young people and the unemployed.

Future Jobs Fund: Wales

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have been employed in Wales through the Future Jobs Fund. [1720]

Chris Grayling: The latest Official Statistics, covering the period October 2009 to January 2010, show that 690 people in Wales started jobs created through the Future Jobs Fund.

Incapacity Benefit

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what procedure is followed when more than one error is discovered in a targeted audit of a medical report carried out by medical services on

behalf of his Department for the purpose of determining a claimant's eligibility for incapacity benefit; and if he will make a statement. [2544]

Chris Grayling: A medical report that fails to meet medical services standards is amended before it is returned to the decision maker. Subsequent action is determined by the nature of the errors. Minor errors may be corrected by making changes to the original report. More serious errors may require a further examination of the customer.

Feedback is given to the healthcare professional by a mentor. The timescale for the feedback is determined by the nature of the errors. Serious errors may require immediate feedback. Corrective action is determined by the mentor and medical manager in consultation with the healthcare professional and may include supervised sessions, retraining or further targeted audit.

Whilst engaging as many as possible in work related activity, and prioritising an active work regime, we are determined to make sure those that need it get the right support.

Poverty: Children

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he plans to take to reduce levels of child poverty. [2210]

Maria Miller: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 14 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 587W, to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Stephen Mosley).

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to reduce the level of financial exclusion of the most vulnerable families. [2212]

Steve Webb: DWP are developing the capacity of third sector financial service providers, such as credit unions, so that people on low incomes, traditionally not well served by mainstream financial institutions, have access to savings products, affordable credit, basic banking and help with budgeting.

DWP Financial Inclusion Champions are also working with local authorities, social landlords, the third sector, and intermediary groups to co-ordinate local partnerships, developing financial inclusion at the heart of local communities.

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to improve levels of access to public services for deaf children. [2213]

Maria Miller: The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 places a duty on providers of services in the public sector [as well as those in the private and voluntary sectors] to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, which includes deaf children and the duty to make reasonable adjustments has been carried forward in the Equality Act. My Department is working with the Government Equalities Office to ensure that service providers are provided with appropriate advice and guidance on how to fulfil their duties under the Equality Act when it is implemented

The Disability Equality Duty (DED) requires public authorities to have due regard to disability issues when carrying out their functions and delivering their services. The DED applies across the full range of public sector activity and it means that public authorities should consider the impact of their work on disabled people, and take action to promote equality.

Social Security Benefits: Fraud

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what framework will be applied to assess whether or not benefit claimants have complied with the rules on claiming *(a)* income support, *(b)* jobseeker's allowance and *(c)* employment and support allowance; and what measures will be put in place to ensure sanctions for those in breach of those rules do not affect their children. [2163]

Chris Grayling: We strongly believe that the welfare state should combine rights with responsibilities. All benefits have basic entitlement conditions (for example, recipients of jobseeker's allowance have to be available to take up full-time work immediately). Those receiving income support or employment and support allowance who are able to prepare for work or make themselves more work-ready are expected to do so as a condition of receiving benefit.

Where the customer fails to satisfy the conditions for receiving benefit a Jobcentre Plus Decision Maker will consider whether a sanction is appropriate. The decision maker is impartial and considers evidence from both the adviser and the customer set against regulations, case law and guidance.

Sanctions are only applied to the individual's personal benefit entitlement—additions for a spouse or partner and premiums for disabled children are not affected; nor is entitlement to housing benefit and council tax benefit. Child tax credits are unaffected by any sanction. Jobseekers in vulnerable groups who are sanctioned may be entitled to hardship payments, where their jobseeker's allowance is paid at a reduced rate. Vulnerable groups include households where there is a dependent child who may be affected by the imposition of a sanction.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Carbon Emissions: Housing

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what percentage of total carbon emissions reduction target funding was allocated to Wales in each year since the scheme was launched. [1977]

Gregory Barker: The Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) is an obligation set at a GB-wide level to achieve savings in the levels of CO_2 emitted by householders.

Energy suppliers are free to decide how best to deliver their carbon target by installing approved household energy efficiency measures anywhere across Great Britain, in the manner they consider most appropriate within the rules of the scheme. There are no regional targets or funding requirements.

Energy suppliers do not disclose the levels of support that they provide towards the cost of installed measures and regard this as commercially sensitive information.

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps are taken to ensure that funding for *(a)* carbon emissions reduction targets and *(b)* the Community Energy Saving Programme is allocated evenly to each constituent part of the UK. [1978]

Gregory Barker: The Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) and the Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) are GB-wide obligations on the six largest domestic energy suppliers (and large electricity generators in the case of CESP) to achieve savings in the levels of CO_2 emitted by householders. Individual companies' targets are set by the regulator, Ofgem.

Energy companies are free to decide how best to deliver their carbon target by installing approved household energy efficiency measures anywhere across Great Britain in the manner they consider most appropriate within the rules of the schemes. There are no regional targets or funding requirements.

CESP does designate eligible areas based on the lowest income areas identified by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. In England this is based on the lowest 10% income areas and in Scotland and Wales the lowest 15%. In total there are around 4,500 designated CESP areas across Great Britain.

Nuclear Power Stations: Insurance

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much has been spent on underwriting of UK civil nuclear insurance liabilities in the last 10 years. [2342]

Charles Hendry: The purchase of insurance to cover nuclear liabilities is a commercial matter for the nuclear operators.

Government have not provided any underwriting for UK civil nuclear insurance liabilities in the last 10years. Indeed, if Government were to provide such a facility they would do so for a commercial charge.

Nuclear Power: Finance

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much the Government has spent on nuclear projects through the European Commission Joint Research Centre in the last 10 years. [2345]

Charles Hendry: The European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC) is funded directly by the European Commission under the auspices of the Euratom treaty. Therefore the UK has not directly funded any nuclear projects through the JRC.

Renewable Energy

Michael Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what his plans are for the future of the Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [2546]

Gregory Barker: The Government are committed to increasing the amount of renewable heat in the UK; this is a crucial part of ensuring we meet our renewables targets, cutting carbon and ensuring energy security.

We are currently looking at the renewable heat incentive (RHI) proposals. Clearly there are benefits to the scheme, but we must also consider the impact of the costs, particularly given the financial constraints we must work within and the potential impact that funding options could have on vulnerable people.

We are aware that there is uncertainty in the renewable heating industry and want to provide certainty and clarity as quickly as possible, but must make sure that we make the right decision.

We will look to make an announcement on the future of the proposed scheme as soon as possible.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Affordable Housing: Construction

Mr Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps he is taking to create new community land trusts. [2401]

Andrew Stunell *[holding answer 14 June 2010]:* We are going to introduce community-owned local housing trusts which will enable communities to create new homes for local people. My Department and the Homes and Communities Agency are already working with several existing community land trusts and other community inspired housing groups who are developing schemes for local housing.

Council Housing: Construction

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if his Department will undertake research into the cost-effectiveness of building of homes *(a)* by local authorities directly and *(b)* under private finance initiative schemes. [1587]

Andrew Stunell: Until recently there have been very few homes built by local authorities and no funding provided to them.

Homes being built under the Local Authority New Build programme are subject to a value for money assessment by the Homes and Communities Agency before receiving support and Housing Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes also go through key value for money assessments. As part of the comprehensive spending review, my Department plans to assess the value for money of Housing PFI and other delivery routes.

Departmental Accountancy

Mr Spencer: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what ministerial directions were issued to the Accounting Officer of his Department in the last 12 months. [1574]

Robert Neill: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Angie Bray) on 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 237W.

Union Flag

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which his Department is responsible. [1820]

Robert Neill: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport issues guidance for the flying of the Union flag on UK Government buildings. The guidance encourages the Union flag to be flown 365 days a year, and as a minimum all Departments must fly the Union flag on the 19 special designated days e.g Queen's birthday, Remembrance Day, etc. and other special occasions as required e.g. State Opening of Parliament.

More information on the guidance is available on the DCMS website:

http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/honours/7124.aspx

The Department for Communities and Local Government flies the Union flag 365 days of the year from our HQ office Eland House.

Departmental Official Residences

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether any domestic properties in the gift of the Government have been allocated to the use of Ministers in his Department. [1791]

Robert Neill: No Communities and Local Government Ministers have been allocated a property in the gift of Government for use as a domestic property.

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to his Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff employed by (i) his Department and (ii) its agencies. [630]

Robert Neill: The cost for redundancies in Communities and Local Government for the financial year 2009-10 was circa £69,000.

The Department's agencies are the Fire Service College, QE11 Conference Centre

and Planning Inspectorate.

The estimated cost of redundancies in the Fire Service College for the financial year 2009-10 was circa £480,000. The Planning Inspectorate and QE11 Conference Centre have not had any redundancies.

Fire Services

Iain Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on the regionalisation of the fire service. [1803]

Robert Neill: The Government are opposed to the regionalisation of the fire and rescue service.

Home Information Packs

Chris Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the number of jobs likely to be lost as a result of the ending of the requirement to use home information packs. [1063]

Andrew Stunell *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* It is difficult to make such an estimate. Although HIP providers will be most affected, many may continue to offer other services such as conveyancing, local search provision and the preparation of energy performance certificates.

Our impact assessment of this, however, estimates that sellers of homes will save over £870 million over a 10 year period.

Mr Spencer: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what timetable he has set for the full abolition of home information packs. [1575]

Andrew Stunell: We took swift action to suspend the home information pack (HIP) from 21 May and intend to introduce legislation to abolish the HIP later in the parliamentary Session.

Housing and Planning Delivery Grant

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 10 June 2010, on local government savings package, what the evidential basis is for the statement that the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant has been ineffective. [2566]

Robert Neill: Housing and Planning Delivery Grant was designed to incentivise an increase in housing completions and the delivery of local plans. HPDG was first paid in 2008-09. Since then housing completions have fallen from 174,900 in 2007 to 142,400 in 2008 and 118,000 in 2009. Furthermore, local planning authorities local development frameworks have still failed to appear expeditiously with only 18% of local authorities who have adopted a core strategy in the six-year period after the system was introduced.

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much Hartlepool Borough Council received from the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant in each year that it was available. [2567]

Robert Neill: Housing and Planning Delivery Grant commenced in 2008-09 and Hartlepool borough council received the following awards:

	HPDG award (£)
2008-09	138,926
2009-10	107,000

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 10 June 2010, on local

government savings package, what incentive schemes he plans to bring forward to replace the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant. [2568]

Andrew Stunell: The Housing and Planning Delivery Grant has proved to be ineffective and excessively complex. We will replace this with incentives for local authorities to deliver sustainable development, including for new homes and businesses.

Housing: Construction

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether he plans to revise Planning Policy Statement 3. [1687]

Robert Neill: On 9 June 2010, Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing was re-issued with the following amendments:

The definition of previously developed land in Annex B, now excludes private residential gardens

The national indicative minimum density of 30 dwellings per hectare was deleted from paragraph 47.

We have committed, in the Coalition Government document "The Coalition: our programme for government", to publish and present to Parliament a simple and consolidated national planning framework covering all forms of development and setting out national economic, environmental and social priorities. We will set out how we intend to do this in due course.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on the minimum proportion of affordable housing required in new housing developments. [1733]

Andrew Stunell: The Government does not set a minimum proportion of affordable housing required in new housing developments. Existing guidance in Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing, paragraph 29 asks local planning authorities to set an overall plan-wide target for the amount of affordable housing to be provided and remains unchanged.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on the minimum density of new housing developments. [1734]

Andrew Stunell: Local authorities should develop their own housing density policies having regard to Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing, paragraph 46. The indicative minimum density target (30 dwellings per hectare) in paragraph 47 of PPS3 was deleted on 9 June 2010. There is therefore no national minimum density policy.

Housing: Empty Property

Joan Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has to bring empty homes back into use. [2660]

Andrew Stunell: We are currently exploring a wide range of measures to bring empty homes back into use.

Local Government Executive

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with reference to the proposals on page 12 of the Coalition Agreement on allowing councils to return to the committee system, if he will make it his policy to remove the requirement on councils to consult on adopting an indirectly-elected leader model of government. [2426]

Robert Neill: We are committed to allow councils to have the committee system rather than executive structures, if they wish, and intend to seek the necessary powers, including provision about how councils will be able to adopt new governance models, in legislation to devolve greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities control over housing and planning decisions which was announced in the Queen's Speech for this parliamentary Session.

Local Government Finance

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether the end to ring-fencing of central government funding for local authorities will apply to funding for housing. [1630]

Robert Neill: I refer the hon. Member to the written ministerial statement and supporting documents that were laid in the House on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 15-17WS as these provide a detailed breakdown of the central Government grants from which the ringfences have been removed in 2010-11.

The housing market renewal grant which accounts for £236 million of capital funding is one of the grants that will have the ring-fence removed in 2010-11.

Local Government Finance: West Midlands

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what individual grants to *(a)* Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council and *(b)* each other local authority in the West Midlands he plans to reduce as part of his Department's planned expenditure reductions; and if he will make a statement. [2403]

Robert Neill: I refer the hon. Member to the written ministerial statement which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State laid in the House on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 15-17WS.

Local Government: Public Consultation

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government by what mechanism people in a local authority area will be able to initiate a local referendum. [1627]

Andrew Stunell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Chris Leslie) on 8 June, *Official Report*, column 132W.

Marinas: Brighton

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he expects to announce his decision on the Explore Living planning appeal in regard to Brighton Marina; and if he will make a statement. [2262]

Robert Neill: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will issue his decision on or before 13 July 2010.

Planning Permission: Appeals

Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many judicial reviews under section 288 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 were brought by each local planning authority against the decision of the planning inspectorate in each of the last five years; how many of them were *(a)* upheld and *(b)* dismissed in relation to each authority; and if he will make a statement. [2052]

Robert Neill: The following table sets out the number of challenges made by local authorities to planning appeal decisions made by the Planning Inspectorate in the years 2004-05 to 2008-09. The figures for 2009-10 will be available after 17 June (in order to comply with the Statistics Act 2007) and can be provided on request.

LA name	*Upheld*	*Dismissed*	*Total*
2004-05			
Dartford Borough Council	1	—	1
Epping Forest District Council	—	1	1
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council	1	—	1
Maidstone Borough Council	1	—	1
Mole Valley District Council	—	1	1
North Hertfordshire District Council	1	—	1
Oxford City Council	1	—	1
Poole Borough Council	—	1	1
Preston Borough Council	1	—	1
Tandridge District Council	1	—	1
Waverley Borough Council	1	—	1
West Dorset District Council	1	—	1
Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Council	1	—	1
Wycombe District Council	3	—	3
2005-06			
Ashford Borough Council	—	1	1
Carrick District Council	1	—	1
Cherwell District Council	—	1	1
City Of Westminster Council	1	—	1
Doncaster Borough Council	—	1	1
East Hampshire District Council	—	1	1
Hart District Council	1	—	1
Lake District Special Planning Board	2	—	2
Leeds City Council	1	—	1
London Borough Of Waltham Forest	—	1	1
Royal Borough Of Kingston-Upon-Thames	1	—	1
Rugby Borough Council	1	—	1
Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council	—	1	1
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	—	2	2
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council	1	—	1
Trafford Borough Council	1	—	1
West Lancashire District Council	1	—	1
Wycombe District Council	1	1	2
2006-07			
Bath and North East Somerset Council	1	—	1
Bracknell Forest BC	—	1	1
Bradford City Council	1	—	1
Darlington Borough Council	—	1	1
East Hampshire District Council	—	1	1
Horsham District Council	1	—	1
Leeds City Council	—	1	1
London Borough Of Bromley	—	1	1
London Borough Of Croydon	—	1	1
London Borough Of Lambeth	1	—	1
London Borough Of Richmond-Upon-Thames	1	—	1
London Borough Of Southwark	—	1	1
Maidstone Borough Council	1	—	1
North Cornwall District Council	1	—	1
North Dorset District Council	1	—	1
North Wiltshire District Council	—	1	1
Portsmouth City Council	—	1	1
Redditch Borough Council	1	—	1
South Cambridgeshire District Council	—	1	1
South Gloucestershire Council	—	1	1
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	1	—	1
Tewkesbury District Council	1	—	1
Wychavon District Council	—	1	1
2007-08			
Brentwood District Council	—	1	1
Cheltenham District Council	—	1	1
East Dorset District Council	1	—	1
London Borough Of Islington	—	1	1
London Borough Of Lambeth	—	1	1
Maidstone Borough Council	1	—	1
South Cambridgeshire District Council	1	—	1
South Staffordshire District Council	—	1	1
Surrey County Council	—	1	1
Waverley Borough Council	1	—	1
2008-09			
Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council	1	—	1
Canterbury City Council	—	1	1
Chelmsford Borough Council	1	—	1
Craven District Council	1	—	1
Derbyshire Dales District Council	—	1	1
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	—	1	1
Guildford Borough Council	—	1	1
Harrogate Borough Council	1	—	1
Leeds City Council	1	1	2
London Borough Of Bexley	—	1	1
London Borough Of Hackney	—	1	1
Mid-Devon District Council	1	—	1

LA name	Upheld	Dismissed	Total
New Forest District Council	—	1	1
Royal Borough Of Kensington and Chelsea	—	1	1
Royal Borough Of Kingston-Upon-Thames	—	1	1
Vale Of White Horse District Council	—	1	1
West Dorset District Council	—	1	1
West Lindsey District Council	1	—	1

The following table sets out details of all challenges made to Inspector planning appeal decisions in the relevant years.

	Upheld	Dismissed	To be decided	Total
2004-05	28	40	0	68
2005-06	30	55	0	85
2006-07	36	62	1	99
2007-08	25	56	4	85
2008-09	27	65	5	97

Note:
"Dismissed" indicates challenge either successfully defended by the Secretary of State or where the challenge was withdraw; "Upheld" indicates challenge unsuccessfully defended by the Secretary of State or where the decision was quashed with the consent of the parties.

Regional Development Agencies

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what representations his Department has received for the retention of regional development agencies since the general election. [2428]

Robert Neill: The Department has received no formal representations since the May 2010 general election calling for the retention of the regional development agencies.

Social Rented Housing: Kirklees

Simon Reevell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) how many people in Kirklees local authority area are on the social housing waiting list; and if he will make a statement; [2321]

(2) how many people in Kirklees local authority area were on the social housing waiting list in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [2322]

Andrew Stunell: Information is available on numbers of households rather than people. The number of households registered on social housing waiting lists in each local authority, each region, and in England, as at 1 April each year from 1997 to 2009, is published on the Communities and Local Government website in table 600. The link for this table is given as follows:

http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/table600.xls

Simon Reevell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his most recent estimate is of the number of social houses in the Kirklees local authority area which are unoccupied; and if he will make a statement. [2323]

Andrew Stunell: As at 1st April 2009 there were 248 local authority owned dwellings in the Kirklees local authority area that were unoccupied (Source: Communities and Local Government's Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix). As at 31 March 2009 there were 53 registered social landlord (RSL) owned self-contained general needs dwellings that were unoccupied (Source: Tenant Services Authority's Regulatory Statistical Return).

Social Rented Housing: Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what social housing construction projects are being funded by his Department in the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan. [1629]

Andrew Stunell: The Homes and Communities Agency is supporting the following schemes for constructing new social housing:

Bickershaw Colliery
Mother and Baby Move-on Unit, Lancaster Road, Hindley
Durham Street, Phases 1 and 2, Wigan
Byrom Fields, Wigan
Plot 24, 7 Aveley Gardens, Highfield
Windermere Gardens, Gordon Street, Leigh
Gadsbury Fold, Plots 112 and 113, Atherton
Worthington Park, Plots 49, 54 and 194, Standish
Kay Close, Scholes
Etherton Street, Wigan
Windsor Avenue, Astley
The Orchards, Wigan
Greenfields, Billinge.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much finding he plans to provide for capital expenditure on the decent homes programme of Wigan and Leigh Housing. [1632]

Andrew Stunell: Wigan and Leigh Housing is an Arms Length Management organisation (ALMO) which manages the council housing stock of Wigan council. The Department does not provide capital funding to ALMOs such as Wigan and Leigh Housing but funds Wigan council directly through the HRA subsidy system.

Since the Decent Homes programme began in 2001, Wigan council has received £137 million in ALMO supported capital expenditure to undertake a Decent Homes investment programme. There are no plans to fund additional capital expenditure to Wigan council for Decent Homes works beyond the major repairs allowance funding provided in the subsidy system.

Tenant Services Authority

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what recent representations he has received on his plans for the Tenant Services Authority. [1998]

Grant Shapps: I have received representations on a range of subjects since my appointment as Minister for Housing and Local Government, including on the regulation of social housing. The role of all CLG

quangos is being examined closely, but no final decisions have been made about the future of the Tenant Services Authority.

Travellers: Caravan Sites

Mr Spencer: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the change in the number of unauthorised traveller sites since 1997. [1573]

Andrew Stunell: The number of caravans on unauthorised developments has increased from 887 in 1997 to 2,395 in 2010—an increase of 170% over 13 years.

Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for what public spending projects in *(a)* Wigan constituency and *(b)* the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan his Department secured Treasury approval between 1 January 2010 and the date of his appointment as Secretary of State. [1626]

Robert Neill: The Government are reassessing spending approvals granted between 1 January 2010 and the general election to ensure that they offer good value for money and are consistent with the Government's priorities. Further announcements will be made in due course.

TRANSPORT

Bus Services: Finance

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the effects of bus services operators grant levels on bus *(a)* usage, *(b)* fares and *(c)* service. [1588]

Norman Baker: Our assessment of the impact of bus service operators grant (BSOG) is that on average usage is 6.7% higher, fares are 6.5% lower and services are 7.1% higher outside London than if BSOG funding were completely withdrawn.

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans to review the operation of bus service operators grant; and if he will make a statement. [1623]

Norman Baker: As part of the forthcoming spending review, and in common with all other areas of departmental expenditure, the Government will examine carefully the amount of subsidy paid to the bus industry, and the basis on which it is paid, to ensure that it offers the best value for taxpayers' money, and meets wider Government objectives.

Departmental Flags

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which his Department is responsible. [1808]

Norman Baker: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport issues guidance for the flying of the Union flag on UK Government buildings. The guidance encourages the Union flag to be flown 365 days a year, and as a minimum all departments must fly the Union flag on the 19 special designated days eg Queen's birthday, Remembrance Day, etc. and other special occasions as required eg. State Opening of Parliament.

More information on the guidance is available on the DCMS website:

http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/honours/7124.aspx

At the main Department for Transport London headquarters building the Union flag is flown 365 days of the year. The Union flag is flown on designated days at other departmental buildings able to fly flags.

Departmental Official Residences

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether any domestic properties in the gift of the Government have been allocated to the use of Ministers in his Department. [1793]

Norman Baker: There are no domestic properties in the gift of the Government allocated for the use of Ministers in the Department for Transport.

Northern Rail: Rolling Stock

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the future of the High Level Output Statement agreement on the delivery of carriages for *(a)* Northern Rail and *(b)* TransPennine Express. [1255]

Mrs Villiers: We are assessing our policy for managing crowding on the rail network in the light of likely spending constraints over the next few years. The National Audit Office report "Increasing Passenger Rail Capacity" published on 4 June highlighted a number of problems with delivery of the High Level Output Statement capacity programme. In the light of this report and in anticipation of the current Spending Review, we have announced that proposals by the previous administration for the purchase of additional carriages will be reappraised and assessed for affordability.

Public Transport: Carbon Emissions

Mr Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance he plans to issue to local authorities on the appraisal process for low carbon local transport schemes; and if he will make a statement. [1367]

Norman Baker: In the Coalition Agreement we committed to reform the way decisions are made on which transport projects to prioritise, so that the benefits of low carbon proposals (including light rail schemes) are fully recognised. We will announce details of how these reforms are to be implemented in due course.

Railways: North West

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the electrification of the rail network in the North West. [1748]

Mrs Villiers: We are in the early stages of the new Government and Ministers are considering the full range of transport policy. The Government supports rail electrification as it helps to reduce carbon emissions and cut running costs.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the likely effect of the introduction of high speed rail on rail services serving Wigan North Western station. [1751]

Mr Philip Hammond: The detail of any changes to service patterns on the existing network that may result from a new high speed rail network will be determined in due course, in consultation with passengers and the rail industry. By generating significant additional capacity new high speed lines would free up space on the existing lines, which would ultimately benefit passengers.

Tolls

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is on the levying of charges on foreign-registered *(a)* cars and *(b)* heavy goods vehicles using UK roads; and if he will make a statement. [1496]

Mike Penning: The Secretary of State has ruled out national road pricing for cars on existing roads. As stated in the Coalition programme for Government, we are working towards the introduction of a new system of HGV road user charging to ensure that foreign heavy goods vehicles contribute to the upkeep of UK roads that they use and to ensure a fairer arrangement for UK hauliers.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the measures required to be introduced during the present Parliament to prepare for any introduction of road pricing after May 2015. [1497]

Mike Penning: The Secretary of State has ruled out for the duration of the Parliament national road pricing for cars on existing roads and any preparation for such a scheme beyond that time horizon.

For this reason no such assessment has been made.

Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for which public expenditure projects in *(a)* Wigan constituency and *(b)* the Metropolitan borough of Wigan his Department secured Treasury approval between 1 January 2010 and the date of his appointment as Secretary of State. [1749]

Norman Baker: The following transport projects affecting Wigan have gained approval since 1 January 2010:

Kickstart funding for enhanced bus services on circular routes 664-674 in Wigan. This funding has now been withdrawn as part of the 2010-11 grant reductions to local authorities.

£298,000 allocated to Wigan metropolitan borough council for emergency highways repair funding to deal with the impacts of the adverse weather during the winter. This funding will be paid in full in 2010-11.

The Government are re-assessing spending approvals granted between 1 January 2010 and the general election to ensure that they offer good value for money and are consistent with the Government's priorities. Further announcements will be made in due course.

Wigan North Western Station

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the renovation of Wigan North Western rail station; and if he will make a statement. [1750]

Mrs Villiers: The Government recognises the importance of investing in station improvements, and is committed to facilitating this investment through reforms to the way the railways are run.

Network Rail is responsible for delivering the majority of investment in rail infrastructure across the UK rail network, and does so in accordance with the high level output specification (HLOS) developed by the Department for Transport, which formed the basis on which Network Rail's income was set by the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) for the current regulatory control period (CP4) in 2008.

The Government's priority is reducing the deficit. As a company funded largely by Government, Network Rail needs to contribute to this. As part of the £683 million savings in departmental spending in 2010-11, Network Rail is reducing by £50 million the amount that had been provisionally allocated to improving the ten stations identified for improvement in the Station Champions' "Better Rail Stations" report. However, Wigan North Western is not precluded from benefitting from other funding such as the £150 million National Stations Improvement programme.

The hon. Member should contact Network Rail's chief executive at the following address for specific detail on Network Rail's plans for Wigan North Western station:

Iain Coucher
Chief Executive
Network Rail
King's Place
90 York Way
London N1 9AG.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Community Policing: Finance

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding for each area under pathfinder neighbourhood agreements *(a)* has been allocated in 2010-11 to date and *(b)* is planned to be allocated in the remainder of 2010-11. [2391]

Nick Herbert: No funding has been provided to neighbourhood agreement pathfinder areas in 2010-11 to date. No decisions have yet been made on the allocation of funding to pathfinder areas in the remainder of 2010-11.

Departmental Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the URL is of each website managed by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* each non-departmental public body and agency for which her Department is responsible. [2369]

Nick Herbert: The information is as follows:

(a) The Home Office manages the following websites:

	Websites
Home Office	www.homeoffice.gov.uk
Neighbourhood policing	www.neighbourhoodpolicing.co.uk
National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO)	www.secureyourfertiliser.gov.uk
Police Could You—recruitment website	www.policecouldyou.co.uk
Zahid Mubarek inquiry	www.zahidmubarekinquiry.org.uk/
Warning Service	www.warp.gov.uk
Life in the UK Test	www.lifeintheuktest.gov.uk
Think U Know—(child safety online campaign)	www.thinkuknow.co.uk
National anti fraud network	www.nafn.gov.uk
UK visas	www.ukvisas.gov.uk

(b) Non-departmental public body and agency websites for which the Home Office is responsible are as follows:

	Websites
Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre	www.ceop.gov.uk
Identity and Passport Service	www.ips.gov.uk
Independent Safeguarding Authority	www.isa-gov.org.uk
Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure	www.cpnatinf.gov.uk
Forensic Science Service	www.forensic.gov.uk
Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC)	www.ipcc.gov.uk
Investigatory Powers Tribunal	www.ipt-uk.com
Office of Surveillance Commissioners	www.surveillancecommissioners.gov.uk
Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC)	www.oisc.gov.uk
SOCA	www.soca.gov.uk
National Police Improvement Agency	www.npia.police.uk
Alcohol Education and Research Council (AERC)	www.aerc.org.uk
Centre for the protection of the National Infrastructure	www.cpni.gov.uk

Firearms

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what her most recent estimate is of the incidence of gun-related crime in *(a)* rural and *(b)* urban areas. [2013]

James Brokenshire: Firearms are taken to be involved in a crime if they are fired, used as a blunt instrument or used as a threat. Data only at police force area level on offences involving firearms are submitted to the Home Office by each police force in England and Wales. It is not possible to determine the precise location of offences from this centrally collected information, including whether the specific location is urban or rural.

Available information, relating to non-air weapon offences, was included in table 2.12 of the most recent chapter on offences involving firearms, published within Home Office Statistical Bulletin 01/10 in January 2010. 60% of all non-air weapon firearm offences in England and Wales in 2008-09 occurred in just three police force areas—Metropolitan, Greater Manchester and West Midlands—while just under a quarter of the population of England and Wales reside in these areas.

Firearm offences (excluding air weapons) by police force area: English regions and Wales, 2004-05 to 2008-09

Recorded crime

	Total number of offences					
Police force area	*2004-05*	*2005-06*	*2006-07*	*2007-08*	*2008-09*	*Offences per 100,000 population, 2008-09*
Cleveland	37	41	19	15	34	6.1
Durham	21	18	14	45	22	3.6
Northumbria	182	137	111	78	51	3.6
North East Region	240	196	144	138	107	4.2
Cheshire	61	71	41	59	61	6.1
Cumbria	26	18	21	18	28	5.6
Greater Manchester	1,268	1,200	993	1,160	827	32.1
Lancashire	259	372	364	349	207	14.3
Merseyside	491	485	410	398	353	26.2
North West Region	2,105	2,146	1,829	1,984	1,476	21.5
Humberside	174	108	117	58	62	8.8
North Yorkshire	13	15	14	17	11	1.4
South Yorkshire	185	301	211	202	144	11.0
West Yorkshire	318	355	319	332	287	13.0
Yorkshire and the Humber Region	690	779	661	609	504	9.7
Derbyshire	149	109	83	70	75	7.5
Leicestershire	123	89	109	134	127	13.0
Lincolnshire	90	72	45	41	16	2.3

Firearm offences (excluding air weapons) by police force area: English regions and Wales, 2004-05 to 2008-09

Recorded crime

Police force area	*Total number of offences*					*Offences per 100,000 population, 2008-09*
	2004-05	*2005-06*	*2006-07*	*2007-08*	*2008-09*	
Northamptonshire	113	128	159	164	112	16.4
Nottinghamshire	303	277	196	240	204	19.1
East Midlands Region	778	675	592	649	534	12.1
Staffordshire	144	128	94	123	44	4.1
Warwickshire	73	80	90	107	56	10.6
West Mercia	151	115	58	124	79	6.6
West Midlands	959	946	979	974	987	37.7
West Midlands Region	1,327	1,269	1,221	1,328	1,166	21.6
Bedfordshire	94	103	86	83	64	10.6
Cambridgeshire	50	34	24	30	34	4.4
Essex	193	280	255	260	176	10.3
Hertfordshire	139	114	89	112	68	6.3
Norfolk	23	29	34	43	29	3.4
Suffolk	59	58	42	38	25	3.5
East of England Region	558	618	530	566	396	6.9
London, City of[1]	3	1	4	3	3	n/a
Metropolitan	3,694	3,883	3,327	3,396	3,087	40.6
London Region	3,697	3,884	3,331	3,399	3,090	40.6
Hampshire	148	85	122	100	80	4.3
Kent	100	142	92	82	93	5.6
Surrey	63	87	60	70	66	6.0
Sussex	67	85	84	69	65	4.2
Thames Valley	437	401	332	322	214	9.7
South East Region	815	800	690	643	518	6.2
Avon and Somerset	196	167	138	116	95	6.9
Devon and Cornwall	189	174	132	111	70	4.2
Dorset	49	27	28	21	16	2.3
Gloucestershire	87	77	65	43	52	8.9
Wiltshire	49	43	69	49	45	6.9
South West Region	570	488	432	340	278	5.3
Dyfed-Powys	40	21	17	25	7	1.4
Gwent	85	53	33	47	36	6.4
North Wales	60	88	98	53	42	6.2
South Wales	104	71	67	84	54	4.4
Wales	289	233	215	209	139	4.6
England and Wales	11,069	11,088	9,645	9,865	8,268	15.1

n/a = Not available.
[1] Not available. Data for London Region includes the City of London.

Forensic Science Service

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed by the Forensic Science Service in each financial year since 2005-06. [2283]

James Brokenshire: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Forensic Science Service—staffing figures

	Average number of full-time equivalent staff employed
2005-06	2,484
2006-07	2,357
2007-08	2,024
2008-09	1,856
2009-10	1,797

Note:
Based on figures reported in the annual report and accounts, annualised for the first two years due to differing accounting periods.

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* voluntary and *(b)* involuntary redundancies there were from the Forensic Science Service in 2009-10. [2284]

James Brokenshire: There were no voluntary redundancies and 34 compulsory redundancies.

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staffed locations of the Forensic Science Service there were in each financial year since 2005-06. [2285]

James Brokenshire: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Forensic Science Service Ltd—number of staffed locations

	Number of staffed locations
2005-06	12
2006-07	14
2007-08	13
2008-09	13
2009-10	13

Gary McKinnon

Mr Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what her policy is on the request from the US Administration for the extradition of Gary McKinnon. [1443]

Nick Herbert: The UK's policy and practice is to give maximum assistance to all of its extradition partners in accordance with domestic law and international obligations. It expects no less in return. In Mr McKinnon's case, proceedings under the Extradition Act 2003 are now at an end, but the Government have agreed to look afresh at whether new evidence demonstrates that extradition would breach Mr McKinnon's human rights. To that end, we are considering further representations which Mr McKinnon's solicitors submitted to us on 8 June.

More generally, the Government have undertaken to review the 2003 Act and the UK-USA Extradition treaty.

Immobilisation of Vehicles

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she plans to introduce a code of practice for wheelclampers. [2370]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government included in their Coalition Agreement, published on 12 May, a commitment to tackle rogue private sector wheel clampers. An announcement on how we will do this will be made in due course.

Members: Security

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether she has had discussions with the Association of Chief Police Officers on advice to hon. Members on security measures at constituency offices; and if she will make a statement. [340]

Nick Herbert: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has had discussions with representatives of ACPO and the police service on a range of issues. In the course of these, my right hon. Friend has been briefed on the action which the police are taking in the light of the incident involving the hon. Member for East Ham at his Newham constituency office on 14 May 2010. The briefing my right hon. Friend received included details on the liaison that has taken place between the police and the parliamentary authorities to ensure that hon. Members are given appropriate advice and support on security measures at constituency offices.

Passports: Lost Property

Caroline Dinenage: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated cost of Hampshire Constabulary running the airfield at HMS Daedalus in Lee-on-the-Solent is for 2010-11, identifying separately the cost of employment of the Air Support Unit officers and staff and associated expenses. [2204]

Nick Herbert *[holding answer 14 June 2010]:* The information requested is not held centrally. The costs of running the airfield at HMS Daedalus in Lee-on-the-Solent and the cost of employing Air Support Unit officers and staff are matters for the chief constable of Hampshire.

Police: Ports

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the budget for the UK Port Police in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the Port of Dover (i) was in each year from 2007-08 to 2009-10 and (ii) is estimated to be in 2010-11. [2286]

Nick Herbert: The information is as follows:

(a) Nine UK sea ports maintain their own independent port police force entirely funded by the individual port. However, responsibility for policing the UK's sea and air ports lies primarily with the geographic police force in whose territory a port lies. There are around 1,400 special branch officers working at the UK's major air and sea ports. There are also around 1,600 uniformed police patrolling UK ports, who are responsible for protective security and general policing. These officers can be supported on general policing by further officers from the local force. All these officers are drawn from the police force within whose territory the port sits: there is not a specific ports policing budget.

(b) The port of Dover police is independent police force and its budget is a matter for the Dover Harbour Board.

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans she has for the future of the Port Police. [2287]

Nick Herbert: None—this is a matter for the nine ports involved. Nevertheless, on the important matter of border policing in general the coalition agreement sets out a commitment to create a dedicated border police force, as part of a refocused Serious Organised Crime Agency, to enhance national security, improve immigration controls and crack down on the trafficking of people, weapons and drugs. It will also tackle the smuggling and illegal trade on wildlife.

Police: Rural Areas

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans she has to improve policing in rural areas. [2407]

Nick Herbert: The Government are committed to ensuring that all communities, including those in rural areas, receive a high quality policing service that meets local priorities. Effective neighbourhood policing by police officers and police community support officers (PCSOs) provides an important policing presence in

rural, as well as urban areas. The programme set out by the Coalition explains our approach to improving policing, including:

the introduction of directly elected individuals, giving the public a greater voice to ensure their priorities are reflected;

regular beat meetings where residents can hold the police to account;

the publication of crime maps showing the public what is happening in their streets, villages and towns; and

cutting through the bureaucracy that hinders the police, and introducing better technology, so that the police can spend more time out in their communities.

We will also work to enable our citizens to play a more active part in keeping their own neighbourhoods safe, for example through the Neighbourhood and Farm Watch schemes that are in place in many rural areas.

Rape

Sandra Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps her Department plans to take to increase conviction rates in cases of rape. [2218]

James Brokenshire: We need to increase the number of successful rape prosecutions and send more rapists to jail. The current conviction rate in cases of rape proceeded against in court stands at 38%.

As we have made clear, the victim in rape cases remains our priority and we welcome many of the improvements introduced by the police and the Crown Prosecution Service in recent years, intended to improve both victim care and the number of cases reaching court. These include specially trained officers and prosecutors, dedicated rape units within police force areas and investment in Sexual Assault Referral Centres for the improved collection of forensic evidence and provision of immediate crisis and medial care to victims.

It is important, however, that victims have access to longer term support and we have therefore committed to providing sustainable support for rape crisis centres.

Over the coming months, we shall work with partners to consider what more needs to be done to ensure that perpetrators of rape are brought to justice.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of whether the reservation made by the previous Government to the UN Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities on disabled people's rights to liberty of movement is compatible with the object and purpose of the Convention; and when her Department plans to conduct a review of the reservation. [1601]

Damian Green: This Administration has made no separate assessment on this specific issue.

The Home Office is currently reviewing the continuing need for the reservation, and will shortly invite interested parties to contribute to this.

Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what public expenditure projects within *(a)* Wigan constituency and *(b)* the Metropolitan borough of Wigan her Department had secured Treasury approval between 1 January 2010 and the date of her appointment as Secretary of State. [1692]

Nick Herbert: The Government are re-assessing spending approvals granted between 1 January 2010 and the general election to ensure that they offer good value for money and are consistent with the Government's priorities. Further announcements will be made in due course.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Apprentices

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) how many people in *(a)* Wigan constituency, *(b)* the North West region and *(c)* England are undertaking an apprenticeship; [1645]

(2) how many people in *(a)* Wigan constituency, *(b)* the North West region and *(c)* England are undertaking an advanced apprenticeship; [1646]

(3) how many people in *(a)* Wigan constituency, *(b)* the North West region and *(c)* England are undertaking a higher apprenticeship. [1647]

Mr Hayes: Table 1 shows the number of Apprenticeship (Level 2), Advanced Apprenticeship (Level 3) and Higher Level Apprenticeship (Level 4) programme starts in Wigan parliamentary constituency, the north-west Government office region and England for 2008/09, the latest year for which complete data are available.

Table 1: Apprenticeship programme starts by level and geography, 2008-09.

	Apprenticeships (Level 2)	*Advanced Apprenticeships (Level 3)*	*Higher level Apprenticeships (Level 4)*	*Total*
Wigan parliamentary constituency	300	160	—	460
North-west	23,600	12,900	—	36,500
England	158,500	81,300	200	239,900

Notes:
1. Figures for Wigan parliamentary constituency are rounded to the nearest 10. All other figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Figures are based upon home postcode of the learner.
3. '—' Indicates a base value of less than five for parliamentary constituency and less than 50 for Government office region.
4. The England figure contains a small amount of counts where the postcode of the learner is outside England and also learners where the postcode is not known.

Source:
Individualised Learner Record

Information on the number of Apprenticeship starts by parliamentary constituency, local authority, Government office region and for England is published in a quarterly statistical first release (SFR). The latest SFR was published on 24 March, and revised on 22 April:

http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/sfrmar10

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent representations he has received on the level of demand for apprenticeships in *(a)* engineering and *(b)* manufacturing. [2189]

Mr Hayes *[holding answer 14 June 2010]:* Ministers and officials have received a number of representations about apprenticeships including those in engineering and manufacturing. The Government are committed to increasing the number of apprenticeships, in particular advanced apprenticeships, to meet the needs of employers in an advanced modern economy. We know also that the demand from young people and adults for good quality employer-owned apprenticeships is high. The Government's decision to redeploy £150 million of Train to Gain funds for 2010-11, creating an additional 50,000 adult places, demonstrates our commitment to high-quality skills. Apprenticeships are founded on partnerships so it is important that employers, including those in manufacturing and engineering, take up these new opportunities and offer apprenticeship places to secure a new generation of highly skilled employees and we will be encouraging them to do so.

Building Colleges for the Future Programme

Laura Sandys: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what criteria will be applied to decide on provision of additional capital funding for further education colleges. [2666]

Mr Hayes: The Chancellor of the Exchequer on the 24 May announced that £50 million of Train to Gain funding would be reallocated to support a range of capital infrastructure projects prioritising those colleges who have not previously benefitted significantly from previous further education capital investment.

The funding is to be spent in 2010-11 and will result in genuine benefits to colleges and learners. The Skills Funding Agency has already begun work on a robust process to ensure value for money and, most importantly, the best outcomes for learners. As part of this process the Agency has consulted the sector through the Association of Colleges' Capital Reference Group to ensure that the views of the sector inform this process.

The Skills Funding Agency will be inviting colleges to apply shortly with a view to successful projects starting on site as soon as is practicable.

Departmental Travel

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the *(a)* name and *(b)* version is of each computer software package used by his Department to calculate travel costs. [1943]

Mr Davey: The Department does not own any computer software packages to calculate travel costs. The Department uses the Buying Solutions travel frameworks to book travel for air, rail car hire and accommodation.

Buying Solutions travel frameworks offer substantial savings to Government Departments on travel spend by offering specially negotiated Government rates not available outside of the frameworks.

Economic Situation

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the effect of the recent recession on *(a)* the West Midlands and *(b)* other regions of England; and what steps he plans to take in the West Midlands to alleviate these effects in areas within his Department's responsibilities. [2435]

Mr Prisk: Early data suggests that the recession may have had a significant impact on those areas that were already lagging, with the regions and sub-regions with the highest initial unemployment experiencing the highest increases. For example latest data for 2008 indicates that GVA growth between 2007 and 2008 was 3.0% in the West Midlands, below the English average of 3.5% and the lowest of the English regions; and in the period from 2007 to 2009, the West Midlands saw the largest percentage point increase in the unemployment rate of all the English regions, rising by 4.6 ppts compared to the English average of 2.6 ppts.

The Government will shortly be announcing details of its proposals for local enterprise partnerships, which are joint local authority-business bodies to promote local economic development. These may take the form of existing RDAs in areas where they are popular.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what plans he has for the future provision of bonuses to students who meet targets related to attendance and achievement. [1439]

Mr Gibb: I have been asked to reply.

It is for schools to decide on whether to use rewards and incentives with their pupils.

Higher Education: Admissions

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent discussions he has had on post-qualification admissions to higher education. [1667]

Mr Willetts: I have had no recent discussions on post-qualification admissions to higher education.

Higher Education: Student Numbers

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many people from Wigan constituency entered higher education in each year since 1996. [1641]

Mr Willetts: The number of entrants from Wigan constituency to UK higher education institutions are shown in the table. Figures are provided for the academic years 1996/97 to 2008/09. Information for the 2009/10 academic year will be available from the Higher Education Statistics Agency in January 2011.

Entrants[1] from Wigan constituency[2]—UK higher education institutions[3], academic years 1996/97 to 2008/09

Academic year	Entrants
1996/97	595
1997/98	595
1998/99	640
1999/2000	715
2000/01	665
2001/02	725
2002/03	775
2003/04	830
2004/05	795
2005/06	905
2006/07	805
2007/08	665
2008/09	905

[1] Covers all-aged undergraduate and postgraduate entrants to full-time and part-time courses.
[2] The table does not include entrants where the constituency of the student cannot be established due to missing or invalid postcode information.
[3] Excludes the Open University due to inconsistencies in their coding of entrants across the time series.
Note:
Figures are on a HESA snapshot basis as at 1 December and are rounded to the nearest five.
Source:
Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what plans he has to review the number of undergraduate student places; and if he will make a statement. [1704]

Mr Willetts: We have secured funding for an additional 10,000 undergraduate and foundation degree places in 2010-11. Beyond that we will assess the requirement for student places in the context of our response to the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance chaired by Lord Browne and the next spending review. In doing so we will want to ensure that the quality of higher education courses is not diminished.

Regional Development Agencies

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what *(a)* in-house and *(b)* external lobbying activity (i) each regional development agency and (ii) the National Secretariat for Regional Development Agencies has undertaken for the retention of regional development agencies since the general election. [2427]

Mr Prisk: Cabinet Office guidance on NDPBs is that it will always be an improper use of public funds for NDPBs to employ PR or other consultants to lobby Parliament or Government Departments in an attempt to influence government policy or obtain higher funding. I will ensure that all RDA chief executives are reminded of this responsibility.

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which public affairs firms have been hired by *(a)* each regional development agency and *(b)* the National Secretariat for Regional Development Agencies in the last 12 months. [2429]

Mr Prisk: No public affairs firms have been hired by any regional development agency or the regional development agency national secretariat in the last 12 months.

Train to Gain Programme: West Midlands

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether he plans to alter previously planned expenditure on the Train to Gain programme in the West Midlands in *(a)* 2010-11 and *(b)* 2011-12. [1446]

Mr Hayes: We have announced our intention to immediately reallocate £200 million of Train to Gain funding. This will provide 50,000 new adult apprenticeship places and an extra £50 million in further education infrastructure projects.

The Skills Funding Agency is now looking to implement this change. However, it is not possible at this time to provide information on the impact it may have on individual institutions in the West Midlands, and therefore spend in a particular region.

Union Learning Fund

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many *(a)* disabled people, *(b)* people from ethnic minorities, *(c)* females and *(d)* young people have received assistance from the Union Learning Fund. [1967]

Mr Hayes: The Union Learning Fund (ULF) is overseen by unionlearn, the TUC's learning and skills arm, under a grant arrangement with the Department. Information on the assistance provided to these groups of learners is currently not held in respect of all ULF activity. However, it is available where ULF projects are directly involved in providing learning opportunities through U-net, unionlearn's network of online learning centres. The latest full year information, provided by the TUC, for 2006/07 to 2008/09 shows that out of a total of 17,240 course participants, 8,311 (48.2%) were female, 1,802 (10.5%) were from an ethnic minority, 778 (4.5%) were disabled and 1,193 (6.9%) were young workers (under 25). In April 2010 a new contractual requirement was introduced for all ULF projects to record this level of information to cover all areas of activity.

U-net was ranked by Ofsted (in February 2009) to be among the best learning providers in the country with a:

"strong ethos to widen participation, promote social inclusion and equality of opportunity".

Success rates for Black learners rose from 54% in 2007/08 to 81.8% in 2008/09 and for Asian learners from 70.2% to 82.1%—well above the national average.

Vocational Training: Teachers

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether his Department plans to respond to the recommendations of the Skills Commission on teacher training in vocational education. [1576]

Mr Hayes: I have asked my officials to consider the Skills Commission's recommendations. The report also refers to areas of policy that are the responsibility of

the Secretary of State for Education. I will respond to the recommendations after they have been considered jointly by our two Departments.

Vocational Training: West Midlands

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he plans to take to increase the skills level of the workforce in *(a)* Dudley North constituency, *(b)* the borough of Dudley and *(c)* the West Midlands. [1519]

Mr Hayes: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is seeking to drive up the skills levels of the workforce by directing public funding where it will bring the clearest benefits.

We will also make sure that employers and individuals have the information they need to make the best choices about investing in training. We have begun to rebalance skills provision by redeploying £150 million of Train to Gain funding to create 50,000 high-quality Apprenticeship places, focused on small and medium sized enterprises. We are also taking action to set colleges and training organisations free from excessive bureaucracy and direct state control, to give them the freedom to respond better to local needs.

The Skills Funding Agency is responsible for the delivery of public funds for skills training, including Apprenticeships. Dudley and the West Midlands will benefit from the refocusing of funding towards higher-quality training with clearer benefits. Over £31 million of public funding will support skills training in the Dudley area in 2010/11 covering a diverse range of programmes to meet the needs of individuals and employers, including apprentices. Learners resident in the Dudley North constituency are accessing these opportunities and others in the wider region to raise their skill levels and improve their lives. £509 million will support skills training in the wider West Midlands region.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Flags

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what his policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which his Department is responsible. [1810]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: At our UK headquarters in East Kilbride, the Department for International Development (DFID) has chosen to fly the Union flag on a daily basis from its highest centre pole. DFID's UK headquarters in London does not have a flagpole and therefore we are unable to fly the Union flag at this building. The decision on flying the Union flag in our country offices depends on whether they have a flagpole. I am investigating the possibility of procuring a second hand flagpole at minimum cost for DFID's UK headquarters in London.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether he expects to allocate funding from his Department to *(a)* peacekeeping and *(b)* military operations in the next 12 months. [1747]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: I do not intend to allocate funds from the Department for International Development's (DFID's) budget to peacekeeping or military operations in the next 12 months.

DFID resources are not spent on UK military operations.

Funding for the UK's legal obligation to contribute to international peacekeeping will continue to be met through the peacekeeping budget, an annual claim on the Treasury Reserve. UK discretionary peacekeeping activity, will continue to be funded by the tri-departmental Conflict Pool, which is allocated to DFID, Ministry of Defence (MOD), and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) by the Treasury separately from core departmental budgets.

Developing Countries: Children

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he plans to take to reduce levels of child poverty in developing countries. [2211]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: In the coming months the Department for International Development (DFID) will be reviewing its aid programme to determine how we can achieve better value for money for the taxpayer and accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The UK is committed to helping achieve the MDGs, which will reduce child poverty in developing countries. For example as part of our work toward the education MDGs of universal primary education and gender parity in all levels of education, we are funding five million children to go to primary school.

Developing Countries: Climate Change

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when funding his Department expects to allocate for climate adaptation in the next 12 months. [1746]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: I expect the United Kingdom to spend approximately £300 million this year on climate adaptation in developing countries, as part of the Fast Start commitment agreed at Copenhagen. This will help poor people to cope with the impact of climate change, including more frequent droughts and floods. For example in Bangladesh UKaid is helping to protect more than 400,000 very poor people from floods by raising their homesteads onto earth platforms.

EDUCATION

Academies: Public Consultation

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he plans to take to ensure that the views of staff and their trade unions are taken into account in the establishment of academy schools. [1764]

Mr Gibb: The governing body, which includes staff representation, must agree that the school can become an academy before an application is made. Guidance issued for schools wishing to convert to an academy provides further detailed information and is available at:

www.education.gov.uk/academies

In addition, during the conversion process, the current employer of school staff (either the local authority or governing body) will be required to conduct a TUPE consultation with all staff and the unions as part of the staff transfer process.

Children: Databases

Mr Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children in each local education authority *(a)* are and *(b)* are not recorded on the ContactPoint database. [2208]

Tim Loughton *[holding answer 14 June 2010]:* ContactPoint was designed to hold basic information on every child in England, by gathering data from a range of national and local data sources. The system is not set up to run reports on numbers of children in each local authority.

Children: Internet

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether he plans to maintain the Home Access programme for disabled children and those from low income backgrounds following the closure of BECTA. [1410]

Mr Gibb *[holding answer 8 June 2010]:* The Home Access programme will continue until the total available for grants has been awarded. The programme includes full assistive technology provision for learners with special educational needs (SEN) which is expected to continue until March 2011.

Departmental Electronic Equipment

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* plasma and *(b)* LCD televisions there are in ministerial offices in his Department. [386]

Michael Gove: There are five plasma and one LCD televisions in Ministers' offices at the Department for Education. These were installed between February and July 2007.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when and in what form he plans to publish a list of all items of expenditure by his Department over £25,000. [271]

Michael Gove: The Prime Minister has written to Cabinet Ministers reiterating transparency commitments made in the Coalition Programme for Government, and setting out a timetable for achieving them. In particular, all new items of central Government spending over £25,000 will be published online in an open format from November 2010.

Departmental Redundancy Pay

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to his Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff. [633]

Michael Gove: The Department for Education and its predecessor, the Department for Children Schools and Families, has made no employees redundant.

The Department is subject to the same recruitment restrictions as all other Government Departments. It has not yet identified any necessary additional reductions to its non-frontline staff and therefore cannot provide any estimate in relation to cost.

The cost to the Department of any release payments this year will be disclosed in the Department's Resource Accounts for 2010/11.

Departmental Reorganisation

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his estimate is of the cost of renaming his Department. [109]

Michael Gove: The re-naming of the Department for Education cost £5,250.

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of renaming his Department. [528]

Michael Gove *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* The re-naming of the Department for Education cost £5,250.

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the cost of renaming his Department; and whether all branded facilities and services of his Department are to be re-branded. [879]

Michael Gove: The re-naming of the Department for Education cost £5,250. New facilities and services will use the Department for Education brand where appropriate. We will take individual decisions about branding for existing facilities and services in order to minimise costs and waste.

Free Schools

Ed Balls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many full-time civil servants in his Department have been allocated to work on policy development and programme delivery in relation to free schools. [1211]

Michael Gove: Free schools will open as academies. There are currently around 115 civil servants in the Department for Education engaged directly in work on policy development and programme delivery related to academy schools. There is a substantial number of other civil servants in the Department who make a significant contribution to policy development and programme delivery related to academy schools as part of their wider role. In addition there are 47 staff in the Young People's Learning Agency involved in funding and supporting open academies.

JUSTICE

Self-defence Law

16. **Mr Bailey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has to bring forward proposals to change the law on self-defence. [2231]

Nick Herbert: We are reviewing the law and its interpretation carefully and will explore all options before bringing forward proposals. We must make sure that the responsible citizen acting in self defence or the prevention of crime has the appropriate level of legal protection.

Bilingual Juries (Wales)

20. **Mr Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what recent consideration he has given to empanelling bilingual juries in courts in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [2235]

Mr Djanogly: I am aware that the previous Government consulted on this issue and announced in March this year their decision to make no change to the existing position. According to 2001 census results 21% of people in Wales said they could speak Welsh. That would amount to the exclusion, in every case involving a bilingual jury, of about four fifths of the population of Wales. I believe that juries should be selected randomly from the community and am not convinced that departing from that principle would be justified in this instance.

Victims' Groups

22. **Keith Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has to increase the level of involvement of victims' groups in the criminal justice system. [2237]

Nick Herbert: As part of our ambition to build the Big Society we are committed to putting more power and opportunity into people's hands. I have asked my officials for advice on how we take a fresh look at the provision of services to victims and I am particularly keen that this includes more meaningful involvement of victims groups.

Guilty Pleas (Pre-court)

23. **David T. C. Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps are being taken to encourage defendants to enter guilty pleas before cases come to court. [2239]

Mr Blunt: It is beneficial to victims who would otherwise have to give evidence, if defendants who are guilty plead guilty at the earliest opportunity. The main means of encouraging defendants to do so is the long-standing practice of recognising timely pleas of guilty with a reduction in sentence. It is not possible to plead guilty before the first appearance in court, but it is open to suspects to co-operate when they are interviewed by the police. It is of considerable advantage to the whole Criminal Justice System, witnesses and the taxpayer if suspects co-operate in this way. There is a case for treating those who do more favourably and it is open to the Sentencing Council to consider this.

Bill of Rights

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice when the Commission to investigate the creation of a British Bill of Rights will be appointed. [1676]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: The Government will make a statement to Parliament on the appointment of the Commission on a Bill of Rights in due course.

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) whether the Government's proposed British Bill of Rights will include provision for the protection of economic and social rights; [2165]

(2) when he will announce the timetable for the Government's plan to establish a commission to investigate the creation of a British Bill of Rights. [2166]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: The Government will make a statement to Parliament on the terms of reference and appointment of the Commission on a Bill of Rights in due course.

Departmental Ministerial Appointments

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many special advisers *(a)* he and *(b)* each other Minister in his Department (i) has appointed to date and (ii) plans to appoint; [317]

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments he has made since his appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [366]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Members to the written answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W. I also refer to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's written ministerial statement on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 32-34WS.

Departmental Official Residences

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether any domestic properties in the gift of the Government have been allocated to the use of Ministers in his Department. [1800]

Mr Blunt: The Ministry of Justice has not allocated any domestic properties for the use of Ministers.

Legal Aid Scheme

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice who will carry out his Department's planned review of legal aid. [1677]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: We set out in "The Coalition: our programme for Government" that we will undertake a fundamental review of legal aid to make it work more efficiently. I am considering how best to take this work forward and will make a statement in due course.

Prisoners: Legal Aid Scheme

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what regulations govern unsolicited communications from law firms advertising their services to prison inmates. [2547]

Mr Blunt: Solicitors are regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority, the regulatory arm of the Law Society. The use of advertisements and other forms of publicity by solicitors is regulated by its Solicitors' Code of Conduct 2007. The Code provides that firms are generally free to advertise their services, subject to the requirements of rule 7. Rule 7 of the Code permits solicitors to publicise their firms in a number of ways—ensuring that clients and the public have appropriate information about the firm and the way it is regulated; but prohibiting misleading publicity and inappropriate approaches for business.

Prisoners' incoming mail is examined for illicit enclosures but is not routinely read. There are no specific rules relating to unsolicited correspondence to named prisoners from law firms advertising their services.

Prisons do not distribute unsolicited mail that is not addressed to a named prisoner. Advertisements from law firms are commonly carried in specialist prisoner newspapers which are made available for prisoners to pick up in communal areas.

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will review his policy on access to legal aid for prisoners seeking a reduction in the length of their sentences. [2550]

Mr Djanogly: Under the existing arrangements, prisoners who wish to appeal against their sentence, to ask the Criminal Cases Review Commission to refer their sentence to the Court of Appeal, or to seek a review of their minimum term of imprisonment, are eligible for legal aid, subject to passing the relevant merits and means tests.

The Government set out in 'The Coalition: our programme for government' that it will undertake a fundamental review of legal aid to make it work more efficiently. We are considering how best to take this work forward and will make a statement in due course.

Rape: Bail

Kate Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) what proportion of those charged with rape in England and Wales were granted *(a)* conditional and *(b)* unconditional bail between charge and verdict in each of the last five years; [1583]

(2) what proportion of those charged with rape in England and Wales were granted *(a)* conditional and *(b)* unconditional bail between arrest and charge in each of the last five years. [1585]

Mr Blunt: The estimated proportion of defendants proceeded against for rape (including attempted rape) at magistrates courts who were granted bail and the estimated proportion tried for rape at the Crown Court who were granted bail, in England and Wales 2004 to 2008 (latest available) is shown in Table 1.

The estimated proportion of defendants proceeded against for rape (including attempted rape) at magistrates courts who were granted bail by the police following their arrest in England and Wales in each year between 2004 and 2008 (latest available) is shown in Table 2.

The Court Proceedings Database held by the Ministry of Justice relating to the use of bail by the police and courts does not record whether conditions are attached to bail in cases where bail is granted by either the police or courts.

Table 1: The estimated[1] proportion of defendants proceeded against for rape[2] at magistrates courts[3] who were granted bail[4] and the estimated proportion tried for rape at the Crown Court who were granted bail in England and Wales, 2004-08[5,6]

Percentage

Court type	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008[7]
Magistrates	21	19	17	19	23
Crown	39	39	40	42	40

[1] It is known that in some police force areas, information on remand decisions is not always readily available to those coding court proceedings returns. In certain cases, the return may be mistakenly coded as if no remand had taken place. For magistrates court proceedings, the number of remands and more importantly, the number which are in custody, are believed to be under-recorded in total. As the breakdown of remands into bail and custody cases for a number of forces is not accurate for a number of forces, estimates have to be made to provide national figures.
[2] Includes rape and attempted rape of males and females.
[3] Excludes remands/bail data relating to Cardiff magistrates court for April, July and August 2008.
[4] Excludes those remanded in custody at any stage of proceedings at magistrates and Crown courts who may also have been given bail at some stage of those proceedings.
[5] Proportions for 2008 have been estimated based on pre-committal remand status.
[6] The figures presented in this table have been computed using data that exclude those defendants who fail to appear to bail or summons.
[7] Magistrates courts data for 2008 are provisional and subject to change.
Note:
Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.
Source:
Prepared by Justice Statistics Analytical Services

Table 2: The estimated[1] proportion of defendants proceeded against for rape[2] at magistrates courts[3] who were granted bail[4] by the police following their arrest prior to appearing in court, England and Wales, 2004-08[5,6]

Percentage

Court type	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008[7]
Magistrates	62	61	59	63	48

[1] It is known that in some police force areas, information on remand decisions is not always readily available to those coding court proceedings returns. In certain cases, the return may be mistakenly coded as if no remand had taken place. For magistrates court proceedings, the number of remands and more importantly, the number which are in custody, are believed to be under-recorded in total. As the breakdown of remands into bail and custody cases for a number of forces is not accurate for a number of forces, estimates have to be made to provide national figures.
[2] Includes rape and attempted rape of males and females.
[3] Excludes remands/bail data relating to Cardiff magistrates court for April, July and August 2008.
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[5] Proportions for 2004-08 have been estimated based on pre-committal remand status.
[6] The figures presented in this table have been computed using data that exclude those defendants who fail to appear to bail or summons.
[7] Indicates that the data are provisional and subject to change.
Note:
Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.
Source
Prepared by Justice Statistics Analytical Services.

Rape: Disclosure of Information

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans the Government has to provide for anonymity of those accused of rape *(a)* between arrest and charge, *(b)* between charge and trial and *(c)* during trial. [1693]

Mr Blunt: The Government have made clear that they will carefully consider all the options before bringing proposals to Parliament.

Roy Whiting

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how much was spent from the public purse on legal aid to Roy Whiting during his appeal seeking reduction of the length of his sentence; [2548]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of the appeal by Roy Whiting against the length of his sentence. [2549]

Mr Djanogly: The full cost to the public purse of the High Court review of Roy Whiting's minimum term of imprisonment is not yet known, as his legal representatives have up to three months within which to submit their claim for legal aid costs following the conclusion of the case. I will write to the hon. Member once further information is available.

Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice for what public expenditure projects within *(a)* Wigan constituency and *(b)* the Metropolitan borough of Wigan his Department had secured Treasury approval between 1 January 2010 and the date of his appointment as Secretary of State. [1691]

Mr Djanogly: I have reviewed the significant new spending decisions taken between 1 January 2010 and the general election, to ensure that they offer good value for money and are consistent with the Government's priorities. No specific spending projects have been approved within *(a)* Wigan constituency or *(b)* the Metropolitan borough of Wigan. However, many of the spending decisions are for national initiatives or programmes, which may have an impact for Wigan constituents.

Further announcements will be made in due course.

Young Offender Institutions: Social Services

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many *(a)* filled and *(b)* vacant social worker posts there are in each young offender institution. [1763]

Mr Blunt: There is a statutory duty on local authorities to provide social work services to children in need. It is a matter for local authorities how they choose to fulfil these duties. In 2005, a number of dedicated social worker posts in young offender institutions (YOIs) were established by a centrally funded pilot scheme; since this funding came to an end in 2009, the provision of social work services has been determined on a case by case basis at a local level, therefore meaningful data is not available.

HEALTH

Cancer: Screening

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to introduce a cancer screening programme using the oncimmune blood test; and if he will make a statement. [1655]

Mr Burstow: The oncimmune blood test is an assay for the measurement of autoantibodies against a panel of antigens known to be expressed in lung cancer. Research continues into its potential role as part of a strategy including imaging for early detection of lung cancer in individuals at increased risk.

The United Kingdom National Screening Committee (UK NSC) advises Ministers and the national health service in all four UK countries about all aspects of screening policy and supports implementation. The UK NSC draws on latest research evidence and assesses new programmes against a set of internationally recognised criteria, covering the condition, the test, the treatment options, the effectiveness and acceptability of the screening programme.

The UK NSC last reviewed screening for lung cancer in July 2006 and is due to review its position on screening again following the publication of the Health Technology Assessment's (HTA) pilot study results which are part of the HTA's UK Lung Cancer Screening Trial (UKLS). The UK NSC will also consider any additional new evidence available at that time.

Care Homes: Abuse

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will ensure that in all cases when allegations are made to social services or health services of abuse of residents of care homes the police are informed; [2450]

(2) if he will hold a meeting with Essex county council to discuss the findings of the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board into the performance of the Greenways Care Home in Colchester; [2451]

(3) if he will undertake an investigation into the appropriateness of the transfer by Essex county council of care homes to care home company Excelcare; and if he will make a statement; [2452]

(4) what recent representations he has received about the standard of operation by Excelcare *(a)* of care homes nationally and *(b)* of the Greenways Care Home in Colchester. [2453]

Mr Burstow: Decisions to notify the police of allegations of abuse of a resident in a care home are taken locally by safeguarding adults boards, depending on the nature and severity of individual allegations. The Department does not consider it would be appropriate to introduce a requirement that all such allegations, regardless of circumstances, should be automatically referred to the police.

The transfer or sale of care homes by councils to independent operators is a matter for local consultation and determination. Local councils are free to decide how best to provide care services for their populations, having regard for local need and their budgets. All care homes, whether in the independent or public sectors, must be registered with and regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

The Department has no plans to meet with Essex county council to discuss the findings of the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board into the performance of the Greenways Care Home in Colchester. The Department has received no other recent representations about the standard of operation by Excelcare, either nationally or at the Greenways Care Home in Colchester.

We are informed by CQC that 35 services operated by Excelcare, including 33 residential care and nursing homes, are registered with it. CQC meets with Excelcare regularly to discuss the quality of care services operated by the company.

At the most recent meeting, in late February 2010, 28 of 35 Excelcare services were rated "good", five "adequate" and one was yet to be rated by CQC. One was rated "poor". In the case of this service, CQC was content with the company's action plan for improvement.

The last Government commenced a review of the safeguarding guidance No Secrets. We are considering how to proceed with the review, and will ensure that the case raised by the hon. Member is taken into account. We will make further announcements with respect to No Secrets and safeguarding in due course.

Carers

Mr Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he plans to take to assist carers; and if he will make a statement; [2277]

(2) how many people *(a)* between 18 and 30 years old, *(b)* between 31 and 40 years old, *(c)* between 41 and 50 years old, *(d)* between 51 and 60 years old and *(e)* over the age of 60 years old were registered as carers in (i) Jarrow constituency, (ii) South Tyneside, (iii) the North East and (iv) England in each year since 1997; [2278]

(3) how many carers *(a)* work full-time and *(b)* undertake paid work not on a full-time basis in (i) Jarrow constituency, (ii) South Tyneside, (iii) the North East and (iv) England. [2279]

Mr Burstow: The Department does not centrally hold the number of registered carers nor the number who undertake paid work.

Carers may register with a range of organisations for different purposes. There is no single register for carers.

To assist carers, we will extend the roll out of personal budgets to give people and their carers more control and purchasing power. We will use direct payments to carers and better community based provision to improve access to respite care. We will establish a commission for long-term care which will consider how we ensure responsible and sustainable funding for long-term care.

Carers: Finance

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that money allocated to primary care trusts to support carers goes to carers. [2252]

Mr Burstow: We are currently analysing information from strategic health authorities about the priority accorded to supporting carers by primary care trusts (PCTs) in 2009-10. However, the Department does not break down PCT revenue allocations by policies at either a national or local level. It is for PCTs to decide their priorities for investment locally, taking into account their local circumstances and priorities set out in the NHS Operating Framework.

It is this Government's policy to enhance freedom for local government and PCTs as much as possible by reducing the ring-fencing of monies, freeing up resources to concentrate on local priorities and the delivery of essential frontline services. However, it is important that local government and PCTs ensure that they account locally for the priorities they determine.

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease: Health Services

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding has been provided for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease-related research by his Department in the last five years. [2152]

Mr Simon Burns: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Expenditure on chronic obstructive pulmonary disease research

£ million

	Department of Health[1,2]	Medical Research Council
2005-06	0.5	0.1
2006-07	0.9	0.4
2007-08	1.3	1.5
2008-09	2	2.2
2009-10	3	[3]3.5

[1] National Institute for Health Research and Policy Research Programme

[2] Excludes spend by NHS organisations from the research and development funding allocations made directly to them from 2005-06 to 2008-09. That information is not held centrally.

[3] An estimated figure.

In addition, the National Institute for Health Research Clinical Research Network is providing national health service research infrastructure support to 57 studies of relevance to the question.

Departmental Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the URL is of each website managed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each non-departmental public body and agency for which his Department is responsible. [2368]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department is responsible for the following websites:

www.dh.gov.uk

www.nhs.uk

Non-departmental bodies and agencies for which the Department is responsible, have the following URLs that are in line with Cabinet Office guidance:

www.aerc.org.uk

www.appointments.org.uk

www.cqc.org.uk

www.chre.org.uk

www.gscc.org.uk

www.hpa.org.uk

www.hfea.gov.uk

www.hta.gov.uk

www.mhra.gov.uk

www.monitor-nhsft.gov.uk

In addition the Department is also responsible for reviewing, converging and closing the following websites as part of its commitment to Cabinet Office under Transformational Government:

www.18weeks.nhs.uk/
www.adb.dh.gov.uk/
www.arsac.org.uk/
www.asthmar-d.org.uk/
www.breastfeeding.nhs.uk/
www.pharmacopoeia.co.uk/
www.buginvestigators.co.uk/
www.clean-safe-care.nhs.uk
www.comare.org.uk/
www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk
www.ct-toolkit.ac.uk/
www.east-of-england-rdsu.org.uk/
www.health4work.nhs.uk
www.healthystart.nhs.uk/
www.hsru.co.uk/
www.hgc.gov.uk/
www.immunisation.nhs.uk/
www.info.doh.gov.uk/doh/iar.nsf?open
www.invo.org.uk/
www.nhsidentity.nhs.uk/
www.nhsplus.nhs.uk/
www.nhs-procure21.gov.uk/
www.nibsc.ac.uk/
www.photolibrary.nhs.uk/
www.rdinfo.org.uk/
www.rdlearning.org.uk/
www.rddirect.org.uk/
www.rdsu.org.uk/
www.nhsft-regulator.gov.uk/
www.shape.dh.gov.uk/
www.smokefreeengland.co.uk/
www.socialworkandcare.co.uk/
www.valuingpeople.gov.uk/

Departmental Private Finance Initiative

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the revenue cost of each project sponsored by his Department under the private finance initiative over the lifetime of the project. [1824]

Mr Simon Burns: The information in respect of the private finance initiative (PFI) schemes has been placed in the Library. The list shows all national health service trusts, NHS foundation trusts and primary care trusts with a PFI contract with the name and location of the scheme; the capital value; the length of the contract and the annual unitary charge (which are uprated annually for inflation), and which comes from revenue budgets.

General Practitioners: Standards

Mr Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he plans to take to reduce the number of targets which GPs are expected to meet. [2123]

Mr Simon Burns: We have made it clear that the national health service is to focus on securing improved health outcomes for patients rather than on top-down process targets that do not lead to improvements in patient health. We will be discussing with the profession and their representatives what this means for existing general practitioner contractual arrangements over the coming months.

Health Bill

Mr Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his timetable is for introduction and consideration of the Health Bill. [2124]

Mr Simon Burns: As announced in the parliamentary debates on the Queen's Speech, the Government will seek to introduce a Health Bill in the autumn.

Health Services: EU Action

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy on the proposed EU cross-border health directive is; what assessment his Department has made of its effect on the NHS; and what consultation he intends to undertake on this matter prior to the agreement of any EU directive. [1752]

Anne Milton: The Government, along with many other European Union member states, support the idea of codifying existing European Court of Justice case law relating to article 56 of the treaty on the funding of the European Union. The Government's assessment of the Council of Ministers draft of the EU cross-border healthcare directive is that it delivers a number of key aims as follows:

to protect the right of the home member state to decide entitlements to health care, whether locally or nationally;

to ensure that member states can operate a meaningful system of prior authorisation for hospital care and other specialised care;

to maintain the 'gatekeeper' function (i.e. to maintain the UK Commissioner, general practitioner and consultant determination of entitlements to treatment through the national health service); and

to avoid the extension of EU competence, whether through the active text of the directive (e.g. EU-wide health care standards) or through powers delegated in the directive (e.g. legally binding measures on eHealth).

The Department launched a consultation on the European Commission's proposals for a directive on the application of patients' rights in cross-border health care in October 2008 and published the response in April 2009. A partial impact assessment was also published in October 2008, which estimated that demand was low and therefore the cost to the NHS would be limited. Further consultation will follow when a final directive is agreed with the European Parliament.

Mental Health Services

Esther McVey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps his Department is taking to reduce waiting times for people assessed as requiring cognitive behavioural therapy; [2599]

(2) what his policy is on the provision of access to *(a)* talking therapies and *(b)* cognitive behavioural therapy for those diagnosed with severe mental health problems. [2600]

Mr Burstow: We have set out, in "Our Programme for Government", a commitment to ensure greater access to talking therapies to reduce long-term costs for the national health service. This is a clear public health priority for us and we are currently working to identify how we will take forward this commitment.

Psychological therapies can be a key element of the treatment of people with severe and enduring mental health conditions, particularly when these conditions are experienced alongside depression and anxiety disorders. In these cases, the delivery of cognitive behavioural therapy and other National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence-compliant therapies is the recommended treatment. Services for these clients is largely provided by psychology departments in specialist mental health trusts. The implementation of "improving access to psychological therapies" services for people in community settings with mild to moderate conditions will reduce the number of referrals to specialist mental health trusts and enable them to focus on providing services to those with severe and enduring mental illness.

Mental Health Services: Children

Mr Buckland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to ensure that children with a dual diagnosis of a mental health problem and learning disability have both diagnoses recorded in the *(a)* child and adolescent mental health services commissioning process, *(b)* children and young people's plans and *(c)* children's health needs assessments. [884]

Mr Burstow: It is for local partners to agree how best to record and reflect in the processes for commissioning of child and mental heath the needs of those children with both a mental health problem and a learning disability.

Current guidance states that each local Children and Young People's Plan must identify action to improve outcomes for children, including physical and mental health and emotional well-being, with particular reference to the needs of children with disabilities. These will inform the services that are commissioned.

Children's health needs assessments and the Children and Young People's Plan feed into the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) commissioning process.

NHS

Mr Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his plans are for the future of strategic health authorities. [1894]

Mr Simon Burns: The coalition agreement made clear that the Government intend to establish a new independent NHS Commissioning Board, to allocate resources and provide commissioning guidelines.

The NHS Commissioning Board will combine functions currently provided by the Department and strategic health authorities (SHAs), and deliver these in a much more streamlined way. The NHS Commissioning Board will exercise its functions through the regional offices that will report directly to the chief executive.

In the meantime, SHAs will continue to have a vital role in delivering financial control and performance, and driving improvements in quality and productivity.

NHS: Finance

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding he plans to allocate to hospitals for the purpose of providing patient care for the first 30 days after discharge as a consequence of the proposals announced on 8 June 2010; and if he will make a statement. [2081]

Mr Simon Burns: At this early stage, it is not possible to provide the detailed financial information requested.

Plans for the implementation of this policy, which is designed to better align payments in the national health service to drive up the quality of care that patients receive, will be progressed over the coming months. Issues relating to financial flows will be addressed as part of this work.

NHS: Standards

Heidi Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which datasets were used to measure primary care trust performance against local indicators in the world class commissioning assurance process; and if he will publish such datasets for the outcome indicator *(a)* mental health patients in employment, *(b)* access to psychological services, *(c)* reduce acute inpatient admissions to mental health units, *(d)* adults in contact with secondary mental health services in settled accommodation, *(e)* health improvement in deprived areas, *(f)* falls and *(g)* 28 day unplanned readmission; [1619]

(2) which datasets are used to measure primary care trust world class commissioning scores; and if he will publish these datasets available for the outcome indicator *(a)* delayed transfers of care, *(b)* under 18 conception rate, *(c)* deaths from chronic liver disease, *(d)* suicide and injury undetermined intent mortality rate, *(e)* drug treatment waiting times, *(f)* percentage drug users effective treatment, *(g)* rate of hospital admissions per 100,000 for alcohol related harm and (h) percentage of all deaths that occur at home. [1620]

Mr Simon Burns: World class commissioning (WCC) assurance assesses primary care trusts (PCTs) commissioning capabilities across three elements; outcomes, competencies and governance.

PCTs have selected up to eight health outcomes as priorities for their local population. The majority are selected from a national list with up to three defined locally. The national list of outcome measures is contained in the "World Class Commissioning Assurance Handbook, 2009-10", copies of which have been placed in the Library. In addition, two outcomes are set for all PCTs: reducing health inequalities and increasing life expectancy.

The WCC health outcome data is available for PCTs and other national health service professionals via the NHS Information Centre. There are no plans to publish these datasets nationally.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure consistency of standards between primary care trusts. [1684]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department will set out proposals on the future role and functions of primary care trusts in due course.

Respite Care

Grahame M. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether it is his policy to ring-fence funding allocated to respite care; and if he will make a statement; [2270]

(2) what his policy is on the provision of respite care for carers. [2271]

Mr Burstow: This Government recognise that breaks from caring is one of the top priorities for carers in terms of the sort of support they want.

Resources allocated for carer support by the previous Government was not ring-fenced. We are examining how effectively existing arrangements are being implemented. We are currently analysing information from strategic health authorities about the priority accorded to supporting carers by primary care trusts (PCTs). In addition, we will consider how local authority direct payments and personal budgets can be used in ways that enable both carers and the people that they care for to access community support, including respite.

It is this Government's policy to enhance freedom for local government and PCTs as much as possible by reducing the ring-fencing of monies, freeing up resources to concentrate on local priorities and the delivery of essential frontline services. However, it is important that local government and PCTs ensure that they account locally for the priorities they determine.

Social Services: Kirklees

Simon Reevell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the quality of adult social care provision in the Kirklees local authority area. [2320]

Mr Burstow: The assessment of the quality of adult social care provision locally is the responsibility of the Care Quality Commission (CQC), as regulator of health and adult social care services.

We are informed by CQC that it considers that Kirklees council is performing well in delivering adult social care outcomes for people in its area. A copy of CQC's most recent performance report for the council—for 2008-09—has been placed in the Library.

CQC also regulates individual social care providers in the Kirklees area. It publishes quality ratings for all individual social care services in its online directory of care services. This is available at:

www.cqc.org.uk/findcareservices.cfm

Swine Flu: Disease Control

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total gross expenditure by his Department was on the purchase of *(a)* anti-viral drugs and (b) vaccines to combat swine influenza in the last 18 months. [2130]

Anne Milton: The Department's spend on antivirals and vaccines for pandemic influenza preparedness and the swine flu outbreak in the last 18 months amounts to approximately £570 million. We are not able to break down this number due to confidentiality clauses in our contracts with the various manufacturers.

This expenditure includes stocks of antivirals which continue to be available for future pandemic preparedness. It also includes stocks of H1N1 vaccine which are being held as a strategic reserve.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Adjournment Debates

Chris Bryant: To ask the Leader of the House (1) if he will make provision for hon. Members to submit applications for adjournment debates online; [2120]

(2) if he will make provision for hon. Members to table and add their names to early-day motions online. [2121]

Sir George Young: The arrangements for submitting applications for adjournment debates, and for tabling and adding names to early-day motions, are a matter for the House.

Any proposals to extend further the facilities for hon. Members to initiate or participate in the proceedings of the House online would have to incorporate robust authentication procedures, as well as demonstrating value for money.

Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund

Harriett Baldwin: To ask the Leader of the House what his most recent estimate is of the extent of unfunded pension liability of the Parliamentary Contributary Pension Fund. [1910]

Sir George Young: The Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund (PCPF) is a funded pension scheme, with assets totalling £367.2 million, at last valuation, whose costs are met from contributions from members of the Fund, investment returns and an Exchequer contribution.

The Government Actuary undertakes a triennial valuation in which he makes recommendations as to the necessary Exchequer contribution to the PCPF, in order to finance the pensions for future service of Members, Ministers and Office Holders, and any deficit. The Exchequer contribution can rise or fall depending on factors such as assumed investment returns and longevity assumptions.

The deficit (unfunded liability) calculated as at 1 April 2008 (the date of the last valuation) was £50.9 million.

Trade Unions

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Leader of the House if he will hold discussions with trade unions representing House of Commons staff on any proposed Parliamentary reforms which affect them. [1971]

Sir George Young: I am happy to meet trade unions representing staff of the House to discuss any matter falling within my responsibilities which may affect them.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what the URL is of each website managed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each non-departmental public body and agency for which his Department is responsible. [2363]

John Penrose: The URLs of each website managed by *(a)* my Department and *(b)* each non-departmental public body[1] (NDPB) and agency are in the following table.

[1] The URL of the main website of each NDPB has been provided in the table. To provide all URLs for each NDPB would incur disproportionate cost.

Website	*URL*
(a) My Department	
Department for Culture, Media and Sport (main)	www.culture.gov.uk
	www.dcms.gov.uk
BBC Charter Review	www.bbccharterreview.org.uk
Culture and Sport Evidence Programme (CASE)	www.culture.gov.uk/case
DCMS image bank	www.dcmsimagebank.co.uk
Digital Television	www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk
Flu guidance	www.culture.gov.uk/fluguidance
Lottery grants database	www.lottery.culture.gov.uk
Government Art Collection	www.gac.culture.gov.uk
UK World Heritage site	www.culture.gov.uk/ukwhportal
(b) NDPBs	
Arts Council	www.artscouncil.org.uk
Big Lottery Fund	www.biglotteryfund.org.uk
British Library	www.bl.uk
British Museum	www.britishmuseum.org
Churches Conservation Trust	www.visitchurches.org.uk
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)	www.cabe.org.uk
English Heritage (The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England)	www.english-heritage.org.uk
Football Licensing Authority	www.flaweb.org.uk
Gambling Commission	www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk
Geffrye Museum	www.geffrye-museum.org.uk
Horniman Public Museum and Public Park Trust	www.horniman.ac.uk
Horserace Betting Levy Board	www.hblb.org.uk
Imperial War Museum	www.iwm.org.uk
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester	www.msim.org.uk
Museums, Libraries and Archives Council	www.mla.gov.uk
National Gallery	www.nationalgallery.org.uk
National Heritage Memorial Fund	www.hlf.org.uk/NHMFWeb/AboutTheNHMF
(including Heritage Lottery Fund)	www.hlf.org.uk
National Lottery Commission	www.natlotcomm.gov.uk
National Maritime Museum	www.nmm.ac.uk
National Museum of Science and Industry	www.nmsi.ac.uk
National Museums Liverpool	www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk
National Portrait Gallery	www.npg.org.uk
Natural History Museum	www.nhm.ac.uk
Olympic Delivery Authority	www.alustinglegacy.co.uk
Olympic Lottery Distributor	www.olympiclotterydistributor.org.uk

Website	*URL*
Public Lending Right	www.plr.uk.com
Royal Armouries	www.royalarmouries.org
Sir John Soane's Museum	www.soane.org
Sport England	www.sportengland.org
Tate Gallery	www.tate.org.uk
UK Anti-Doping	www.ukad.org.uk
UK Film Council	www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk
UK Sport	www.uksport.gov.uk
Victoria and Albert Museum	www.vam.ac.uk
VisitBritain	www.visitbritain.com
Wallace Collection	www.wallacecollection.org
Advisory NDPBs	
Advisory Committee on Historic Wreck Sites	www.english-heritage.org.uk
Advisory Committee on National Historic Ships	www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/pages/the-advisory-committee.html
Advisory Committee on the Government's Art Collection	www.gac.culture.gov.uk/role/index.asp
Advisory Council on Libraries	www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/libraries/3408.aspx
Legal Deposit Advisory Panel	www.webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/Libraries/legal_deposit/members_ldap.htm
Public Lending Right Advisory Panel	www.plr.uk.com/allaboutplr/plrCommittees/plrCommittees.htm
Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest	www.mla.gov.uk/what/cultural/export
Spoliation Advisory Panel	www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/cultural_property/3296.aspx
Theatres Trust	www.theatrestrust.org.uk
Treasure Valuation Committee	www.webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/
VisitEngland	www.enjoyengland.com
Tribunal NDPB	—
Horserace Betting Levy Appeal Tribunal for England and Wales	www.hblb.org.uk
Agency	
The Royal Parks Website	www.royalparks.org.uk
The Royal Parks online shop	www.royalparksstore.org.uk

Departmental Manpower

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (1) what his estimate is of the cost to the public purse of proposed reductions in numbers of non-frontline staff in his Department and its agencies; [485]

(2) what his most recent estimate is of the annual cost to his Department of redundancy payments for *(a)* front line and *(b)* other staff employed by (i) his Department and (ii) its agency. [631]

John Penrose: To deliver savings in 2010-11, the Department is making savings on its non-pay budgets, and through reducing spend on non-permanent staff. The Department and its agency will take all possible steps to avoid compulsory redundancies. We are working closely with staff and unions to ensure this outcome. We will not be making final decision on these items until overall spending figures have been confirmed through the usual Budget and public spending review processes later this year.

Departmental Pay

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how much was paid in bonuses to civil servants in his Department in 2009-10. [2185]

John Penrose: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport paid a total of £645,262 in bonuses to staff in the financial year 2009-10. Awards were made in line with Cabinet Office principles and guidelines on performance-related pay.

Departmental Travel

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what the *(a)* name and *(b)* version is of each computer software package used by his Department to calculate its travel costs. [2483]

John Penrose: The Department does not operate a dedicated software package for the recording and calculation of its travel costs. It receives management information on a monthly basis from providers of travel booking services and procurement cards in the form of excel spreadsheets. These are then collated by the procurement team for the corporate accounting system.

Licensed Premises

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how many *(a)* premises and *(b)* independent retailers in (i) England, (ii) the East Midlands and (iii) Leicester (A) applied for and (B) were granted (1) alcohol licences and (2) 24-hour alcohol licences in each of the last five years. [2570]

John Penrose: The Alcohol, Entertainment and Late Night Refreshment Licensing Statistical Bulletins collect the number of applications for premises licences and club premises certificates and the number granted in England and Wales.

Under the Licensing Act 2003, premises licences and club premises certificates may authorise regulated entertainment and/or late night refreshment as well as the sale or supply of alcohol. It is not possible to identify separately licences and certificates that authorise the sale or supply of alcohol or sale or supply of alcohol for 24 hours in their standard timings.

The following table lists the number of applications for premises licences and club premises certificates and the number that were granted in each year[1].

Financial year	*England and Wales*		*East Midlands*		*Leicester*	
	Applied	*Granted*	*Applied*	*Granted*	*Applied*	*Granted*
2006-07	15,154	14,486	1,956	1,871	98	91
2007-08	12,586	11,837	954	931	86	77
2008-09	10,800	10,165	883	769	88	81

The following table lists the number of premises licensed for the sale or supply of alcohol for 24 hours in their standard timings, on 31 March in each of the following years[1].

	England and Wales	*East Midlands*	*Leicester*
2007	5,126	221	23
2008	6,338	277	28
2009	7,178	290	30

[1] Please see statistical bulletin for response rates for each year.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (1) how many *(a)* premises and *(b)* independent retailers in (i) England, (ii) the East Midlands and (iii) Leicester had their licences to sell alcohol revoked (A) for any reason and (B) in circumstances where the persistent sale of alcohol to persons under the age of 18 years had been demonstrated in each of the last five years; [2574]

(2) how many independent retailers have had their licence to sell alcohol revoked in *(a)* England, *(b)* the East Midlands and *(c)* Leicester in each of the last five years. [2575]

John Penrose: The Alcohol, Entertainment and Late Night Refreshment Licensing Statistical Bulletin collects the number of licences revoked, but does not indicate why or the type of premises involved. Licences may be revoked following a review by the licensing authority for a number of reasons, including persistent selling of alcohol to children. However, the persistent sale of alcohol to children is a specific criminal offence under section 147A of the Licensing Act 2003.

The table lists premises licences or club premises certificates that were revoked, following a completed review[1].

[1] Please see statistical bulletin for response rates for each year.

Financial year	*England and Wales*	*East Midlands*	*Leicester*
2006-07	92	6	2
2007-08	155	17	8
2008-09	154	18	6

This table lists premises licences that were suspended by a court[1].

[1] Please see statistical bulletin for response rates for each year.

Financial year	*England and Wales*	*East Midlands*	*Leicester*
2006-07	[1]70	7	0
2007-08	18	0	0
2008-09	12	0	0

Prior to 6 April 2007 premises licence could be suspended following a review. From 6 April 2007, a Premises Licence could be suspended by a court, under Section 147B(1) of the Licensing Act 2003 (as amended by the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006) for the sale or supply of alcohol, following an offence of persistently selling to underage children.

Public Houses

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how many public houses there were in each of the last 10 years. [1031]

John Penrose: The Department does not collate information specifying the number of public houses. The Department's Statistical Bulletin on Alcohol, Entertainment and Late Night Refreshment does, however,

identify the number of premises authorising the sale or supply of alcohol by means of a premises licence or a club premises certificate.

These modelled figures apply not only to public houses, but also to other licensed premises permitted to make on-sales or both on-and-off sales or supplies of alcohol, such as hotels and restaurants. Modelled estimates have been rounded to the nearest 100.

As at 31 March	*Premises licences permitted to sell or supply alcohol, excluding off-sales only*
2007	112,300
2008	117,100
2009	116,500

Source:
DCMS Statistical Bulletin: Alcohol, Entertainment and Late Night Refreshment Licensing: England and Wales, April 2008 to March 2009
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/research/Licensing_Statistical_Bulletin_2009.pdf

Prior to this period, licensing information was published by the Home Office. This information can be found in the DCMS Statistical Bulletin Liquor Licensing England and Wales, July 2003 June 2004, page 8:

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http:/www.culture.gov.uk/images/research/7138BLiquorReport.pdf

Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (1) for what public spending projects within *(a)* Wigan constituency and *(b)* the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan his Department had secured Treasury approval between 1 January 2010 and the date of his appointment as Secretary of State; [1696]

(2) what projects his Department is funding within *(a)* Wigan constituency and *(b)* the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan. [1697]

John Penrose: The Government are reassessing spending approvals granted between 1 January 2010 and the general election to ensure that they offer good value for money and are consistent with the Government's priorities. Further announcements will be made in due course.

The Department does not hold information on projects in the Wigan constituency or the metropolitan borough of Wigan which are funded by its arm's length bodies, and collating this information would incur disproportionate cost.

CABINET OFFICE

10 Downing Street: Repairs and Maintenance

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how much has been spent on interior design in relation to office refurbishments at the *(a)* offices and *(b)* flats at 10 and 11 Downing Street since 7 May 2010; [1923]

(2) how much has been spent on re-carpeting the *(a)* offices and *(b)* flats at 10 and 11 Downing Street since 6 May 2010; [1924]

(3) when he expects the refurbishment of the kitchens in the flats at 10 and 11 Downing Street to be completed; [1925]

(4) what electrical items of each type have been purchased for the *(a)* offices and *(b)* flats at 10 and 11 Downing Street since 7 May 2010; and what the monetary value was of those items; [1927]

(5) what estimate he has made of the refurbishment and maintenance costs made to the *(a)* offices and *(b)* flats at 10 and 11 Downing Street since 6 May 2010. [1928]

Mr Maude: The Government are legally required to maintain the Downing street buildings to standards appropriate to its Grade 1 and 2 listed status in consultation with English Heritage. In addition to providing office accommodation, the building also fulfils an important representational role. Information on improving Cabinet Office buildings, including the Downing street estate is included in the annual Cabinet Office resource accounts.

No public funds have been spent on interior design, electrical goods or re-carpeting for the offices or flats at 10 and 11 Downing street since 6 May 2010.

It is anticipated that work to the No.11 flat will be carried out in summer 2010. There are no plans for any work to the No. 10 flat.

China Taskforce

Tony Baldry: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he next expects the UK China Taskforce to meet; and if he will make a statement. [2254]

Mr Maude: The chairmanship of the China Taskforce is an appointment made by the Prime Minister. We would expect the taskforce to meet once a new Chair has been appointed.

Civil Servants: Recruitment

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what consideration he has given to the introduction of a revised version of the European Fast Stream for 2010. [2326]

Mr Maude: A revised version of the European Fast Stream was introduced for the 2010 Fast Stream recruitment round. 21 new European Fast Streamers have been recruited and will be placed in a range of Government Departments.

Departmental Pay

Tom Brake: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much was paid in bonuses to civil servants in his Department in *(a)* 2008-09 and *(b)* 2009-10. [2174]

Mr Maude: The amount paid in non-consolidated awards to civil servants in the Cabinet Office under the last Government for the years 2008-09 and 2009-10 is detailed as follows:

Performance year	*Paid in*	*Total paid in non-consolidated awards (£)*
2008-09	2009-10	1,769,265
2007-08	2008-09	1,745,118

There is also a small number of staff who received in-year non-consolidated awards over this period. These decisions are delegated to line managers and as such the total cost is not held centrally and would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Plants

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much has been spent on *(a)* cut flowers and *(b)* pot plants for the (i) offices and (ii) flats at 10 and 11 Downing Street since 7 May 2010. [1926]

Mr Maude: No money has been spent on flowers or pot plants for offices or flats at 10 and 11 Downing street since 7 May 2010.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when and in what form he plans to publish a list of all items of expenditure by his Department over £25,000. [267]

Mr Maude: The Cabinet Office is currently working with the Treasury and the Transparency Board, who are leading on this work to agree the data, format and method of publication of information.

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of the *(a)* implementation of penalty clauses and payments in its contracts and *(b)* potential legal action arising from the deferral and cancellation of contracts and projects under his Department's plans to achieve cost savings; and whether those estimates are included in the total cost savings to be achieved by his Department. [557]

Mr Maude: The Efficiency and Reform Group is working to establish the methodology and contractual implications of this work.

Departmental Reorganisation

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office by what mechanisms his Department informs *(a)* non-departmental public bodies and *(b)* executive agencies of machinery of Government changes. [1922]

Mr Maude: The Prime Minister notifies Parliament of significant machinery of government changes. Communication to staff within a Department, including those in executive agencies, and communication to those outside a Department, such as non-departmental public bodies, the wider public sector and customers or businesses who will be affected by the change is the responsibility of the relevant Department.

Government Departments: Publications

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will publish under his Department's Open Data Initiative the title of each post in each *(a)* Department, *(b)* non-departmental public body and *(c)* agency that remains unfilled as a result of the freeze on public sector recruitment. [1933]

Mr Maude: We expect Departments to restructure to handle the roles left vacant by the recruitment freeze. Organograms will be published online for every Department which will reflect these changes. Overall savings from the freeze are estimated at £120 million.

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office whether he plans to publish the job titles and descriptions of civil servants in his Department under the Open Data Initiative. [1935]

Mr Maude: The Cabinet Office has published organisation charts and staff lists for the Cabinet Office, including No. 10, which provide names of senior civil servants, their job titles and contact details. These data will be updated later in the year to include the job titles of other civil servants in the Department. The organisation charts can be found at:

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/about-cabinet-office/cabinet-office-structure.aspx

and the data have been released through

www.data.gov.uk

A copy of this information will also be placed in the Library.

Private Sector: Manpower

Mr Redwood: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what his estimate is of the number of private sector jobs in the UK which are sustained by public sector spending. [2127]

Danny Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

Direct general Government employment was 5.5 million in the final quarter of 2009—19% of total employment in the UK. The public sector also has an impact on employment through its consumption of privately produced goods and services, as well as through providing services, such as education and transport infrastructure, which indirectly support the private sector economy.

An estimate of the number of private sector jobs sustained by the public sector in these ways is not available.

Public Transport: Timetables

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on the publication under the open data initiative of rail and bus timetables in a machine readable open format. [2386]

Mr Maude: My officials are in contact with the Department of Transport about timetable data. The Department for Transport are leading discussions with the Operating Companies about when we can release this data in an open and re-useable form.

Senior Civil Servants: Pay

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* consultants and *(c)* civil servants appointed since 6 May are being paid more than £150,000 per annum. [2634]

Mr Maude: Details of special advisers appointed by this administration are set out in the Prime Minister's statement of 10 June, *Official Report*, column 32WS. None are paid more than £150,000 per annum.

The remuneration of individuals employed by private sector companies, including consultancies, is a matter for the companies concerned.

For details of recent civil service appointments, I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on 14 June, *Official Report*, column 334W.

Senior Civil Servants: Pensions

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make it his policy to publish the remuneration rates for all persons in receipt of Civil Service pensions who are employed on non-executive or consultancy contracts with Government departments at rates which exceed the ministerial element of the Prime Minister's salary; and if he will make a statement. [1997]

Mr Maude: There is no prohibition on retired civil servants returning to work. Many Government Departments have chosen to operate a policy of "partial retirement" such that older workers may apply to restructure their jobs so that they are drawing pension and a reduced salary. This enables Departments to retain skills and enables staff to extend working lives by moving gradually into retirement.

To protect public funds, the civil service pension scheme operates a policy of "abatement". This means that, where people are receiving both a civil service pension and pay in respect of a contract of service, their pension will be reduced so that the total of pension and pay does not exceed the pay they were receiving before drawing their pension.

Our transparency commitments were set out in the Prime Minister's letter of 29 May to Cabinet colleagues, a copy will be placed in the Libraries of the House. On 1 June we published details of public servants paid at annual full-time rates of £150,000 or more at 31 March 2010. We have committed to extend disclosure to the rest of the senior civil service and to those paid by non-departmental public bodies at rates in excess of the minimum applicable to the senior civil service. These disclosures include non-executives and similar appointments.

TREASURY

Annuities

Mr Bain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate has been made of potential *(a)* liabilities and *(b)* other costs to the public purse from the Government's plans to end the rules requiring compulsory annuitisation at the age of 75 years. [2159]

Mr Hoban: The Government are committed to removing the requirement to purchase a pension annuity by age 75. Details of any changes to existing tax rules, including fiscal implications, are announced by the Chancellor as part of the Budget process.

Public Expenditure

Mr Watson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated number of Government financial transactions of amounts greater than £25,000 was in the latest year for which figures are available. [2289]

Danny Alexander: The Treasury does not hold this information but the Government have committed to publish online all new items of central Government spending over £25,000 from November 2010 (with limited exemptions on national security and personal privacy grounds).

Mr Watson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether publication of items of departmental expenditure above £25,000 per annum will be mandatory or voluntary. [2290]

Danny Alexander: The Prime Minister has written an open letter to all Departments on plans to open up Government data. This included a commitment that all new items of central Government spending over £25,000 would be published online from November 2010. Limited exemptions on national security and personal privacy grounds will be permitted.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 16 June 2010

SCOTLAND

Devolution

11. **Miss Anne McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent devolution issues the Advocate-General has considered; and if he will make a statement. [1845]

David Mundell: Since the reporting year began on 1 April the Advocate General and his predecessor have received 143 devolution notices, 136 of which are in criminal cases and seven in civil cases. In the same period the Advocate General has continued monitoring more than 40 devolution cases, has been represented in court in three, and is currently involved as intervenor in two cases.

In addition to his work on devolution issues as defined in the Scotland Act, the Advocate General works closely with the Attorney General to advise Government Departments on a wide range of legal matters.

13. **Greg Hands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with the First Minister on the devolution settlement. [1847]

Michael Moore: I had my first meeting with the First Minister on 7 June, followed by a Joint Ministerial Committee on 8 June. The First Minister and I discussed a range of issues relating to the devolution settlement, including our proposals to implement recommendations from the final report of the Commission on Scottish Devolution.

General Election

12. **Pete Wishart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with the First Minister on the Government's plans to schedule a general election on the first Thursday of May 2015. [1846]

Michael Moore: The issue of the planned 2015 general election was raised at the Joint Ministerial Committee on 8 June, which I attended with the First Minister.

Scotland Office

14. **Sandra Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for the future of the Scotland Office. [1848]

Michael Moore: The Scotland Office will take forward the Coalition Government's commitment to implement the recommendations of the Calman Commission. It will also play a central role in the Coalition Government's constructive engagement with our partners in the Devolved Administrations. The Scotland Office will continue to ensure that Scotland's interests are understood and represented in Westminster and Whitehall, and it will ensure that the Government's policies in reserved areas are understood in Scotland.

Royal Mail

15. **Mr Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with the Royal Mail on mail deliveries and post offices in Scotland. [1849]

Michael Moore: We will ensure that post offices are allowed to offer a wide range of services in order to sustain the network, and we will be working with Post Office Ltd. to develop new sources of revenue, including considering the case for a Post Office Bank.

Departmental Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the URL is of each website managed by his Department. [2373]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office manages one website. The URL for the Scotland Office website is:

www.scotlandoffice.gov.uk

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what his policy is on the use by Ministers in his Department of cars allocated from *(a)* his Department's pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured in the UK; whether Ministers in his Department are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [2422]

David Mundell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on Monday 14 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 290W.

PRIME MINISTER

10 Downing Street: Visits

John Mann: To ask the Prime Minister how many requests by hon. Members from each party for their constituents to be given a tour of No. 10 Downing Street have been *(a)* made and *(b)* granted since the Government came into office. [2689]

The Prime Minister: I hope that as many people as possible will be able to have a tour of 10 Downing street, including children and individuals from a wide cross-section of the community.

Andy Coulson and Jonny Oates

Mr Watson: To ask the Prime Minister to what *(a)* expenses, *(b)* allowances and *(c)* pension provision his Director of Communications is entitled. [2651]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the written ministerial statement I made on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 32WS.

Mr Watson: To ask the Prime Minister whether *(a)* Andy Coulson and *(b)* Jonny Oates (i) have been subject to positive vetting and (ii) will have access to situation reports from military commanders. [2306]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the written ministerial statement I made on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 32WS and my answer of 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 99W.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Manpower

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers are employed by his Department; and at what civil service pay grade in each such case. [1287]

Mr Paterson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 32-34W. The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) employs one special adviser at pay band 2 (special advisers are not subject to civil service pay grades).

My Department also employs three press officers; one senior civil servant, one at B1 grade and one at B2 grade.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Early Day Motions

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the House of Commons Commission what the cost of administering and processing early day motions was in the latest period for which figures are available. [2311]

Sir Stuart Bell: The estimated cost to the House of administering and processing early day motions (EDMs) in financial year 2009-10 was approximately £1 million.

Most of this cost was accounted for by printing and publication of early day motions, amendments to them, and names added to them, under the House's contract with TSO. This cost nearly £776,000 in 2009-10.

Expenditure is incurred on staff time to process and input notices relating to early day motions, and to index that material. Staff who deal with EDMs also undertake other duties, but a rough estimate of the full salary costs incurred from the estimated amount of their time spent on EDMs, including employer's pension contribution and national insurance, is of the order of £150,000 for 2009-10.

In addition, technical support for the EDMi database and the Table Office's software application for processing EDMs cost approximately £87,000 in 2009-10.

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the House of Commons Commission how many early day motions had *(a)* between one and five, *(b)* between six and 10, *(c)* between 11 and 50, *(d)* between 51 and 100 and *(e)* over 100 signatures at the end of each of the last five parliamentary sessions. [2444]

Sir Stuart Bell: The figures are as follows:

	Number of signatories					
Session	*1 to 5*	*6 to 10*	*11 to 50*	*51 to 100*	*Over 100*	*Total number of EDMs*
2005-06	79	124	1,429	933	357	2,922
2006-07	67	91	1,110	670	255	2,193
2007-08	101	171	1,403	690	194	2,559
2008-09	80	107	1,370	544	170	2,271
2009-10	51	93	719	289	95	1,247

Session 2005-06 was a long session following a general election; Session 2009-10 was a short session preceding a general election.

Early day motions are classified in the table above by the number of signatures which they had on their last day as valid motions: in nearly all cases this will be the number of signatures which they had on the last day of each session, but for those motions withdrawn or debated in the course of each session the number of signatures given is the number on the last day on which the motion had the status of an early day motion.

For some sessions the figure for the total number of motions differs from the figure given in the House's sessional returns: this is because the sessional returns figures include motions tabled and then withdrawn in the course of the same sitting day. Such motions are assigned an early day motion number which is not re-used, but do not appear in print as valid notices of motions.

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the House of Commons Commission how many early day motions were tabled in each parliamentary session since 2000-01. [2445]

Sir Stuart Bell: The total number of early day motions (EDMs) tabled each session is published in the House's sessional returns, available at:

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmsesret.htm

For some sessions the totals given include one or two EDMs which were tabled and withdrawn on the same sitting day, and so were given an EDM number but never appeared in print.

The figures for each session since 2000-01, together with the average number tabled per sitting day to enable comparisons to be made between sessions of differing lengths, are as follows:

	Total	*Average per sitting day*
2000-01	659	7.9
2001-02	1,864	9.3
2002-03	1,939	12
2003-04	1,941	12.4
2004-05	1,033	15.9
2005-06	2,924	14.1
2006-07	2,193	15
2007-08	2,560	15.5
2008-09	2,272	16.7
2009-10	1,248	18.1

Sessions 2000-01, 2004-05 and 2009-10 were short pre-general election sessions; Sessions 2001-02 and 2005-06 were long post-general election sessions.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan: Corruption

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent progress has been made in reducing levels of corruption in Afghanistan. [2005]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: In 'The Coalition: our programme for government', the UK Government laid out our commitment to "support efforts to tackle corruption".

At the London Conference in January the Government of Afghanistan made a number of key commitments to address corruption. Since the London Conference a number of these commitments have already been delivered by the Government of Afghanistan, including increased powers and independence for an Afghan anti-corruption commission (the High Office of Oversight (HOO)) and the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Tribunal.

In addition the Government of Afghanistan has begun compiling asset declarations of Government Ministers and officials. Thus far assets belonging to 18 previous Cabinet Ministers and over 1,200 public officials have been registered. A significant reduction in the number of procedures required to register a vehicle from 51 to four has also been implemented, which reduces the scope and opportunity for corruption.

Through UK support to the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL) we are mentoring and supporting the Ministry of Interior Inspector General in 28 alleged anti-corruption cases involving approximately 118 suspects.

Tuberculosis: Disease Control

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what *(a)* programmes his Department supports and *(b)* discussions he has had with Ministerial colleagues in other Government Departments on the global eradication of tuberculosis. [2554]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The UK remains strongly committed to reducing death and suffering from tuberculosis. The Department for International Development (DFID) invests in a broad range of actions to combat tuberculosis (TB) from TB specific programmes, to strengthening health systems and strategies to address poverty and inequity. DFID uses a variety of channels including country programmes, support to the Stop TB Partnership, UNITAID and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, and through research partnerships. We see this as the best way of tackling the many challenges posed by TB.

I have not yet met ministerial colleagues in other Government Departments to discuss TB, but expect to do so in due course.

We are currently reviewing all our aid, including aid channelled through multilateral agencies to ensure it is as effective as possible and brings real benefit to the world's poor.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Children: Maintenance

Mr Mark Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to ensure that payments made through the Child Support Agency contribute directly towards the welfare of children. [1699]

Maria Miller: The Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission is responsible for the child maintenance system. I have asked the Child Maintenance Commissioner to write to the hon. Member with the information requested and I have seen the response.

Letter from Stephen Geraghty:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission, the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Child Maintenance Commissioner.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to ensure that payments made through the Child Support Agency are going directly towards the welfare of children. [1699]

A fundamental aim of the child support system is that it should contribute to the reduction of child poverty by increasing the proportion of parents who meet their financial obligations to their children.

All parents who live apart from their children have a legal duty to contribute financially to their upkeep and the Child Support Agency (CSA) was set up to ensure that parents comply with these requirements. The CSA assesses Child Maintenance liability on the basis of a non-resident parent's income and transfers payments to the person who is responsible for the child's day to day care. The regular receipt of maintenance increases the range of choices that are open to parents with care, for example, allowing them to take up employment and improve their families' standard of living.

In carrying out its functions the CSA has regard to the welfare of all children that may be affected by its decisions. This includes any children who may be living with the non-resident parent. However, it is not the role of the CSA to monitor how a person with care spends any child maintenance payments made by the non-resident parent. Where a person with day to day responsibility for a child fails to provide them with adequate care, there are other organisations with expertise in this area who can assist as required.

I hope you find this answer helpful.

Departmental Flags

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which his Department is responsible. [1821]

Chris Grayling: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport issues the guidance for the flying of the Union flag on UK Government buildings. The guidance encourages the Union flag to be flown 365 days a year, and as a minimum all Departments must fly the Union flag on the 19 special designated days e.g. the Queen's Birthday, Remembrance Day, etc. and other special occasions as required e.g. State Opening of Parliament. More information on the guidance is available on the DCMS website:

http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/honours/7124.aspx

My Department flies the Union Flag on the 19 designated days and on other special days as required. We also fly the flag on every day of the year at the Department's London Headquarters building, Caxton House and the Adelphi.

Future Jobs Fund

Kate Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of young people who have been placed into training, employment or work experience through the Future Jobs Fund are *(a)* registered disabled, *(b)* women and *(c)* from a minority ethnic background. [1584]

Chris Grayling: The latest Official Statistics show that:

(a) 14% of the job starters are recorded as having a disability,

(b) 26% of the job starters are female,

(c) 14% of the job starters are from an ethnic minority background.

Housing Benefit

Dr Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he plans to amend the regulations on the award of local housing allowance to *(a)* registered drug addicts and *(b)* those undergoing treatment for alcoholism. [1890]

Maria Miller: We have no plans to amend the housing benefit regulations in the manner described.

Dr Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he plans to amend the regulations on *(a)* the award of local housing allowance and *(b)* the payment of local housing allowance to landlords in 2010. [1891]

Maria Miller: The Department concluded its consultation on reforms to housing benefit earlier this year. The Government are considering the responses to the consultation and will bring forward proposals to ensure that housing benefit under the local housing allowance arrangements is fair and affordable while giving tenants access to reasonable accommodation.

A review of the first two years' operation of the local housing allowance arrangements is being undertaken to monitor the impact of the local housing allowance at a national level. The review aims to cover a range of issues including direct payment to tenants and will report later this year. Changes to the payment arrangements will be considered in the light of that report.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what his policy is on the use by Ministers in his Department of cars allocated from *(a)* his Department's pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured in the UK; whether Ministers in his Department are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [2409]

Hugh Robertson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary under Secretary of State (Roads and Motoring) (Mike Penning) on 14 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 290-1W.

Digital Broadcasting: Oxfordshire

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what discussions his Department has had with *(a)* Digital UK and *(b)* broadcasters on compensation to viewers in respect of disruption to television reception in Oxfordshire arising from works on the Beckley transmitter. [2680]

Mr Jeremy Hunt: The Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries has discussed this matter with Digital UK, which provides public information about switchover on behalf of the public service broadcasters. It is regrettable that some viewers are suffering disruption to their TV services, but I am reassured by Digital UK that the mast operator, Arqiva, is doing everything possible to build the new antenna and get it in place as soon as possible, and that full services should be restored by the end of September, weather permitting.

In the intervening period, those affected should still be able to receive some services. Compensation is not payable to viewers who experienced limited disruption to their television reception due to engineering works of this kind. For completeness, I should add that, where there is a complete loss of TV services, there are circumstances where a licence fee refund may be available but we are not aware of any such cases.

Supporters Direct

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (1) what recent discussions he has had with the *(a)* Football Association, *(b)* Football League and *(c)* Premier League on supporters' trusts; [2476]

(2) whether he plans to meet representatives of Supporters Direct; [2477]

(3) what funding his Department plans to provide to Supporters Direct in the 2010-11 financial year. [2478]

Hugh Robertson: I have had no official meetings with the football authorities or Supporters Direct on the subject of supporters' trusts. While my officials remain in regular contact with the football authorities and Supporters Direct, I anticipate that there will be an opportunity for me to meet them in the near future.

The Government currently have no plans to fund Supporters Direct.

WALES

Pensioners: Poverty

Jessica Morden: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what her most recent estimate is of the number of pensioners living in poverty in Wales. [2397]

Mr David Jones: The most commonly used measure of poverty relates to those with incomes below 60 per cent. of contemporary median income, after housing costs.

The latest figures for Wales are published in the "Households Below Average Income series". Three-year averages are used to report regional statistics as single-year estimates are subject to volatility. Figures show that for the period 2006-07 to 2008-09 there were around an estimated 18% of all pensioners in Wales in poverty, corresponding to around 100,000 pensioners. Figures are quoted to the nearest 100,000 and percentages are quoted to the nearest whole percentage point. The three year average of 18% of pensioners in relative poverty in Wales is the same level as the current UK three year average.

This Government will restore the earnings link for the basic state pension from April 2011, with a 'triple guarantee' that pensions are raised by the highest of earnings, prices or 2.5%.

We will help prevent people from falling into poverty in later life by simplifying the rules and regulations relating to pensions to help reinvigorate occupational pensions. We will encourage companies to offer high-quality pensions to all employees and will work with businesses and the industry to support auto enrolment.

TRANSPORT

Manchester Metrolink

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he estimates the extension work to phases 3a and 3b of the Manchester Metrolink will be completed; [2375]

(2) what evaluation has been made of the cost to the economy of not completing phases 3a and 3b of the extension to Manchester Metrolink; [2378]

(3) how much has been spent from the public purse on phases 3a and 3b of the Manchester Metrolink extension. [2379]

Norman Baker *[holding answer 15 June 2010]:* Manchester Metrolink Phase 3a is currently under construction and is expected to open in late 2011.

Metrolink 3b is currently under review following the announcement by Her Majesty's Treasury on 17 May 2010 which asked for all spending approvals granted since 1 January 2010 to be re-examined. If the project subsequently receives re-approval it is expected that the two extensions will be completed by early 2014.

No evaluation or technical analysis has been undertaken on the economic costs of Phases 3a or 3b if these were not completed.

The Department for Transport has to date provided capital funding of £129.6 million for Phase 3a and £10.241 million for 3b. These figures exclude any costs incurred by the Department on the assessment of the two Metrolink Phases. It also does not include any public expenditure incurred by the promoter, Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive.

Transport: Oxford

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans to maintain the £88 million Access to Oxford funding for local transport schemes. [2681]

Norman Baker: In his written ministerial statement to the House on 10 June, "Transport: Local Authority Major Schemes", the Secretary of State for Transport announced that the Department would not support further work on major investment schemes until after the Government's spending review is concluded and the departmental budget is settled.

Transport: Schools

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance his Department provides to local authorities on assessing the suitability of section 19 permit holders in the provision of home-to-school transport; and if he will make a statement. [2479]

Mike Penning: The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) publishes an on-line guide entitled "Passenger transport provided under Section 19 or Section 22 permits". This is available on the agency's website:

www.vosa.gov.uk

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum: Children

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unaccompanied child asylum seekers were deported to each destination from the UK in each month over the last five years. [2630]

Damian Green: Our statistics do not record the number of unaccompanied children removed separately from the number of children removed as part of a family group. The number of unaccompanied children removed is, however, very small and generally confined to those returned to EU countries under Dublin convention procedures or the few that can be returned direct to their parents.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Government plans to review arrangements for the removal of unaccompanied child asylum seekers from the UK. [2631]

Damian Green: We are looking to expand the reintegration assistance we make available to adult returnees who we remove to Afghanistan, in order to make it suitable for a limited number of males aged 16 or 17. This should result in some of this age group being returned but this will depend on individual assessments of their circumstances.

We are constantly monitoring the range of assistance available for returnees to a variety of countries. In respect of young people under 18, our preference is to return them direct to their parents. Only when that is

not possible do we need to look to provide interim assistance on return while onward passage to parents or family is arranged.

Borders: Security

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans she has for the use of vehicular x-ray scanners by the UK Border Agency. [2104]

Damian Green: UKBA currently has 15 freight scanners. Of these, 13 are mobile. The deployment, use and effectiveness of these scanners is continually assessed, as is the level of risk they are deployed to combat. The scanners and supporting resources are deployed according to risk.

All current scanners have been specified to safely detect a wide range of commodities including prohibited items, fiscal goods and concealed persons. This capability allows UKBA to effectively address risk with the minimum disruption to legitimate trade.

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the UK Border Agency budget was spent on vehicular x-ray scanners in the latest period for which figures are available. [2106]

Damian Green: During the 2009-10 Fiscal Year, £9,771,389 capital was spent on the purchase of seven mobile and two fixed freight scanners. £2,290,343 was spent on servicing and maintaining the UKBA fleet of 15 units.

This expenditure represents five per cent. of the UKBA capital budget allocation for 2009-10.

British Citizenship: Bexley

Mr Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those resident in the London borough of Bexley have been granted British citizenship in each year since 2005. [1897]

Damian Green: Details of the number of grants of British Citizenship for the years requested are shown in the following table.

Persons, resident in the London borough of Bexley[1], Granted British Citizenship[2], 2005 to 2009

	Total
2005	710
2006	740
2007	730
2008	505
2009	910

[1] Persons resident within the London borough of Bexley postcode areas and/or who attended a citizenship ceremony held by Bexley local authority.

[2] Total number of grants is made up of those who have attended a citizenship ceremony, minors who are not required to attend a citizenship ceremony and adults who have been registered as British Citizens and who are not required to attend a ceremony.

This information has been provided from local management information and is not a National Statistic. As such it should be treated as provisional and therefore subject to change.

Deportation: Offenders

Mr Bacon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the 1,023 failed asylum applicants released from prison who were referred to in the then Home Secretary's announcement of 25 April 2006 are unaccounted for. [2552]

Damian Green *[holding answer 15 June 2010]:* After analysis the figure of 1,023 foreign national prisoners (not exclusively failed asylum seekers) released without deportation consideration was revised in July 2006 to 1,013.

The chief executive of the UK Border Agency has regularly updated the Home Affairs Select Committee on the progress of these cases. In her latest letter of 4 February 2010, figures accurate as at 4 January 2010 showed;

	Number
Cases concluded	782
Of whom have been deported or removed	371
Cases still going through the deportation process	125
Individuals serving a custodial sentence	25
Not located	81
Total	1,013

Copies of the letters to the Committee can be found in the Library of the House.

Entry Clearances: Indonesia

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visitor visa applications were received by the UK Visa Application centre in Jakarta in the last 12 months; how many such applications were *(a)* refused (i) because required supporting documentation was not provided, (ii) although required supporting documentation was provided and (iii) because required financial documentation was not provided, *(b)* granted with only the supporting documentation required on the application form being provided and *(c)* granted following the provision of additional financial information; how much income Jakarta Visa Centre received from (A) initial and (B) subsequent applications in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [2312]

Damian Green: The number of visit visa applications received, approved and refused in Jakarta in FY 2009-10 is shown in the following table, along with the income received from such applications.

Visit visa applications, Jakarta—financial year 2009-10

	Number	*£*
Applications received	15,902	—
Visas issued	14,824	—
Applications refused	1,023	—
Income	—	1,239,582

We are unable to identify from central records how many applications were:

(a) refused because (i) required supporting documentation was not provided, (ii) even though adequate supporting documentation was provided, or (iii) adequate financial documentation was not provided;

(b) granted without further supporting documentation being provided; and

(c) granted following the provision of additional financial information.

Such information could be provided only by inspecting individual records, and therefore at disproportionate cost.

Notes:

1. The total of visas issued and applications refused does not equal the total number received. A number of applications resolved in FY 2009-10 would have been received in the previous FY, and a number received in FY 2009-10 would have been resolved in FY 2010-11. A small number of applications received would also have been withdrawn by the applicant.

2. This data is based on Management Information and as such has not been quality assured. It is provisional and subject to change.

Forensic Science Service

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the budget of the Forensic Science Service (FSS) was in each financial year since 2005-06; and what the projected budget for the FSS is in 2010-11. [2282]

James Brokenshire: The Forensic Science Service is a Government owned limited company. The FSS charges its customers (mainly the police forces of England and Wales) for its services, and endeavours to manage its costs within the funds collected.

The FSS published accounts are available to the public and include the profit and loss accounts, balance sheet and cash flow statement; they do not include the FSS internal budgets which are commercially sensitive.

Identity Cards

Meg Hillier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions Ministers in her Department have had with the Identity and Passport Service on identity cards since 10 May 2010. [1241]

Damian Green: Home Office Ministers have undertaken a number of discussions with the Identity and Passport Service on identity cards and discussions continue in preparation for the Identity Documents Bill.

Meg Hillier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many identity cards had been issued to British citizens on 31 May 2010; and how many people have registered for an appointment to enrol their biometric information but not received an identity card. [1243]

Damian Green: Approximately 14,000 identity cards had been issued to British citizens by 31 May 2010.

It is not possible to give the number of people who registered for an appointment but who did not receive an identity card as the information held on the appointment booking system is not directly comparable with that held on the National Identity Register.

Meg Hillier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate she has made of the monetary value of payments which will be required to pay to companies contracted to undertake work on identity cards, biometric technology and development of the national identity database consequent on the ending of the identity cards and national identity schemes. [1245]

Damian Green: The cost implications of terminating and amending certain National Identity Service contracts are currently a matter of commercial negotiation with suppliers, to protect taxpayers' interests. It is therefore not possible to give a breakdown of the cost of cancelling those contracts at this time.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many residents of each *(a)* parliamentary constituency and *(b)* region have bought an identity card. [2615]

Damian Green: The Identity and Passport Service is not able to provide information relating to particular constituencies or regions for identity card applications. However, as of 14 June 2010, there have been just fewer than 15,000 identity cards issued in the United Kingdom.

Mr Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many identity cards have been issued on a voluntary basis to applicants in *(a)* the North West and *(b)* Blackpool. [2641]

Damian Green *[holding answer 15 June 2010]:* The Identity and Passport Service is not able to provide information relating to particular constituencies or regions for identity card applications. However, as of 14 June 2010, there have been fewer than 15,000 identity cards issued in the United Kingdom.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what her most recent estimate is of the number of illegal migrants in the UK; what recent research she has evaluated on this subject; and if she will make a statement. [159]

Damian Green: It is not possible to accurately quantify the number of illegal immigrants in the UK as some will deliberately evade immigration control to enter and stay in the country illegally.

I am aware of research by the London School of Economics (LSE) in May 2009 which gave a central estimate for the total irregular migrant population in the UK as at the end of 2007 of 618,000 (1.0% of UK population) within a range of 417,000 to 863,000. Estimating methodologies vary and I have noted that the LSE 2007 estimate used the estimate prepared from April 2001 census figures which gave a central figure of 430,000 (0.7% of UK population within a range of 310,000 to 570,000) as its starting point and then added further assumptions. For example it included estimates for the UK-born children of irregular migrants which were not included in the original report.

The LSE report is available to view at:

http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/LSELondon/pdf/irregular%20migrants%20full%20report.pdf

and a copy of the Home Office Research Development and Statistics report (29/05) "Sizing the unauthorised (illegal) migrant population in the United Kingdom in 2001" can be found at:

http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/rdsolr2905.pdf

The wider immigration programme, contained in "The Coalition: our programme for government" published on 20 May, includes a commitment to support e-Borders and re-introduce entry and exit checks.

Immigration Controls

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many annual allocations of certificates of sponsorship were requested by employers for the second year of the points-based system in respect of (a) Tier Two general and (b) Tier Two ICT. [1983]

Damian Green *[holding answer 14 June 2010]:* The UK Border Agency is unable to provide the information requested. The annual renewal date for allocation of certificates of sponsorship is linked to the date an individual sponsor was granted a licence and is different for each sponsor.

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were granted permission *(a)* in-country and *(b)* overseas to work in the UK under each category of Tier One and Tier Two of the points-based system in 2009; and how many associated dependants there were of people in each category. [1984]

Damian Green *[holding answer 14 June 2010]:* The available information relates to Tier 1 and Tier 2 visas issued overseas to main applicants and their dependants and in-country grants of leave to remain to Tier 1 and Tier 2 main applicants. This information is published in Tables 1.1 and 4.1 in the Control of Immigration: Quarterly Statistical Summary, United Kingdom, January—March 2010 which is available in the Library of the House and the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics website at:

http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html

Statistics on in-country grants of leave to remain to dependants for 2009 are due to be published on 26 August in the April—June 2010 Quarterly Statistical Summary.

Immigration: Bexley

Mr Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for leave to remain were received from those resident in *(a)* Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency and *(b)* the London borough of Bexley in the last 12 months. [1893]

Damian Green: The following tables shows the number of leave to remain applications received from addresses in Bexleyheath, Crayford and the London borough of Bexley between 1 June 2009 and 31 April 2010.

Leave to remain applications received for Bexleyheath and Crayford 1 June 2009 to 31 April 2010

	Number of applications
Bexleyheath	70
Crayford	155
Total	225

Leave to remain applications received for the London borough of Bexley 1 June 2009 to 31 April 2010

	Number of applications
Borough of Bexley	2,260

Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest five. Data relates to main applicants only and does not include dependants.

The figures quoted are not provided under National Statistics protocols and have been derived from local management information and are therefore provisional and subject to change.

Immigration: Gurkhas

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the English language requirement for those wishing to settle in the UK will apply to former members of the Brigade of Gurkhas. [2645]

Damian Green *[holding answer 15 June 2010]:* Former members of the Brigade of Gurkhas and their dependants who apply for settlement under the concession introduced in May 2009 are not required to demonstrate language ability as part of the application process.

The recent announcement by the Home Secretary on 9 June 2010 proposed new language requirements for those seeking entry to the UK as either a spouse or civil partner, fiancé or proposed civil partner, unmarried partner or same sex partner of a British citizen or someone who is present and settled in the UK.

Former members of the Brigade of Gurkhas will continue to be exempt from the language requirement when applying under the concession. The impact of the Home Secretary's recent proposals on the dependants of settled Gurkhas is yet to be finalised.

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many former members of the Brigade of Gurkhas have chosen to settle in the UK since the change in the immigration rules; and at what cost to the public purse. [2646]

Damian Green *[holding answer 15 June 2010]:* Since the new policy was announced in May 2009, the UK Border Agency has issued 2610 settlement visas to pre-1997 discharged ex-Gurkhas who previously would not have qualified. The agency does not hold information on how many of those have actually settled here. Statistics are not routinely collected of the annual cost of welfare payments for Gurkhas who choose to settle in the UK upon discharge. However, in terms of estimates, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given in the House of Lords by Lord West of Spithead on 10 December 2009, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column WA155.

Immigration: Married People

Mr Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any language requirements apply to migrant spouses from other EU countries seeking to settle in the UK. [2537]

Damian Green *[holding answer 15 June 2010]*: On 9 June, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced a new language requirement for those seeking entry to the UK as either a spouse or civil partner, fiancé or proposed civil partner, unmarried partner or same sex partner of a British citizen or someone who is present and settled in the UK.

The new language requirement will not apply to spouses of European economic area nationals or spouses who are European economic area nationals applying for the right to reside under the EU free movement directive. Spouses of EEA nationals and spouses who are European economic area nationals are required to demonstrate knowledge of English language and life in the UK if they apply for British citizenship.

Immobilisation of Vehicles

Mr Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will make it her policy to ensure that drivers disputing a fine issued in relation to the immobilisation of a vehicle on private land have recourse to an independent body. [2456]

Lynne Featherstone: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given on 15 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 385W.

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what cap she plans to place on the charge levied by vehicle immobilisation businesses for the release of a vehicle. [2675]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government included in their coalition agreement, published on 12 May, a commitment to tackle the menace of rogue private sector wheel clampers, and is looking at all available options. An announcement on how we will do this will be made in due course.

Passports: Missing Applications

Jeremy Lefroy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passport applications are known to have gone missing in the post in *(a)* 2005, *(b)* 2006, *(c)* 2007, *(d)* 2008 and *(e)* 2009. [2197]

Damian Green: IPS does not keep records of how many passport applications have gone missing in the post.

Stansted Airport: Security

Mr MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps she is taking to reduce queues and waiting times of passengers on arrival at Stansted Airport. [1886]

Damian Green: United Kingdom Border Force has a continuing dialogue with British Airport Authority managers at Stansted to monitor the arrival of passengers to the United Kingdom through the airport. The queues are regularly measured and meet with the approved target waiting times outlined in the local service level agreement with Stansted Airport Limited.

UK Border Agency: Dover Port

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans her Department has for the continuance of Operation Evian by the UK Border Agency in Dover. [2103]

Damian Green: The Department is committed to the continuation of activity under the Evian Administrative Agreement although this agreement focuses mainly on actions in France rather than Dover. This agreement confirms both the French and United Kingdom's commitment to combating illegal immigration and improved border security through increased joint working.

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the budget is for the operations of the UK Border Agency in the Port of Dover in 2010-11. [2105]

Damian Green: The budget for the financial year 2010-11 for the UKBA operation at the Port of Dover is £16,279,258.

UKBA Border Force, which is responsible for all frontline activities within the port has a budget of £15,600,886.

UKBA Immigration Group, which also has a number of staff based at the port (Dover Enforcement Unit) has a budget of £678,372.

UK Border Agency: Manpower

Damian Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will review her Department's recent decision to reduce the number of people employed by the UK Border Agency in Folkestone. [1914]

Damian Green *[holding answer 14 June 2010]*: The nature and volume of work undertaken by the UK Border Agency in Kent has changed over recent years following the introduction of the juxtaposed controls in Northern France. This, along with the need to establish a local immigration team in neighbouring Sussex, resulted in a review of the structure and size of the local immigration team in Kent. Working together, staff and local managers, have designed a structure which reduces the overall number of staff in Kent, by significantly reducing the number of managers. As a result of the planned restructuring, there will actually be more frontline, arrest-trained officers across Kent and Sussex. These changes are not expected to result in any compulsory redundancies.

HEALTH

Alcoholic Drinks: Misuse

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS spent on *(a)* all treatments and *(b)* long-term treatments of alcohol-related illnesses (i) nationally, (ii) in the East Midlands and (iii) in Leicester in each of the last five years. [2559]

Anne Milton: The cost of alcohol treatment is met through national health service mainstream expenditure in line with local needs and priorities and data on NHS spend on alcohol treatment is not collected centrally.

The National Audit Office (NAO) has carried out an audit of NHS spend on alcohol treatment. Its report, Reducing Alcohol Harm: health services in England for alcohol misuse, was published in November 2008 and found, that where primary care trust expenditure on alcohol services was known, an average of £600,000 was spent on commissioning alcohol services in 2006-07.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many persons aged *(a)* over 18 and *(b)* 18 and under were treated for alcohol-related illnesses (i) nationally, (ii) in the East Midlands and (iii) in Leicester in each of the last five years. [2560]

Anne Milton: Data on the number of patients treated for alcohol-related illnesses is not collected centrally, however, we do collect the number of finished admissions for patients with alcohol-related illnesses and this information is shown in the following tables for the last five years for which data are available. Some patients may have had multiple admissions.

Number of finished admissions of patients aged 18 and under and over 18 with an alcohol-related illnesses

	2004-05		2005-06		2006-07		2007-08		2008-09	
	18 and under	Over 18	18 and under	Over 18	18 and under	Over 18	18 and under	Over 18	18 and under	Over 18
Leicester	91	4,308	135	5,319	172	6,185	178	6,315	149	6,376
East Midlands	1,334	55,594	1,437	61,285	1,489	66,221	1,702	72,638	1,677	80,388
England	17,417	626,768	19,709	715,512	20,023	779,097	20,336	842,928	18,562	926,908

Notes:

Includes activity in English national health service hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector.

Alcohol-related admissions

The number of alcohol-related admissions is based on the methodology developed by the North West Public Health Observatory, which uses 48 indicators for alcohol-related illnesses. Figures for under 16s only include admissions where one or more of the following alcohol-specific conditions were listed:

Alcoholic cardiomyopathy (I42.6)
Alcoholic gastritis (K29.2)
Alcoholic liver disease (K70)
Alcoholic myopathy (G72.1)
Alcoholic polyneuropathy (G62.1)
Alcohol-induced pseudo-Cushing's syndrome (E24.4)
Chronic pancreatitis (alcohol induced) (K86.0)
Degeneration of nervous system due to alcohol (G31.2)
Mental and behavioural disorders due to use of alcohol (F10)
Accidental poisoning by and exposure to alcohol (X45)
Ethanol poisoning (T51.0)
Methanol poisoning (T51.1)
Toxic effect of alcohol, unspecified (T51.9)

Number of episodes in which the patient had an alcohol-related primary or secondary diagnosis

These figures represent the number of episodes where an alcohol-related diagnosis was recorded in any of the 20 (14 from 2002-03 to 2006-07 and seven prior to 2002-03) primary and secondary diagnosis fields in a Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) record. Each episode is only counted once in each count, even if an alcohol-related diagnosis is recorded in more than one diagnosis field of the record.

Ungrossed data

Figures have not been adjusted for shortfalls in data (ie the data are ungrossed).

Finished admission episodes

A finished admission episode is the first period of inpatient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Finished admission episodes are counted against the year in which the admission episode finishes. It should be noted that admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.

Data quality

HES are compiled from data sent by more than 300 NHS trusts and primary care trusts in England. Data are also received from a number of independent sector organisations for activity commissioned by the English NHS. The NHS Information Centre for health and social care liaises closely with these organisations to encourage submission of complete and valid data and seeks to minimise inaccuracies and the effect of missing and invalid data via HES processes. While this brings about improvement over time, some shortcomings remain.

Assessing growth through time

HES figures are available from 1989-90 onwards. The quality and coverage of the data have improved over time. These improvements in information submitted by the NHS have been particularly marked in the earlier years and need to be borne in mind when analysing time series. Some of the increase in figures for later years (particularly 2006-07 onwards) may be due to the improvement in the coverage of independent sector activity.

Changes in NHS practice also need to be borne in mind when analysing time series. For example, a number of procedures may now be undertaken in outpatient settings and may no longer be accounted for in the HES data. This may account for any reductions in activity over time.

Assignment of Episodes to Years

Years are assigned by the end of the first period of care in a patient's hospital stay.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), The NHS Information Centre for health and social care.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* adults and *(b)* adults aged under 30 who exceeded the recommended maximum for alcohol consumption (i) nationally, (ii) in the East Midlands and (iii) in Leicester in each of the last five years. [2563]

Anne Milton: Data on alcohol consumption is collected by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) as part of the General Household Survey. Figures are available for 2006 and 2008 and are in the following table. Data are not available for Leicester because the sample size is too small to produce reliable figures.

Figures are not available for 2007, as the relevant questions were not included in the General Household Survey and because of a methodological improvement introduced by ONS in 2006 comparable data are not available for earlier years.

Percentage of men and women whose average weekly alcohol consumption exceeded 21 or 14 units respectively

	Area	Adults aged 18 or over	Percentage Adults aged between 18 and 29
2006	England	26	31
	East Midlands	27	34
2008	England	23	26
	East Midlands	22	23

Source:
General Household Survey

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths attributable to alcohol misuse there were *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the East Midlands and *(c)* in Leicester in each of the last five years. [2564]

Anne Milton: The information is shown in the table. It should be noted that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) does not have data for the number of deaths in Leicester.

Number of deaths related to alcohol misuse for East Midlands and England

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
East Midlands	482	505	504	512	582
England	6,036	6,197	6,517	6,544	6,771

Source:
ONS

The ONS definition of alcohol-related deaths only includes those causes regarded as being wholly due to alcohol consumption. It does not include other diseases where alcohol has been shown to be one of a number of causes, such as cancers of the mouth, oesophagus and liver.

The definition includes all deaths from chronic liver disease and cirrhosis (excluding biliary cirrhosis), even when alcohol is not specifically mentioned on the death certificate. Apart from deaths due to poisoning with alcohol (accidental, intentional or undetermined), this definition excludes any other external causes of death, such as road traffic and other accidents. The definition allows for consistent comparisons over time for those deaths most clearly associated with alcohol consumption. International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) codes used in this dataset:

Mental and behavioural disorders due to use of alcohol - ICD-10 F10

Degeneration of nervous system due to alcohol - ICD-10 G31.2

Alcoholic polyneuropathy - ICD-10 G62.1

Alcoholic cardiomyopathy - ICD-10 142.6

Alcoholic gastritis - ICD-10 K29.2

Alcoholic liver disease - ICD-10 K70

Chronic hepatitis, not elsewhere classified - ICD-10 K73

Fibrosis and cirrhosis of liver - ICD-10 K74 (Excluding K74.3-K74.5 - Biliary cirrhosis)

Alcohol induced chronic pancreatitis - ICD-10 K86.0

Accidental poisoning by and exposure to alcohol - ICD-10 X45

Intentional self-poisoning by and exposure to alcohol - ICD-10 X65

Poisoning by and exposure to alcohol, undetermined intent - ICD-10 Y15

Deaths were selected using the final underlying cause of death.

Cancer: Screening

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to increase the proportion of people screened for early detection and diagnosis of cancers in *(a)* Hartlepool constituency and *(b)* the North-East region. [2274]

Mr Burstow: There are currently three national cancer screening programmes: breast, cervical and bowel. Primary care trusts (PCTs), including those in the North-East, are responsible for commissioning screening programmes and for managing local screening awareness initiatives.

In March 2009, the Department published "Reducing Cancer Inequality: Evidence, Progress and Making it Happen: a Report by the National Cancer Equality Initiative", which recommended that PCTs review local levels of screening coverage and uptake to consider whether further action is required. The report has already been placed in the Library.

Care Homes: Mentally Ill

Mr Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are for the future of Douglas House in Bournemouth. [2125]

Mr Burstow: The Department believes that people with learning disabilities have the right to lead their lives like any others, with the same opportunities and responsibilities and the right to be treated with the same dignity and respect. It is not appropriate for people with learning disabilities to live as inpatients in the national health service when they are not undergoing active assessment or treatment.

There is extensive research that community-based settings give better outcomes in terms of independence, inclusion and better health for people with learning disabilities. Investment is already underway in Bournemouth and we are seeing clear benefits from campus closure across the country.

Continuing Care

Miss Anne McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether patients other than those who are terminally ill qualify for continuing health care. [2941]

Mr Burstow: National health service continuing health is a package of care arranged and funded for individuals outside hospital who have ongoing health care needs. Anyone assessed as having a certain level of care needs, whose primary need is a health need, may receive continuing health care. It is not solely for those diagnosed with a terminal illness.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the use by Ministers in his Department of cars allocated from *(a)* his Department's pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured in the UK; whether Ministers in his Department are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [2415]

Mr Simon Burns: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Penning) on 14 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 290-91W.

Dietary Supplements: EU Law

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the European Commission on maximum permitted dose levels for vitamins and minerals under the EU food supplements directive. [2671]

Anne Milton: The Food Standards Agency represents the United Kingdom in discussions with the European Commission on the setting of maximum permitted levels for vitamins and minerals in recommended daily doses of food supplements. The last working group meeting, a meeting of the 'Ad Hoc Working Group', which comprises eight member states including the UK, was held in April 2009.

Genetically Modified Organisms: Food

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to develop a GM-free food labelling scheme similar to schemes in operation in Germany and Austria; and if he will make a statement. [2437]

Anne Milton: By law, genetically modified (GM) foods must be labelled so that consumers can exercise choice. There are no specific provisions in the legislation for "GM-free" labelling. However, the use of this term is subject to general legislation on food labelling, which requires claims to be truthful and not misleading to the consumer. The current legislation on GM food is harmonised at European Union level and is currently being reviewed by the European Commission. The Commission's report, which will include GM labelling, is due to be published in the summer and the Government have no plans to develop a national labelling scheme for GM-free food in the meantime.

Health Services: Rural Areas

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will take steps to increase the number of nurse-led clinics in villages; [2100]

(2) what steps he is taking to increase access to healthcare in rural areas. [2134]

Mr Simon Burns: "The Coalition: Our programme for government" document indicates this Government's intention to strengthen the power of general practitioners as patients' expert guides through the health system by enabling them to commission care on their behalf.

The provision of nurse-led clinics is one of a number of ways in which access to health care can be improved in rural areas including villages. It is the role of commissioners to ensure provision meets local need, and to commission, where required, services such as nurse-led clinics. There are no national plans to implement an increase in nurse-led clinics in rural areas.

Health: Harlow

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department holds on levels of health inequality in Harlow constituency in each year from 1997 to 2009. [2009]

Anne Milton: The information is not available. However, a limited amount of inequality information within Harlow local authority can be found in the Harlow local health profile, produced by the Association of Public Health Observatories (APHO) and published on their website at:

www.apho.org.uk/resource/view.aspx?RID=50215&SEARCH=harlow

Members: Correspondence

Mr Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to respond to the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay's letter of 27 May 2010 on his constituent, Mrs Hazel Berry. [2684]

Mr Simon Burns: A reply was issued to the hon. Member on 15 June 2010.

NHS

Mr Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of *(a)* NHS London and *(b)* other strategic health authorities in meeting patient need. [1895]

Mr Simon Burns: Strategic health authorities (SHAs) are accountable to the Secretary of State through the NHS chief executive. In addition to the routine performance management of SHAs, during 2009-10 the Department rolled out the SHA Assurance programme. SHA Assurance is designed to strengthen the accountability of SHAs as well as supporting them in their roles as leaders of the local national health service and driving improvements in quality across the health system.

The SHA Assurance panel visited NHS London and stakeholder organisations in the region during two days in January 2010. The panel's final report and recommendations relating to that assessment will—as with the panel reports for all SHAs visited—be published in due course through routine SHA Board papers, which will be available on their website.

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he plans to take to create an independent NHS board; and if he will make a statement. [1921]

Mr Simon Burns: The coalition agreement set out the Government's intention to establish an independent NHS board to allocate resources and provide commissioning guidelines.

The NHS Board will drive improvements in the quality of patient care by ensuring commissioning decisions are made according to evidence-based quality standards. It will have autonomy to ensure that funding decisions are made on the basis of need and will support general practitioners to commission services on behalf of their patients.

We will provide more detail on our plans for establishing the NHS Board in due course.

Smoking: Health Services

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of receipts from hypothecated tobacco tax was ring-fenced for spending on the costs of NHS care for patients with smoking-related diseases in the latest period for which figures are available. [2102]

Danny Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

There is no formal mechanism to ring-fence tobacco receipts for spending on the NHS. It is funded out of the Consolidated Fund.

Sunbeds

Mrs Siân C. James: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he plans to take under the Sunbeds (Regulation) Act 2010 to *(a)* prevent children and young people from using unstaffed sunbed salons and *(b)* ensure the provision of accurate health information on sunbeds; and when he plans to begin the consultation required by that Act. [2449]

Anne Milton: The Sunbeds (Regulation) Act 2010 (the Act) comes into force on 8 April 2011. The purpose of the Act is to prevent people under the age of 18 from using sunbeds on commercial premises, by making it an offence for sunbed operators to allow people under the age of 18 access to sunbeds on their premises.

At this time, no decision has been taken on the regulation making powers under the Act, or on any consultations required by the Act.

The Heath and Safety Executive (HSE) on 1 May 2009 provided revised guidance on their website for sunbed operators, along with information to provide to their customers on the risks to health of sunbed use. SunSmart, the national skin cancer prevention and sun protection campaign also provides information through its website and resources on the risks to health of sunbeds.

Tuberculosis: EU Action

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on measures to reduce the incidence of tuberculosis. [2558]

Anne Milton: The Department is a member of the Management Board of the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) and through this, contributes to the development of measures to reduce the incidence of tuberculosis (TB) across Europe. TB is a priority in ECDC's current work programme.

ECDC is a European Union (EU) agency whose aim is to strengthen Europe's defences against infectious diseases. It was established in 2005 and is situated in Stockholm, Sweden. ECDC's mission is to identify, assess and communicate current and emerging threats to human health posed by infectious diseases.

In order to achieve this mission, ECDC works in partnership with national health protection bodies and experts across Europe to strengthen and develop continent-wide disease surveillance and early warning systems. ECDC pools Europe's health knowledge, to develop authoritative scientific opinions about the risks posed by current and emerging infectious diseases. TB is one of the ECDC's priority programmes.

The Department's Director of Health Protection is a member of the ECDC Management Board.

The Health Protection Agency contributes to formulation and implementation of the EU TB control policy through the European TB Programme Managers group co-ordinated by the ECDC.

Tuberculosis: West Midlands

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he is taking to reduce the incidence of tuberculosis in *(a)* the West Midlands and *(b)* Coventry; [2555]

(2) how many cases of tuberculosis have been reported in *(a)* the West Midlands and *(b)* Coventry in each year since 2005; [2556]

(3) what his most recent estimate is of the incidence of tuberculosis in *(a)* the West Midlands and *(b)* Coventry; and if he will make a statement. [2557]

Anne Milton: It is up to individual primary care trusts (PCTs) to ensure they have adequate procedures in place to reduce the incidence of tuberculosis (TB) and work with the regional Health Protection Agency to handle any outbreaks that occur. However, as part of the regional strategy, 'Investing for Health', West Midlands Strategic Health Authority has led a piece of work looking at developing care pathways for four conditions, of which TB was one.

The national health service in Coventry is managing TB by:

promotion of uptake of neonatal BCG;

increasing the number of staff to manage TB including TB nurses, at University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust); and

implementing T- spot testing within the next three months.

The number of cases of TB reported in west midlands and Coventry since 2005 is shown in the following table:

	West Midlands Region	*Coventry Teaching Primary Care Trust (PCT)*[1]
2005	935	88
2006	944	103
2007	944	140
2008	1,012	111

[1] These data have been provided by Coventry PCT.

Note:
Data for 2009 are not yet available at local authority or PCT level.

Source:
Health Protection Agency

Most recent estimate of incidence of TB in West Midlands and Coventry is shown in the following table:

Rate of tuberculosis in England, West Midlands and Coventry, 2008

	Rate
England	15.5
West Midlands Region	18.7
Coventry Teaching PCT	35.8

Notes:
1. Final 2009 data are not yet available
2. Data for Coventry are provided by the Coventry Teaching PCT

Source:
Health Protection Agency and Office for National Statistics mid-year estimates

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Councillors

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many local councillors sit on both county councils and district councils. [2676]

Robert Neill: This information is not held by the Department.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the presumed minimum hours of work are for local councillors remunerated for cabinet responsibilities. [2677]

Robert Neill: My Department does not hold this information. Being a councillor is not a job, it is a vocation. Accordingly councillors do not receive salaries, rather they receive allowances designed to ensure that being a councillor does not leave them out of pocket. The roles of the councillor will vary from authority to authority, ward to ward and even person to person. It is for each authority to determine how best to organise their meetings and for each councillor to determine how best to organise his or her work-load.

The working practices of councillors who are members of a local authority's cabinet are therefore a matter for that authority.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many local councillors hold five or more paid public sector positions. [2678]

Robert Neill: This information is not held centrally.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government which 10 local councillors receive the highest remuneration from the public purse. [2679]

Robert Neill: My Department does not hold this information. Each council makes available locally for public inspection the allowances paid to each of their councillors. We will be ensuring these data are published in an open and standardised format to facilitate greater public scrutiny.

Departmental Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the URL is of each website managed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each non-departmental public body and agency for which his Department is responsible. [2362]

Robert Neill: The following websites are managed by the Department for Communities and Local Government:

http://www.communities.gov.uk/
http://www.info4local.gov.uk
http://www.planningportal.gov.uk

Awaiting closure:
http://www.data4nr.net/

Awaiting closure:
http://www.be-utd.org/

The following websites are managed by non-departmental public bodies and agencies, for which the Department for Communities and Local Government is responsible:

Homes and Communities Agency:
http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/

Tenant Services Authority:
http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/

Standards for England:
http://www.standardsforengland.gov.uk/

Local Government Ombudsman:
http://www.lgo.org.uk/

Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation:
http://www.thurrocktgdc.org.uk/

West Northamptonshire Development Corporation:
http://www.wndc.org.uk/

Valuation Tribunal Service:
http://www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk/

Leasehold Advisory Service:
http://www.lease-advice.org/

Housing Ombudsman Service:
http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/

Firebuy:
http://www.firebuy.gov.uk/

Community Development Foundation:
http://www.cdf.org.uk/

Infrastructure Planning Commission:
http://infrastructure.independent.gov.uk/

Audit Commission:
http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/

Architects Registration Board:
http://www.arb.org.uk/

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre:
http://www.qeiicc.co.uk/

Ordnance Survey:
http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/

Fire Service College:
http://www.fireservicecollege.ac.uk/

Planning Inspectorate:
http://www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/

Residential Property Tribunal Service:
http://www.rpts.gov.uk/

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in his Department. [1475]

Robert Neill: The Department of Communities and Local Government inherited six allocated cars. One is a Jaguar XJ TDVi Sovereign, manufactured in the UK; one is a Toyota Avensis T4, manufactured in the UK; one is a Honda Civic Hybrid, manufactured in the UK; and three are a Toyota Prius T3, manufactured in Japan.

These arrangements are changing following the publication of the new Ministerial Code which contains changes that affect ministerial entitlement to travel by Government car. The Code states that

"the number of Ministers with allocated cars and drivers will be kept to a minimum, taking into account security and other relevant considerations. Other Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the Government Car Service Pool as needed".

Cabinet Office has provided clarification on how the Code should be interpreted. The expectation is that Ministers not in the Cabinet will use the pool service and that Cabinet Ministers who have an allocated car will wish to consider how that car might be utilised by other Ministers within the Department before calls are made on the Government Car Service Pool.

The Department for Transport and its Government Car and Despatch Agency are working with departments to effect the transition to the new arrangements.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on the use by Ministers in his Department of cars allocated from *(a)* his Department's pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured in the UK; whether Ministers in his Department are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [2413]

Robert Neill: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mike Penning) on 14 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 290-91W.

Departmental Translation Services

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what *(a)* documents and *(b)* other information for which (i) his Department and (ii) its associated public bodies are responsible are published or provided in the UK in languages other than English; for what reason each such publication is required to be made available in a language or languages other than English; and what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of the translation work so incurred in the latest period for which figures are available. [1781]

Robert Neill: The Department does not generally make documents and information available in languages other than English. In the financial year 2009-10, the Department's central Communication Directorate made available some documents, primarily related to the fire and rescue service, in non-English languages as both printed materials and electronic documents. These are listed as follows:

Printed materials	*Electronic materials*
Ramadan Timetable cards	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Chinese
Inter Faith Week flyer and poster	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Punjabi
Fire Kills "Kevin" Polish poster and flyer	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Bengali
Frances the Firefly book	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Arabic
Frances the Firefly Art Competition flyer and poster	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Somali
Fire Safety in the Home leaflet—Chinese	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Bulgarian
Fire Safety in the Home leaflet—Punjabi	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: French
Fire Safety in the Home leaflet- Bengali	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Hungarian
Fire Safety in the Home leaflet—Arabic	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Latvian
Fire Safety in the Home leaflet—Somali	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Lithuanian
Merseyside FRS Recruitment bilingual flyer, poster and invitation (Chinese)	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Polish
Berkshire and Yorkshire FRS Recruitment bilingual flyer, poster and invitation	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Portuguese
Merseyside and Nottingham FRS Recruitment bilingual flyer, poster and invitation	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Romanian
Birmingham FRS bilingual flyer, poster and invitation (Bengali and Urdu)	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Slovak
Gatekeepers Toolkit—Chinese	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Spanish
Gatekeepers Toolkit—Bengali	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Tamil
Gatekeepers Toolkit—Urdu	Fire Safety in the Home leaflet: Urdu
Gatekeepers Toolkit—posters	Pakistani "If Only" press advert
Together we Save Lives—Chinese	Bangladeshi "If Only" press advert
Together we Save Lives—Bengali	Somali "Happy Memories" press adverts
Together we Save Lives—Urdu	Polish "If Only" press advert
Ambassador Brand Resource Pack, covers, inserts and text	Polish "Kevin Aiston" poster
Dahabshiil poster and dispenser	Gatekeepers Toolkit—Chinese
	Gatekeepers Toolkit—Bengali
	Gatekeepers Toolkit—Urdu
	Gatekeepers Toolkit—posters

The total cost to the public purse to print the above printed materials was £85,701. No central record exists of individual translation costs involved, and such costs could only be compiled at disproportionate cost. No cost to the public purse was incurred in 2009-10 to make the electronic materials available.

Campaign material was made available to local fire and rescue services in languages other than English to assist them in promoting fire safety and recruitment messages amongst communities where English is commonly not spoken as a first language.

Information on translated documents provided by our ALBs could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Travel

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the *(a)* name and *(b)* version is of each computer software package used by his Department to calculate its expenditure on travel. [2268]

Robert Neill: CLG records and calculates travel expenditure on its central financial, procurement and reporting system—SAP ERP (version:—ECC 5.0, SP 21).

Derelict Land and Green Belt: Thanet

Laura Sandys: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the acreage of *(a)* brownfield and *(b)* greenfield land in South Thanet constituency was (i) in 1997 and (ii) on the latest date for which information is available. [2685]

Robert Neill: Information is available for the local authority areas of Dover and Thanet and not at constituency level.

Estimates are available on the amount of previously-developed land that may be available for redevelopment for 1998 to 2008, from the National Land Use Database of Previously-Developed Land. There are no comparable estimates of greenfield land on a comparable basis.

The table provided shows the estimates for the amount of previously-developed land, by land type category, in Thanet and Dover for the years 1998 and 2008.

Table: Previously-developed land by land type, 1998 and 2008

Hectares

	Authority	*Vacant land*	*Vacant buildings*	*Derelict land and buildings*	*Currently in use with planning allocation or permission for development*[1]	*Currently in use with redevelopment potential*
1998	Dover	69	18	193	157	[2]—
	Thanet	20	3	37	9	[2]—
2008	Dover	39	24	70	75	0
	Thanet	14	0	41	378	14

[1] The definition changed from 2001 to include sites use with planning permission for all uses (not just housing) and to achieve more comprehensive coverage.
[2] Not published.
Source:
National Land Use Database of Previously-Developed Land

Information at constituency level could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Housing and Planning Delivery Grant: Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much funding has been allocated from the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant to Wigan Metropolitan borough council to date. [2854]

Andrew Stunell: Housing and Planning Delivery Grant commenced in 2008-09 and Wigan Metropolitan borough council received the following awards:

	HPDG Award (£)
2008-09	128,995
2009-10	389,938

Local Government Finance: Sheffield

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the total funding reduction for the city of Sheffield will be consequent on the reduction in grants to local authorities announced on 10 June 2010, taking into account reductions in UK and EU matched spending through the local enterprise government initiative; and if he will make a statement. [2670]

Robert Neill: I refer the right hon. Member to the written ministerial statement which my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State laid in the House on Thursday 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 15-17WS. Local government are free to make their own decisions about where savings are found. We have ensured that councils have the flexibility to take decisions locally on how to deliver the savings needed.

Local Government: Compulsory Purchase

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether he plans to bring forward proposals to amend the legislation relating to compulsory purchase orders for local authorities. [2276]

Robert Neill: My Department has no plans to amend the enabling legislation for local authorities' powers to acquire land by compulsion.

Non-domestic Rates: Ports

Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many port companies which had been separately rated have *(a)* paid their new assessments, *(b)* paid a contribution under the scheme to allow retrospective demands to be paid off over eight years, *(c)* have not been reassessed under the fast track reassessment programme and *(d)* became insolvent following retrospective demands. [734]

Robert Neill: As at 8 October 2009, informal inquiries to local authorities suggest that ratepayers occupying 221 properties within ports had fully discharged their backdated liability and ratepayers occupying a further 200 business properties within ports had been granted a schedule of payments. The Government do not have information on how many payments, or of what amount, the 200 properties with schedule of payments agreements have made.

In view of concerns over the impact of retrospective demands upon businesses the Government, in accordance with our coalition agreement, implemented a freeze in respect of the collection of certain backdated business rates liabilities including businesses in ports. Under its fast track arrangements for ratepayers with backdated bills, the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) has pledged to give an initial response to points raised in a proposal within 10 working days and a final decision within two months in all but the most complex cases. The VOA report that they have met the fast-track time scales with respect to new assessments on 97% of ports proposals. All those who have subsequently appealed against the VOA's final decision on their proposal to the independent Valuation Tribunal have been offered early hearings, although in practice few have taken up this offer.

However, a number of concerns have been raised with Ministers by interested parties concerning the practical operation of the process which we will wish to examine further.

No information is held centrally on how many port companies which had been separately rated have become insolvent following retrospective demands.

Karl Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will bring forward proposals to freeze the back-rating of business rates in respect of port businesses. [2498]

Robert Neill: Legislation to implement a freeze in respect of certain backdated business rates liabilities came into force on 3 June 2010. Ratepayers that meet the criteria, including those based in ports, can benefit from this measure.

A copy of the legislation can be found at:

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2010/pdf/uksi_20101507_en.pdf

Planning: Public Consultation

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on open source planning. [2754]

Robert Neill: The coalition agreement states that

"the Government will return decision-making powers on housing and planning to local councils and reform the planning system in the longer term to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live, based on the principles set out in the Conservative Party publication 'Open Source Planning' ".

We have already made a start by giving local authorities greater control over garden grabbing and density targets. The Queen's speech included a localism Bill where the planning reform agenda will be taken forward.

Public Houses

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will introduce legislative proposals to enable members of the public in local communities to have the right to buy public houses when they are put up for sale; and if he will make a statement. [2512]

Andrew Stunell: The Government's commitment to introduce powers to help communities save local facilities threatened with closure, which could include public houses of importance to particular communities, is set out in the "The Coalition: our programme for Government". Options for achieving this objective most effectively are under consideration, and we will be discussing this further with all those with an interest across the sectors. We intend that any legislative provisions which result from this consideration will be published in the Decentralisation and Localism Bill in the autumn.

Working Neighbourhoods Fund: Hartlepool

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the Written Ministerial Statement of 10 June 2010, on local government savings package, how much has been provided to Hartlepool constituency from the Working Neighbourhood Fund in each year that it has been in operation. [2569]

Robert Neill: Information is not available for individual constituencies. The Working Neighbourhood Fund allocation to Hartlepool local authority was:

Hartlepool

	£000
2008-09	4,520
2009-10	5,840
2010-11 (indicative)	5,090
Total	16,005

Working Neighbourhoods Fund: Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 15-17WS, on the local government savings package, how much has been provided to Wigan constituency from the Working Neighbourhoods Fund in each year of its operation. [2752]

Andrew Stunell: Information is not available for individual constituencies.

The Woking Neighbourhood Fund allocation to Wigan local authority was as follows:

Wigan	*£000*
2008-09	5,932
2009-10	7,952
2010-11	6,991
Total	20,875

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Departmental NDPBs

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which non-departmental public bodies report to his Department; and what *(a)* remuneration is given to the chair and to members of each body and *(b)* rate of expenses is paid to members, broken down by categories of expenses claimable. [2970]

Mr Davey: A list of the Department's NDPBs can be found at the link as follows, under BERR's and DIUS's public bodies directories 2009, which also includes the remuneration given to chairs:

http://www.berr.gov.uk/aboutus/corporate/performance/annual-spending/page27140.html

We do not hold information on NDPBs Board members' remuneration centrally but this can be found in each of the organisations' published annual report and accounts.

Rates of expenses paid to members of NDPBs are not held centrally and could only be collated at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in his Department. [1474]

Mr Davey: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has inherited seven cars which its Ministers are using until pre-existing contracts expire. There is a Jaguar XJ TDVi Sovereign, a Jaguar X type SE.2.d manufactured in the UK, two Toyota Prius T3 and three Honda Civic ES Hybrids which were all manufactured in Japan.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what his policy is on the use by Ministers in his Department of cars allocated from *(a)* his Department's pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured in the UK; whether Ministers in his Department are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [2414]

Mr Davey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer he received from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport on 14 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 290W.

Departmental Public Appointments

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many *(a)* political appointments and *(b)* other personal appointments he has made since his appointment; and at what estimated annual cost to the public purse. [380]

Mr Davey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 6WS.

Environment Protection

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what progress has been made on implementation of the Doha Declaration paragraph 31 commitment to reduce or eliminate tariffs and non-tariff barriers on environmental goods and services. [2332]

Mr Davey: Concluding the Doha Round is a high priority for the UK Government, and we are working with the EU to secure an ambitious deal as soon as possible. The liberalisation of environmentally friendly goods and services is an important part of the negotiations. The World Trade Organisation's Committee on Trade and Environment is mandated to take forward these negotiations, and all parties, including the EU, have reaffirmed their commitment to the negotiations. However, progress has been slow, primarily due to difficulties with defining environmental goods.

Fossil Fuels: Export Credit Guarantees

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which fossil fuel energy projects the Export Credits Guarantee Department is supporting; in which country each projected is situated; which UK companies are in receipt of support; which type of plant is being supported in each case; what the *(a)* start and *(b)* completion date is for each project; and how much is being provided to each. [2330]

Mr Davey: The following table lists the relevant cases where ECGD has a contingent liability arising from the support it is providing in respect of exports to fossil fuel projects.

Fossil fuel projects[1]

Country	*UK exporter*	*Project*	*Original level of support provided (£)*	*Liability start date (est.)*	*Contract completion date (est.)*
Indonesia	NEI Power Projects Ltd	Combined cycle power plant	36,647,273	December 1994	December 2001
Indonesia	Allen Power Engineering Ltd	Power stn extension. Supply and installation of 11 diesel generating sets	18,955,088	December 1997	December 2000
Turkey	Allen Power Engineering Ltd	Bilkent	6,799,523	October 1998	September 1999
Venezuela	[2]—	Oil and gas project	50,668,873	—	—
Philippines	ABN Amro Bank NV	San Lorenzo—500 MW Gas Power station at Batangas	44,382,802	March 2000	September 2015
Dominican Republic	Motherwell Bridge Engineering Ltd	San Pedro—Conversion of Oil Power station to Gas Fired Power Station	15,783,542	April 2000	February 2002

Fossil fuel projects[1]

Country	*UK exporter*	*Project*	*Original level of support provided (£)*	*Liability start date (est.)*	*Contract completion date (est.)*
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Skanska Construction UK Ltd	Tabas coal mine	29,524,244	March 2001	June 2005
Algeria	Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery Ltd	Supply of pumping and generating sets for the 0Z2 Pipeline	22,282,064	October 2001	October 2003
Brazil	Man B & W Diesel Ltd	4 x diesel generating sets	6,884,401	November 2001	December 2002
Israel	Alstom Power Ltd	Refurb of existing power station. Low Emission Boiler and Converter	7,094,427	March 2002	October 2003
Turkey	Alstom Power Plants Ltd	2 x 160 MLO Power Station	7,262,428	April 2002	February 2004
Nigeria	M W Kellogg Ltd	LNG project. Addition of Trains 4 and 5 to existing LNG plant	119,033,808	December 2002	September 2005
Algeria	Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery Ltd	Supply of turbine generator sets for the OZ2 Pipeline	23,061,936	September 2003	September 2005
Brazil	Diamond Offshore Drilling (UK) Ltd	P52 oil platform. Drilling Offshore Exploration Wells/ Charter of an Offshore Drilling Unit	42,767,276	January 2004	February 2004
Azerbaijan	BP Exploration (Caspian Sea) Ltd	BTC Pipeline project	56,354,403	February 2004	August 2006
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Salzgitter Mannesmann (UK) Ltd	South Pars Phases 9 and 10. Steel-related products for the downstream development of a gas field	12,630,693	July 2004	July 2008
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Man Ltd	South Pars Phases 9 and 10 Mechanical, piping and electrical engineering equipment for the downstream development of a gas field	32,529,092	July 2004	July 2008
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Doncasters Middle East Ltd	Provision of services and tooling to refurbish turbine generator blades	14,373,935	August 2004	March 2006
Kazakhstan	Kellogg Brown & Root	Alibekmola Oil Field Development	6,839,754	November 2004	December 2004
Mexico	Odebrecht Oil and Gas Services Ltd	Living quarters on oil platform	6,189,505	November 2004	December 2004
Brazil	Invsat Ltd	P52 oil platform: Telecommunications	1,318,153	October 2005	October 2007
Brazil	Koch Chemical Technology Group Ltd	P52 oil platform. Vacuum Deaeration Equipment	2,099,502	October 2005	October 2007
Brazil	Rolls Royce Power Engineering plc	P52 oil platform: Power Generation Equipment	26,695,937	October 2005	October 2007
Brazil	VWS Westgarth Ltd	P52 oil platform: Sulphate Reduction Equipment	6,488,282	October 2005	October 2007
Korea, Republic of	Alstom Power Conversion Ltd	Shin Wolsuing Power Stn	1,127,299	January 2006	January 2009
Turkey	Brush Electrical Machines Ltd	50 MW generators sets	684,163	March 2006	May 2006
Mexico	SLP Engineering Ltd	KMZ oil field platform: Accommodation Platforms	12,468,774	June 2006	January 2008
Nigeria	Gentec Energy plc	5 MW gas fired power plant	7,891,229	May 2008	June 2009
Nigeria	Gentec Energy Plc	12.75 MW power stn and gas plant	13,669,924	September 2008	September 2009
Russian Federation	Rolls Royce Plc	Portovaya Compressor Station: Compressors and related equipment for Nordstream pipeline	376,450,274	May 2010	June 2011

[1] Includes oil and gas transportation, coal, oil and gas extractions, power generation and energy exports that involve the use of fossil fuel. Excludes petrochemical projects.
[2] Information withheld to protect the commercial interests of the company and ECGD.

Post Offices

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will review the post office closures implemented in the last three years for the purpose of re-introducing services in those premises. [2502]

Mr Davey: It is not my intention to review the post office closures implemented under the Network Change Programme. But the Government are committed to allowing post offices to offer a wide range of services in order to sustain the post office network without any further closure programme.

Post Offices: Bank Services

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the Government's plans are for the social payment network for post offices; and if he will make a statement. [2531]

Mr Davey: The Government fully recognise the important social and economic role of post offices in the communities they serve. The Government are committed to making a social network payment to support the network in 2011-12, subject to state aid clearance from the European Commission. The Government are working with Post Office Ltd on funding requirements for the network beyond 2012.

Post Offices: Thanet

Laura Sandys: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many post office branches there were in South Thanet constituency *(a)* in 1997 and *(b)* on the latest date for which information is available. [2668]

Mr Davey: I have asked David Smith, the managing director of Post Office Ltd, to respond directly to my hon. Friend and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Renewable Energy: Export Credit Guarantees

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he plans to take to increase take-up of the Export Credits Guarantee Department's £50 million annual underwriting fund for the renewable energy industry. [2327]

Mr Davey: In collaboration with the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, UK Trade International, the Department of Energy and Climate Change and relevant trade associations, including the Renewable Energy Association, ECGD continues to promote its services to renewable energy exporters, so that as required these can be used to assist them when they compete to win export orders. ECGD has risk capacity that in aggregate substantially exceeds £50 million to support exports of renewable energy technology. This capacity is allocated to individual overseas markets based upon their creditworthiness, taking into account existing risk exposure and likely future demand, and is made available on a first come, first served basis for eligible exports.

Train to Gain Programme: North East

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many *(a)* employers and *(b)* employees received support from the Train to Gain programme in (i) Hartlepool constituency, (ii) Tees Valley sub-region and (iii) North-East region in each year since the programme was introduced; and how many in each category will receive such support in (A) 2010-11 and (B) 2011-12. [2594]

Mr Hayes: In England, between August 2008 and March 2009, 39,700 employers were engaged through the Train to Gain Skills Brokerage Service. This was replaced in April 2009 by the Business Link Integrated Brokerage Service, which recorded 16,100 employer engagements between April and July 2009[1]. Table 1 shows Train to Gain starts by (i) Hartlepool parliamentary constituency (ii) Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees, Darlington and Redcar and Cleveland, local authorities which comprise the Tees Valley sub region and (iii) the North-East Government office region for the 2005/06 to 2008/09 academic year, the latest year for which full year data is available. Final full year Train to Gain data for 2009/10, released as part of a Statistical First Release, is normally expected to be available in December 2010. Investment in further education and skills for the financial year 11-12 onwards will be subject to the spending review.

[1] The number of employer engagements represents the number of employers who have engaged with the Brokerage Service. It does not represent the number of employers with employees learning on the Train to Gain programme.

Table 1: Train to Gain starts by Geography, 2005/06 to 2008/09

	2005/06[1]	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09[2]
Hartlepool parliamentary constituency/local authority	100	500	700	2,300
Redcar and Cleveland local authority	200	1,000	1,200	3,100
Middlesbrough local authority	200	900	1,200	3,700
Stockton-on-Tees local authority	200	1,000	1,300	4,500
Darlington local authority	100	500	700	2,300
Tees Valley sub region	800	3,900	5,000	15,800
North East Government office region	3,500	15,200	19,800	75,800

[1] April to August.
[2] Figures for 2008/09 are not comparable with earlier years as in 2008/09 NVQs delivered in the workplace previously funded by FE are now funded by Train to Gain. There were 181,000 starts and 132,000 achievements in NVQs delivered in the workplace in 2007/08.

Notes:
1. Parliamentary constituency, local authority and regional figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. The full-year numbers are a count of the number of starts at any point during the year. Learners starting more than one course will appear more than once.
3. Government office region, local authority and parliamentary constituency is based upon the home postcode of the learner.
4. Tees Valley sub region is comprised of Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland, Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees and Darlington local authorities. Figures for Tees Valley sub region are based on the sum of unrounded data for these local authorities.

Source:
Individualised Learner Record

Train to Gain Programme: West Midlands

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many *(a)* employers and *(b)* employees received support under the Train to Gain programme in the west midlands in 2009-10; and how many will receive such support in (i) 2010-11 and (ii) 2011-12. [2348]

Mr Hayes: In England, between August 2008 and March 2009, 39,700 employers were engaged through the Train to Gain Skills Brokerage Service. This was replaced in April 2009 by the Business Link Integrated Brokerage Service, which recorded 16,100 employer engagements between April and July 2009.[1]

There were 106,600 Train to Gain starts in the west midlands Government office region in the 2008/09 academic year, the latest year for which full year data are available. Final full year Train to Gain data for 2009/10, released as part of a Statistical First Release, is normally expected to be available in December 2010.

Investment in further education and skills for the financial year 2011-12 onwards will be subject to the spending review.

[1] The number of employer engagements represents the number of employers who have engaged with the Brokerage Service. It does not represent the number of employers with employees learning on the Train to Gain programme.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Palace of Westminster: Repairs and Maintenance

Chris Bryant: To ask the Leader of the House what discussions he has had with the House authorities on necessary long-term work to the Palace of Westminster; and if he will publish advice he has received on this matter. [2298]

Sir George Young: Long-term work to the Palace of Westminster is a matter for the House of Commons Commission. I have regular discussions with the House authorities on a range of issues, both in my capacity as Leader of the House and as a member of the House of Commons Commission.

Petitions

Chris Bryant: To ask the Leader of the House if he will make provision for online submission of petitions to the House. [2281]

Sir George Young: The Government propose a radical reform of the way the House handles petitions, with those that receive at least 100,000 signatures being eligible for debate in the House. Online petitioning could play an important part in these new procedures.

The Procedure Committee produced proposals in its First Report of 2007-08 (HC 136), which the previous Government resisted on the basis of the projected cost of more than £4 millión over the course of a Parliament (HC 952, Session 2008-09). Any further proposals would need to demonstrate that they offered good value for money.

Written Questions

Chris Bryant: To ask the Leader of the House if he will discuss with the authorities of both Houses provision for combining the publication of ministerial answers to written questions asked in the House of Lords and the House of Commons. [2280]

Sir George Young: The publication of written ministerial answers is a matter for each House. I have no plans to propose any changes to the current arrangements.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change which Ministers in his Department have been issued with *(a)* a BlackBerry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1432]

Gregory Barker: All four Ministers at this Department have been issued with one BlackBerry each.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what his policy is on the use by Ministers in his Department of cars allocated from *(a)* his Department's pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured in the UK; whether Ministers in his Department are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [2410]

Gregory Barker: I refer you to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport on 14 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 290-91W.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many individual car journeys have been made on ministerial duties by Ministers in his Department in the last four weeks. [2690]

Gregory Barker: The information requested is not held.

Nuclear Power Stations: Insurance

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what his estimate is of the cost to the public purse of insurance indemnities to the nuclear industry in the latest period for which figures are available. [2022]

Charles Hendry: None.

Radioactive Waste: Waste Management

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent discussions *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have had with the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority on the (i) earliest and (ii) latest dates for the proposed national deep-level geological repository for radioactive waste to open to receive waste deposits; and what discussions his Department has had on the operation opening dates of that proposed repository. [2390]

Charles Hendry: Ministers held discussions with representatives from the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) on a recent visit to Sellafield. This visit provided an opportunity to discuss the NDA's responsibilities for decommissioning and clean-up of the UK's public civil nuclear sites including the geological disposal of higher activity radioactive waste. Officials regularly meet the NDA to discuss the same responsibilities.

In 2008, communities were invited to 'Express an Interest' in entering discussions with Government about a siting process for a geological disposal facility and to date three 'Expressions of Interest' have been received from authorities in west Cumbria. The programme towards implementation is flexible and incorporates both robust technical site investigations and ongoing interactions between the project and local communities. The Government have therefore not set a fixed delivery timetable, however the NDA has a current planning assumption that the disposal facility could be available to receive the first waste in 2040.

This Government recognise the need for strong leadership and effective programme management for geological disposal and will publish a more detailed timeline against which progress can be measured. This will be based on NDA planning assumptions which are benchmarked against international experience.

Interim stores provide safe and secure facilities throughout the geological disposal facility development programme. In the event that geological disposal facilities are not available until after 2040, they can have their lives extended as required.

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent discussions *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have had with (i) industry and (ii) local authorities on the location for an underground repository for radioactive waste; and if he will make a statement. [2393]

Charles Hendry: In 2008, communities were invited to 'Express an Interest' in entering discussions with Government about a siting process for a geological disposal facility for higher activity radioactive waste.

To date, three 'Expressions of Interest' have been received (Copeland borough council, Cumbria county council and Allerdale borough council) for the areas of Copeland and Allerdale. The authorities and local stakeholders are working together in partnership to consider issues relevant to this stage of the process and DECC officials have regular discussions with them as part of these arrangements. Further information about the West Cumbria Managing Radioactive Waste Safely (MRWS) Partnership can be found at

www.westcumbriamrws.org.uk

The option to 'Express an Interest' remains open and as such DECC officials have promoted the invite, as well as the opportunities that will arise from hosting such a facility, at a number of national events and meetings with local authorities and industry. Ministers will also seek to confirm the invitation process wherever possible during their routine visits and meetings.

Renewable Energy

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what plans he has for renewable heat incentive schemes; and if he will make a statement. [971]

Gregory Barker *[holding answer 7 June 2010]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Michael Fallon) on 15 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 367-68W.

Renewable Energy: Feed-in Tariffs

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to his Department's answer of 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 223W, on renewable energy: feed-in tariffs, if he will take steps to equalise the payments made to owners of micro-generation capacity used for feed-in tariffs who installed micro generation capacity before 15 July 2009 and those who installed it after that date. [2739]

Charles Hendry: I have received a number of representations on this issue and am considering them carefully in the context of our overall approach to energy and climate change. We will make an announcement in due course.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan: Peacekeeping Operations

Mr Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers of 11 Light Brigade have been *(a)* killed, *(b)* very seriously injured and *(c)* seriously injured during the brigade's operations in Afghanistan. [2148]

Dr Fox *[holding answer 14 June 2010]:* 11 Light Brigade deployed as Task Force Helmand between 10 October 2009 and 10 April 2010. During this roulement the UK sustained 59 fatalities, 44 very serious injured and 28 seriously injured troops.

Armed Forces: Deployment

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent estimate he has made of the number of service personnel stationed in *(a)* Germany and *(b)* Cyprus. [1391]

Mr Robathan: The numbers of UK Regular Service Personnel as at 1 April 2010 stationed in Germany and Cyprus are shown in the following table:

Location	*Total number*
Germany	19,090
Cyprus	2,880

These figures are based on strengths of armed forces personnel based in each location at a specific time and will vary as personnel change location.

A copy of the Defence Analytical Services and Advice publication TSP 10 (UK Regular Forces Stationed Location) has been placed in the Library of the House.

Armed Forces: Dogs

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what recent estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of the dogs deployed by each armed service to undertake each function; [1900]

(2) how many dogs in the armed forces have been put down in the last 12 months; and for what reasons. [2039]

Mr Robathan: The Ministry of Defence accounting system does not hold financial data in the format requested.

99 military working dogs have been put down in the last 12 months. 89 of these were for veterinary related problems, with the remainder due to behavioural issues, which is defined as turning on their handlers and being unsafe to work with.

The Ministry of Defence gives dogs every possible training opportunity to correct such behaviour before resorting to euthanasia.

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with reference to the answer to the hon. Member for Lewes of 2 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 1081W, on the Atomic Weapons Establishment: floods, what cost was incurred by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* AWE plc and *(c)* commercial insurers arising from the July 2007 flooding at the Atomic Weapons Establishment sites; and if he will make a statement. [2027]

Peter Luff: The cost incurred by the Ministry of Defence as a result of the flood at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) in 2007 was some £5 million. The Ministry of Defence Police based at Burghfield also incurred flood-related costs totalling £110,000 which did not form part of the AWE Management Ltd claim. A small claim from an AWE sub-contractor has still to be resolved.

The £5 million flood-related costs described above were incurred by AWE Management Ltd and their operating company, AWE plc, and were the costs claimed from the Department under non-nuclear indemnity.

No costs were incurred by commercial insurers as a result of the flood, as the non-nuclear indemnity is in place to cover such events.

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what staffing targets for the Atomic Weapons Establishment for *(a)* permanent staff, *(b)* temporary staff and *(c)* consultants have been set for each of the next three years. [2046]

Peter Luff: Based on current contract assumptions, AWE plc staffing targets for the next three years are 4,700 permanent full-time equivalent staff, no temporary staff and 1000 integrated personnel, who are contractors employed by AWE plc to provide specific fixed-term skills and expertise. The exact figures will be dependent on programme demand.

AWE Burghfield

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action was taken to assess levels of off-site radioactive contamination resulting from scouring of drains or other causes following the 2007 floods at the Atomic Weapons Establishment Burghfield. [2028]

Peter Luff: All of the locations from which water exits the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Burghfield site, sediment in the Burghfield brook and grass samples are subject to routine sampling. The results of the sampling are reported to the Environment Agency and are available on the AWE website. Samples taken at the time of the floods indicate no abnormal levels of off-site radioactive contamination.

Clyde Submarine Base

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to replace radioactive waste facilities at HM Naval Base Clyde; whether new waste facilities will be operational by 2014; and how much funding has been allocated for this purpose. [2044]

Peter Luff: Plans for replacing the existing radioactive waste facilities at HM Naval Base Clyde are under development. A study of the future radioactive waste processing requirement is nearing completion, which will inform the options for the new facility.

Against current plans, it is anticipated that the new facility will not be operational until the latter part of this decade.

Until the new facility is operational, HM Naval Base Clyde will continue to work with the appropriate regulators, the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator, the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, to ensure that the existing waste management facilities are managed and operated in a safe and environmentally responsible manner.

Costs are not yet available at this early stage and will be developed as part of the preparation of the main gate business case.

Defence

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his planned timetable is for holding a strategic defence review. [1973]

Dr Fox: The Government are conducting a wide-ranging cross-Government strategic defence and security review under the National Security Council. This will provide coherent long-term policy direction and take the tough choices required to produce the armed forces' and wider defence capabilities the country will need in the decades ahead. It will report by the end of the year.

Defence: Procurement

Mr Carswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review defence procurement contracts; how many contracts will be reassessed on value-for-money grounds; and if he will make a statement. [2696]

Peter Luff: Under the strategic defence and security review, the Secretary of State has set work in hand to review all major equipment and support contracts to ensure the future programme is coherent with future defence needs and can be afforded.

The Government are also reassessing spending approvals granted between 1 January 2010 and the general election to ensure that they offer good value for money and are consistent with the Government's priorities, and further announcements will be made in due course.

Departmental Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the URL is of each website managed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each non-departmental public body and agency for which his Department is responsible. [2364]

Mr Robathan: The Ministry of Defence and armed forces collectively maintain four corporate websites. The URLs are as follows:

Website	URL
Ministry of Defence	www.mod.uk

Website	URL
Royal Navy	www.royalnavy.mod.uk
British Army	www.army.mod.uk
Royal Air Force	www.raf.mod.uk

The URLs managed by NDPBs are as follows:

Website	URL
National Employer Advisory Board	www.sabre.mod.uk
National Museum of the Royal Navy	www.fleetairarm.com
	www.royalmarinesmuseum.co.uk
	www.royalnavalmuseum.org
	www.rnsubmus.co.uk
National Army Museum	www.national-army-museum.ac.uk
Royal Air Force Museum	www.rafmuseum.org
	www.rafmuseumshop.com

The URLs managed by agencies are as follows:

Website	URL
Service Personnel and Veterans Agency	www.veterans-uk.info
MOD Police and Guarding Agency	www.mod.police.uk

The URLs managed by trading funds are as follows:

Website	URL
Defence Support Group	www.dsg.mod.uk
Defence Science and Technology Laboratory	www.dstl.gov.uk
	www.ctcentre.mod.uk/
Met Office	www.metoffice.gov.uk
	http://hadobs.metoffice.com
UK Hydrographic Office	www.ukho.gov.uk
	http://nmwebsearch.com
	www.admiraltyleisure.co.uk
	http://catalogue.ukho.gov.uk/

A number of other websites are managed by the Ministry of Defence:

Website	URL
Acquisition Operating Framework	www.aof.mod.uk
Aeronautical Information Documents Unit	www.aidu.mod.uk
Army Crusaders Football Club	www.crusadersvets.mod.uk
Army FE Bursary Scheme	www.bursary.furthereducation.mod.uk
Army Fit	www.armyfit.mod.uk
Army in Education	http://armyineducation.army.mod.uk/
Army Jobs Pathfinder	http://pathfinder.armyjobs.mod.uk
Army online	www.armyonline.mod.uk
British Army jobs	www.armyjobs.mod.uk
British Forces Post Office	www.bfpo.mod.uk
Camouflage	www.camouflage.mod.uk
Chief Scientific Advisor	www.science.mod.uk
Civilian Jobs	www.civilianjobs.mod.uk/
Defence Academy	www.da.mod.uk
Defence Analytical Services and Advice (DASA)	www.dasa.mod.uk
Defence Blogs	www.blogs.mod.uk
Defence Contracts Bulletin	www.contracts.mod.uk
Defence Dynamics	www.defencedynamics.mod.uk
Defence Engineering and Science Group	www.desg.mod.uk
Defence Image Database	www.defenceimagedatabase.mod.uk
Defence News Imagery	www.defencenewsimagery.mod.uk
Defence Sixth Form College (Welbeck)	www.dsfc.ac.uk/
Disposal Services Authority	www.edisposals.com
DES Careers	www.descareers.co.uk/
Film Locations	www.films.mod.uk
Future Navigation	www.futureofnavigation.com
ICS Catalogue	www.icscat.mod.uk
Joint Data Link Management Organisation	www.jdlmo.mod.uk
My Camouflage MOD	www.mycamouflage.mod.uk
Royal Air Force Community Support	www.rafcom.co.uk
Royal Military Academy Sandhurst	www.sandhurst.mod.uk
Royal Navy Community Website	www.rncom.mod.uk
Soldier Magazine	www.soldiermagazine.co.uk
Sovereign Base Areas Cyprus	www.sba.mod.uk
Thunderer Squadron—Defence Technical Undergraduate Scheme	www.thundererssquadron.mod.uk
To The Best	www.tothebest.army.mod.uk
UK Defence Standardisation	www.dstan.mod.uk
Welbeck	www.welbeck.mod.uk

On current plans 28 of these sites are scheduled to be rationalised by March 2011, in line with the pan-government web rationalisation programme.

Departmental Manpower

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers are employed by his Department; and at what civil service pay grade in each such case. [1261]

Mr Robathan: There are two special advisers in the Ministry of Defence, both fall within pay band 2 of the special advisers pay structure.

The following table shows press officer posts in the Ministry of Defence identified in a survey carried out in March 2010, adjusted to take account of known changes since. A breakdown of those posts by civilian and military grade is also shown in the table. This includes civilian and military posts across the Department, including within single Services and Trading Funds. Posts are defined as those who directly interface with national or regional media on news issues, and include those working overseas in direct support of operations.

Grade	Number of press officers
SCS1	1
B1 (Grade 6)	1
B2 (Grade 7)	14
C1 (SIO)	21
C2 (IO)	55
D(EO)	1
OF5[1]	1
OF4[1]	4
OF3[1]	5
OF2[1]	1
SNCO[1]	2
Total	106

[1] Military grade. For example OF5, OF4, OF3 are equivalent to Army Colonel, Lt Col and Major respectively, but include all equivalent single Service ranks.

Departmental Translation Services

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* documents and *(b)* other information for which (i) his Department and (ii) its associated public bodies are responsible are published or provided in the UK in languages other than English; for what reason each such publication is required to be made available in a language or languages other than English; and what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of the translation work so incurred in the latest period for which figures are available. [1776]

Mr Robathan: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. All expenditure must comply with the principles set out in Managing Public Money and in the Treasury handbook on Regularity and Propriety.

Accessibility to expenditure information on discrete items and services is largely determined by the MOD's Chart of Accounts (Joint Service Publication 530), copies of which are available in the Library of the House. It is also published in the MOD's publication scheme at:

http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/CorporatePublications/FinancialReports/ChartOfAccountsManualJsp530.htm

Military Bases: Safety

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking in response to the safety concerns raised by the Ship Environment and Safety Board in their recent report to the Defence Environment and Safety Board. [2621]

Mr Robathan: The Department produced a new safety strategy in April 2010 to address all of the main concerns raised in the Ship Environment and Safety Board report to the Defence Environment and Safety Board for 2009. Safety remains the highest priority to the Department, and the Defence Environment and Safety Board will closely monitor the implementation of the Safety Strategy.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the licence to store ordnance munitions and explosives at each applicable one of his Department's facilities will expire. [2654]

Peter Luff: Some 4,500 Explosives Limit Licences are currently issued by the Department for facilities and buildings, across the UK and overseas, that contain, or are likely to contain, military explosives. The licences can range in scope from the storage of small arms ammunition and pyrotechnics to the processing of torpedoes and other weapons systems. I am withholding the details of the various locations as their collective disclosure could prejudice Defence and UK national security interests. Licences are issued on a rolling three or five-yearly basis, and all current licences will expire by 2015. A comprehensive review is carried out before a new licence is issued to any facility or building.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the Defence Ordnance Safety Board's report of limited assurance on ordnance munitions and explosives; and what steps he is taking to increase the safety of facilities where explosive ordnance is stored. [2656]

Peter Luff: On behalf of the Secretary of State, the 2nd PUS chairs a Defence Environment and Safety Board (DESB) which monitors and reviews performance, including that of the Defence Ordnance Safety Board (DOSB). The DOSB's concerns were highlighted in the DESB's report to Defence Board and Defence Audit Committee. The department recognises that there are issues with the state of some of its ammunition storage depots which, if not attended to, would become increasingly serious. Our requirements for ammunition storage will be reviewed in the light of the strategic defence and security review and this may mean that some storage depots can be shut altogether. We will consider work to address any defects in the depots that remain open in the context of the forthcoming planning round.

Nuclear Weapons

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* name, *(b)* date, *(c)* location and *(d)* grade is of each nuclear weapons emergency exercise being organised by his Department in (i) 2010 and (ii) 2011. [2039]

Peter Luff: The names, dates, locations and grades of the nuclear weapons emergency exercises already undertaken or to be undertaken in 2010 are:

	Exercise	*Location*	*Grade*
9-11 March 2010	Bronze Endeavour 10	RAF Honington, Suffolk	Grade D
12-13 May 2010	Astral Bend 10	Sculthorpe Training Ground, Norfolk and RAF Mildenhall, Suffolk	Grade C and ungraded Table Top Exercise
19 October 2010	SITEX (B)	AWE Burghfield	Level 1

The names, dates, locations and grades of nuclear weapons emergency exercises in 2011 have yet to be determined.

Exercise Bronze Endeavour 10 was moved to Honington from its earlier planned location at Hullavington. Level 1 is a civil grading, broadly equivalent to Ministry of Defence grade C.

Radioactive Materials

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what definitions his Department uses for the four categories of special nuclear materials. [2038]

Peter Luff: The definitions used are consistent with International Atomic Energy Agency guidelines. Categories are principally defined according to the amounts of plutonium, uranium 233, and uranium 235. I am withholding information on the precise definitions as this would be likely to prejudice national security.

RAF Kinloss

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the first Nimrod MRA4 will be operational at RAF Kinloss. [2622]

Nick Harvey: Nimrod MRA4 deliveries began in March this year and under current plans initial operating capability is expected to be achieved at RAF Kinloss by October 2012, with some ad hoc capability available before this date.

All major equipment projects will be assessed as part of the comprehensive strategic defence and security review the Government are conducting.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

British Overseas Territories

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to review the relationship between the UK and its Overseas Territories; and if he will make a statement. [2253]

Mr Bellingham: The Government are currently undertaking a review of our relationship with the Overseas Territories. We aim to bring renewed focus to the UK's relationship with the Overseas Territories and the important strategic, historic and cultural links that we share.

Departmental Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the URL is of each website managed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each non-departmental public body and agency for which his Department is responsible. [2358]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The Digital Diplomacy Group of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is responsible for the following websites, which are managed from the central FCO web platform. They include websites for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its posts overseas (including websites in 40 different languages).

http://britishembassyinireland.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://digitaldiplomacy.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://foi.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukeu.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinafghanistan.fco.gov.uk/dr/
http://ukinafghanistan.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinafghanistan.fco.gov.uk/ps/
http://ukinalbania.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinalbania.fco.gov.uk/sq/
http://ukinalgeria.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinalgeria.fco.gov.uk/fr/
http://ukinangola.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinangola.fco.gov.uk/pt/
http://ukinargentina.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinargentina.fco.gov.uk/es/
http://ukinarmenia.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinarmenia.fco.gov.uk/hy/
http://ukinaustralia.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinaustria.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinazerbaijan.fco.gov.uk/az/
http://ukinazerbaijan.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinbahrain.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinbangladesh.fco.gov.uk/bn/
http://ukinbangladesh.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinbarbados.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinbelarus.fco.gov.uk/be/
http://ukinbelarus.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinbelgium.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinbelgium.fco.gov.uk/fr/
http://ukinbelgium.fco.gov.uk/nl/
http://ukinbelize.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinbih.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinbolivia.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinbolivia.fco.gov.uk/es/
http://ukinbotswana.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinbrazil.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinbrazil.fco.gov.uk/pt/
http://ukinbrunei.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinbrunei.fco.gov.uk/ms/
http://ukinbulgaria.fco.gov.uk/bg/
http://ukinbulgaria.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinburma.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinbvi.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukincambodia.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukincambodia.fco.gov.uk/km/
http://ukincameroon.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukincameroon.fco.gov.uk/fr/
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http://ukincanada.fco.gov.uk/fr/
http://ukincayman.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinchile.fco.gov.uk/en/
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http://ukincolombia.fco.gov.uk/es/
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http://ukincuba.fco.gov.uk/en/
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http://ukincyprus.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinczechrepublic.fco.gov.uk/cs/
http://ukinczechrepublic.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukindenmark.fco.gov.uk/da/
http://ukindenmark.fco.gov.uk/en/
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http://ukinfiji.fco.gov.uk/en/
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http://ukinhongkong.fco.gov.uk/en/
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http://ukiniceland.fco.gov.uk/en/
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http://ukiniran.fco.gov.uk/en/
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http://ukiniraq.fco.gov.uk/ar/
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http://ukinisrael.fco.gov.uk/he/
http://ukinitaly.fco.gov.uk/en
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http://ukinjapan.fco.gov.uk/en
http://ukinjapan.fco.gov.uk/ja
http://ukinjerusalem.fco.gov.uk/ar/
http://ukinjerusalem.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinjordan.fco.gov.uk/ar/
http://ukinjordan.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinkenya.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinkosovo.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinkuwait.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinkz.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinkz.fco.gov.uk/ru/
http://ukinlaos.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinlatvia.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinlatvia.fco.gov.uk/lv/
http://ukinlebanon.fco.gov.uk/ar/
http://ukinlebanon.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinlibya.fco.gov.uk/ar/
http://ukinlibya.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinlithuania.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinlithuania.fco.gov.uk/lt/
http://ukinluxembourg.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinmacedonia.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinmadagascar.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinmalawi.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinmalaysia.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinmaldives.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinmalta.fco.gov.uk/en/
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http://ukinmexico.fco.gov.uk/es/
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http://ukinmontserrat.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinmorocco.fco.gov.uk/en/
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http://ukinnamibia.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinnepal.fco.gov.uk/en/
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http://ukinoman.fco.gov.uk/ar/
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http://ukinpakistan.fco.gov.uk/ur/
http://ukinpanama.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinpanama.fco.gov.uk/es/
http://ukinperu.fco.gov.uk/en/
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http://ukinpoland.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukinpoland.fco.gov.uk/pl/
http://ukinportugal.fco.gov.uk/en/
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http://ukinqatar.fco.gov.uk/ar/
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http://ukun.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukunarmscontrol.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://ukungeneva.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://www.actoncopenhagen.decc.gov.uk/en/
http://www.fco.gov.uk/ar/
http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/
http://www.fco.gov.uk/ur/
http://www.londonsummit.gov.uk/en/
http://www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/

Information on the governance of the above websites and their URLs can be found at:

http://digitaldiplomacy.fco.gov.uk/en/guidance/controls/domain-names

The website URL for the FCO's Trading Fund, FCO Services, is:

http://www.fcoservices.gov.uk/eng/

and they also run a recruitment site at:

http://www.fcoscareers.co.uk/

The website for the FCO's public diplomacy agency, Wilton Park, will join the main FCO platform shortly—its URL is;

www.wiltonpark.org.uk

Other public bodies that report to the Department (the BBC World Service and the British Council) have their own Boards of Trustees and manage their own web presences (their URLs are:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice

and

http://www.britishcouncil.org/new/)

North Korea: Diplomatic Relations

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest assessment is of the state of the UK's diplomatic relationship with North Korea. [1955]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The UK's diplomatic relationship with North Korea is one of carefully targeted critical engagement. We have serious concerns on a range of issues, not least its nuclear programme. We have strongly condemned North Korea's sinking of the South Korean navy vessel Cheonan. We also challenge North Korea on human rights abuses at every opportunity.

But we also seek engagement with North Korea to address these concerns and to help North Koreans develop knowledge of the outside world. For example we work with the British Council to train English language teachers in universities in Pyongyang.

Overseas Territories Consultative Council

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he plans to hold an Overseas Territories Consultative Council in 2010. [2295]

Mr Bellingham: We are currently considering how Overseas Territory leaders might best engage with Ministers and senior officials in the UK.

Pakistan: Religious Freedom

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Pakistan on the treatment of Ahmadi Muslims in that country. [2673]

Alistair Burt: The UK shares the deep concern felt about the terrible attacks in Lahore recently which killed over 90 people, and injured over 100. On 28 May, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said

"the British Government utterly condemns the attacks in Lahore, which have led to the loss of so many innocent lives. Our thoughts are with the victims and their families. The attacks are a reminder of the importance of the international community working with Pakistan to tackle the threat of violent extremism".

Consular staff at our High Commission in Islamabad provided support to the family of the British National who was killed in the attack. Senior officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) have met with representatives of the Ahmadiyya community in the UK. The Minister for South Asia, Mr. Alistair Burt, will be meeting the leadership of the community at the FCO in the near future to discuss the concerns of the Ahmadiyya community in detail.

Our High Commissioner in Islamabad has raised the attacks and the discrimination suffered by the Ahmadiyya Community with the Chief Minister of Punjab alongside

his EU colleagues. Our High Commission has raised the issue bilaterally with the Pakistani authorities, including with the Ministries for Minorities and of the Interior.

Somalia: Piracy

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his most recent assessment is of progress towards securing the release of Paul and Rachel Chandler. [2672]

Alistair Burt: We are monitoring the situation very closely and doing everything we properly can to help secure Paul and Rachel Chandler's return. I am not able to go into operational detail about our efforts but Government Officials in our High Commission in Nairobi and the UK continue to talk to anyone who can help. Foreign and Commonwealth Office Consular staff are in regular contact with the family of Paul and Rachel, and we continue to provide consular support to them.

South America: Embassies

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 7 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 27W, on South America: embassies, for what reason he has no plans for the future of posts in *(a)* Peru, *(b)* Colombia, *(c)* Venezuela, *(d)* Uruguay and *(e)* Chile; what budget has been set for each post in each such country in each of the next three years; and if he will make a statement. [2300]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The budgets for the next three financial years for all overseas posts will be determined by this year's comprehensive spending review. However, it is too early to forecast where or what changes might be made. It is for that reason that we have no existing plans for the future of diplomatic posts in the countries mentioned.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Constituencies

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what public consultation will take place before proposals are made for the redrawing of electoral boundaries. [2314]

Mr Harper: The Government have announced that they will introduce legislation to provide for the creation of fewer and more equally sized constituencies. Further details will be announced in due course and the Government will seek to frame the legislation in a way that ensures that the boundary commissions can complete their task in a timely, fair and thorough way.

General Election 2010: Fraud

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his most recent estimate is of the incidence of *(a)* postal and *(b)* proxy vote fraud in the May 2010 general election. [1119]

Mr Harper: The Electoral Commission and Association of Chief Police Officers are collating information on allegations of electoral malpractice reported to police forces across the UK. Indicative, interim information on electoral malpractice will be given in the Electoral Commission's formal report on the administration of the general election across the UK, which is due to be published in July. The Electoral Commission and Association of Chief Police Officers will produce a joint report on allegations of electoral malpractice at the end of the year.

House of Lords: Reform

Chris Bryant: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he plans a reformed House of Lords to be a wholly or substantially elected second Chamber. [1722]

Mr Harper: The Deputy Prime Minister informed the House on 7 June, *Official Report*, column 47, that he will chair a committee comprising members of all three major political parties in both Houses. This committee will consider proposals for a wholly or mainly elected second chamber. The committee will be charged with producing a draft Bill by no later than the end of this year. The draft Bill will then be subject to pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee of both Houses.

Members: Conduct

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he plans to announce the mechanism by which members of the public may exercise a right to recall hon. Members in cases of serious financial wrongdoing; and when he plans to announce a definition of serious financial wrongdoing. [1638]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The coalition agreement provides that we will bring forward legislation to introduce a power of recall, allowing voters to force a by-election where an MP is found to have engaged in serious wrongdoing and has had a petition calling for a by-election signed by 10% of his or her constituents.

We are looking into exactly what would be the fairest, most appropriate and most robust procedure. I shall outline those plans very soon.

Political Parties: Finance

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what account will be taken of the Hayden Phillips proposals in his proposed review of political party funding. [1640]

The Deputy Prime Minister: As I indicated during the debate on the Address on 7 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 42, the Government will pursue an agreement on limiting donations and reforming party funding to remove big money from politics. We will have regard to the previous cross party talks when considering this reform. Our approach to party funding is being worked up as part of the overall programme of reforms, and an announcement will be made in due course.

TREASURY

Banks: Finance

Dr Pugh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of Government support for the banking and financial sector. [1188]

Mr Hoban: HM Treasury will publish an updated estimate of the cost of financial sector interventions in future Budgets.

Banks: Loans

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his most recent assessment is of levels of bank lending to small and medium-sized enterprises in *(a)* England and *(b)* the West Midlands; and what steps he plans to take to increase such levels . [1600]

Mr Hoban *[holding answer 10 June 2010]:* The Government are committed to developing effective proposals to ensure the flow of credit to viable SMEs. This includes consideration of both a major loan guarantee scheme and the use of net lending targets for the nationalised banks.

Charities: Schools

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the amount of revenue which would accrue to the Exchequer if charitable status was removed from privately-funded schools. [1965]

Justine Greening: It is not possible to ascertain the amount of reliefs claimed by private schools because HMRC records do not distinguish amounts repaid to or claimed by charities according to type of charity.

Child Trust Fund

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for Child Trust Fund accounts after 1 January 2011. [1743]

Mr Hoban: To help reduce the Budget deficit, the Government intend to reduce and then stop all Government contributions into Child Trust Funds. It is intended that vouchers to open new accounts will no longer be issued for children born from January 2011.

Existing Child Trust Funds will continue to operate as before, although without any further Government contributions. They will continue to be Child Trust Fund accounts until the child's 18th birthday, with no withdrawals permitted; they will continue to benefit from tax free investment growth; and friends and family will continue to be able to contribute up to a total of £1,200 a year to each Child Trust Fund.

Departmental Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the URL is of each website managed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each non-departmental public body and agency for which his Department is responsible. [2356]

Justine Greening: The URLs for the department's websites and each of the non-departmental public bodies and agencies are detailed below:

HM Treasury department website:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk

Invest to Save Budget:

http://www.isb.gov.uk

This site is being migrated and integrated into the HM Treasury Department website as part of transformational Government.

Independent and non-departmental public bodies and agencies;

Office for Budget Responsibility:

http://budgetresponsibility.independent.gov.uk

UK Financial Investments Ltd:

http://www.ukfi.co.uk

UK Financial Sector Continuity:

http://www.fsc.gov.uk

HM Revenue and Customs operate the following websites:

HM Revenue and Customs:

http://www.hmrc.gov.uk

Child Trust Fund:

http://www.childtrustfund.gov.uk

UK Trade Info:

http://www.uktradeinfo.com

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA):

http://www.voa.gov.uk

My Business Rates:

http://www.mybusinessrates.gov.uk/wales

Local Housing Allowance:

https://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk

Business Link:

www.businesslink.gov.uk

Northern Ireland Business Info:

www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk

Business Gateway (Scotland):

www.bgateway.com

Flexible Support for Business (Wales):

http://www.fs4b.wales.gov.uk

The remaining websites are managed independently of either HM Treasury or HMRC.

The Debt Management Office (DMO):

http://www.dmo.gov.uk

Government Actuary's Department:

http://www.gad.gov.uk

National Savings and Investments:

http://www.nsandi.com

The Royal Mint:

http://www.royalmint.com

Equitable Life Assurance Society: Compensation

Mr Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what timetable he has set for providing compensation to Equitable Life policyholders; and if he will make a statement. [1654]

Mr Hoban: We will establish an independently designed payment scheme that is transparent and fair to both taxpayers and policyholders.

Sir John Chadwick is due to submit his final report to the Treasury by mid July. Whilst Sir John finalises his report, the Government will consult with others on the next stage of the process.

The Government will then publish Sir John's report alongside a detailed update, giving next steps towards implementing an independently designed payment scheme.

Mr Mark Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of people in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland likely to be affected by the proposed scheme to compensate Equitable Life policyholders. [2266]

Mr Hoban: Approximately 1.5 million people have been affected by the accepted maladministration of Equitable Life during the relevant period. There has been no analysis to date of the distribution across the UK of those who have suffered losses.

We have committed to establishing an independently designed payment scheme that is transparent and fair to both taxpayers and policyholders.

We are working hard to address the situation quickly, while ensuring that our approach is thorough and fair.

Financial Services Authority: Pay

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the Written Ministerial Statement of 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 15WS, on Financial Services Authority (Annual Report), what the breakdown is of the other emoluments and benefits paid to *(a)* Hector Sants, *(b)* Sally Dewar and *(c)* Jon Pain in addition to the salary and performance-related bonus paid to each. [2565]

Mr Hoban: The matter concerned is the responsibility of the Financial Services Authority (FSA), whose day-to-day operations are independent from Government control and influence. I have asked the FSA to write to the hon. Member on the issue he raises.

Foreign Investment in UK

Karen Lumley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase foreign direct investment in the economy in *(a)* Redditch and *(b)* nationally. [2633]

Mr Davey: I have been asked to reply.

(a) In order to maximise high value investment into the UK, including Redditch, the Government will ensure a sound fiscal policy and an excellent environment for business.

(b) UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) is the Government organisation that leads on attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the UK. UKTI delivers consistently excellent, highly professional service throughout the investment process and uses the global network of embassies, high commissions and consulates to assist targeted, high quality investment to come to the UK.

Office for Budget Responsibility

Dr Pugh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what salary will be paid to Sir Alan Budd in his capacity as head of the Office for Budget Responsibility; and for what bonus payments he will be eligible. [419]

Justine Greening: Sir Alan Budd has been appointed by the Treasury as an independent adviser to provide services in connection with its fiscal policies, acting as chair of the Budget Responsibility Committee of the interim Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) and advising on the establishment of a permanent OBR.

Sir Alan Budd is receiving payment at a rate of £2,885 per week (excluding value added tax) for the performance of these services. He is not eligible for a bonus.

The release of this information is consistent with the Government's approach to transparency on public sector pay, and in line with the publication on 1 June of high-earning civil servants' salaries.

Public Finance

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to *(a)* analyse the distributional impact of public expenditure cuts he is considering and *(b)* publish the analysis. [1702]

Danny Alexander: The Government set out in their document "Spending Review Framework" that they will

"look closely at the effects of its decisions on different groups in society, especially the least well off, and on different regions."

(2.4, page 7)

Further information will be available at the spending review.

Maria Eagle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria are being used in his review of the capital expenditure projects announced between 1 January 2010 and the dissolution of the last Parliament; when the reviews will be concluded; and when decisions on each project will be announced. [2455]

Danny Alexander: The Government are re-assessing spending approvals granted between 1 January 2010 and the general election to ensure that they offer good value for money and are consistent with the Government's priorities. Further announcements will be made in due course.

Research and Development Tax Credit: Environment Protection

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was claimed in research and development tax credits by *(a)* clean technology companies and *(b)* green technology companies in 2008-09. [2325]

Justine Greening: Information on R and D tax credits is not yet available for 2008-09. The most recent National Statistics, published on the HMRC website on 18 December 2009, cover financial years up to 2007-08.

Information on claims for R and D tax credits by clean technology and green technology companies is not available because the data are broken down by industry sector using the UK Standard Industrial Classification of Economic Activities (SIC). Clean technology and green technology are not identified as separate sectors in this classification.

Tax Avoidance and Evasion

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his most recent estimate is of the annual amount lost to the Exchequer consequent on tax *(a)* avoidance and *(b)* evasion; and if he will make a statement. [1579]

Mr Gauke: HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) estimates that the overall tax gap was £40 billion in 2007-08. Detail on how this estimate was produced is set out in detail in 'Measuring Tax Gaps 2009', available at:

http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/measuring-tax-gaps.pdf

It is also available in the House of Commons Library.

'Protecting Tax Revenues 2009' builds on this analysis using management assumptions to allocate the tax gap to different forms of non-compliance; available at:

http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/pbr2009/protect-tax-revenue-5450.pdf

Avoidance is estimated to account for 17.5% of the overall tax gap. Evasion accounts for a further 17.5% and the hidden economy, a form of evasion where the source of income is unknown to HMRC, a further 7.5% of the tax gap.

Taxation: Aviation

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what discussions he has had with representatives of the aviation industry on the possible impact of a per-plane tax on *(a)* their levels of business and *(b)* their competitiveness; and if he will make a statement.; [2137]

(2) what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and *(b)* the Secretary of State for Transport on the likely effect on the aviation industry of the introduction of a per-plane tax, with particular respect to freight carriers; and if he will make a statement; [2138]

(3) what discussions he has had with Ministers in *(a)* the Scottish Executive, *(b)* the Welsh Assembly Government and *(c)* the Northern Ireland Executive on the likely effect on the business levels and competitiveness of aviation companies in those countries of a per-plane tax. [2139]

Justine Greening *[holding answer 14 June 2010]:* The coalition agreement includes an intention to switch from a per-passenger to a per-plane duty. The Government are considering options for doing so, and welcomes the views of interested parties. As part of this process, the Chancellor takes representations from a range of interested parties, including Ministers from other Departments and from devolved Administrations.

EDUCATION

Apprentices: West Midlands

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether he plans to alter the number of 16 and 17 year-olds who *(a)* start and *(b)* complete apprenticeships in (i) Dudley and (ii) the west midlands; and if he will make a statement. [1511]

Mr Gibb: We intend to increase the number of apprenticeship places for people of all ages. We are committed to improving the quality of apprenticeships to make them better suited to the needs of employers and learners, and to increasing the number of advanced apprenticeships.

Building Schools for the Future Programme

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what recent discussions have been held by his Department with Essex Education Authority on proposals for the reorganisation of secondary schools in Colchester; and if he will make a statement; [213]

(2) what plans he has for the future of the Building Schools for the Future programme; and if he will make a statement. [250]

Mr Gibb *[holding answer 2 June 2010]:* Officials in the then Department for Children, Schools and Families had discussions about the reorganisation of secondary school education in Colchester with Essex Education Authority between early 2008 and March 2010. The Sir Charles Lucas School is due to become an academy in September 2010. Other aspects of the reorganisation of secondary education in Colchester are currently linked to the Building Schools for the Future programme. The Department is currently reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that we can build schools more effectively and more cost-efficiently in the future.

Christopher Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent assessment he has made of the effect of reductions in public expenditure on *(a)* schools and *(b)* school building plans in Nottingham. [1075]

Mr Gibb: In his announcement of the package on 2010-11 in year savings on 24 May 2010 the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear that spending on Schools, Sure Start and education for 16 to 19-year-olds would be protected from these in-year cuts. The Department is currently reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that we can build schools more effectively and more cost-efficiently in the future.

Ed Balls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what recent representations he has received from local authorities on plans for the Buildings Schools for the Future programme; [1200]

(2) which Buildings Schools for the Future projects in which local authority areas have been put on hold; and how much had been spent on each such project prior to its suspension. [1201]

Mr Gibb: The Department has received a number of representations from local authorities (LAs) on plans for the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme.

The Department is currently reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that we can build schools more effectively and more cost-efficiently in the future.

The Department has not placed any BSF projects in any local authority area on hold.

Stephen Gilbert: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he expects to determine the future of the Building Schools for the Future programme *(a)* for secondary education in Cornwall and *(b)* nationally. [1378]

Mr Gibb *[holding answer 9 June 2010]:* The Department is currently reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that we can build schools more effectively and more cost-efficiently in the future.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what plans he has for schools in Dudley to be included in the Building Schools for the Future programme: and if he will make a statement; [1514]

(2) what plans he has for the future of Building Schools for the Future programme; and if he will make a statement. [1515]

Mr Gibb: The Department is currently reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that we can build schools more effectively and more cost-efficiently in the future.

Building Schools for the Future Programme: North-East

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for the future of the *(a)* Building Schools for the Future and *(b)* Primary Capital Programme in (i) Hartlepool constituency and (ii) the North-East region; and if he will make a statement. [90]

Mr Gibb: The Department is currently reviewing the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that we can build schools more effectively and more cost-efficiently in the future.

Children: Databases

Ed Balls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment his Department has made on the effects on practitioner time expended per child of the introduction of the ContactPoint database. [1220]

Tim Loughton: The Department has made no assessment of the effect of introducing ContactPoint on practitioner time spent on each child.

Pupil Premium

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether young people studying in further education institutions will be eligible for the proposed pupil premium planned for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. [1162]

Mr Gibb: The pupil premium will initially apply to pre-16 pupils in schools and therefore not to those in further education institutions. We will announce further details about the operation of the pupil premium in due course.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on the use by Ministers in her Department of cars allocated from *(a)* her Department's pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured in the UK; whether Ministers in her Department are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [2408]

Richard Benyon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend for Hemel Hempstead Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Penning), 14 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 290-91W.

Waste Disposal: Fees and Charges

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* legislative and *(b)* other proposals she plans to bring into effect the decision to end charges for household waste. [2191]

Richard Benyon: Under Part 5 of the Climate Change Act 2008, no local authority may introduce charges to householders (in order to incentivise household waste reduction and recycling) without the permission of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State intends to bring forward any necessary changes to the legislation to encourage local authorities to incentivise householders with rewards and not charges.

JUSTICE

Courts: Salford

Hazel Blears: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has to ensure the provision of a courthouse in Salford. [2200]

Mr Djanogly: HM Courts Service (HMCS) continually keeps the use and condition of its estate under review. Decisions relating to the provision of courthouses in any area are informed by responses to public consultation. Since November 2009 HMCS has deferred a number of court building schemes; including one at Salford. Like the rest of Government HMCS needs to ensure that all future building projects are affordable and offer value for money for the taxpayer. In line with standard practice, any scheme to build a new court in Salford will be assessed as part of Government investment and governance procedures.

Departmental Pay

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much was paid in bonuses to civil servants in his Department in 2009-10. [2180]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: Non-consolidated performance pay is paid to employees in the Ministry of Justice to recognise outstanding performance through the year (or for staff in grades below the SCS on specific occasions during the year).

Senior civil service

Performance related pay is awarded to senior civil servants (SCS) in line with recommendations made by the Senior Salaries Review Body.

Non-consolidated performance-related payments are made as part of the SCS annual pay award to those whose performance has exceeded agreed delivery objectives during the previous performance year. The amount paid in 2009-10 was £1,375,000. There is no in-year provision.

Other staff

With the exception of staff working in the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), in grades below the SCS, staff in the Ministry of Justice are employed on common terms and conditions.

For staff in grades below the SCS non-consolidated performance pay may be awarded either at the 'end of year' or 'in year'. Awards of 'end of year' non consolidated performance pay are made as part of the annual pay award to staff whose performance over the course of the year has been judged as outstanding. 'In year' non consolidated performance payments are made to staff in recognition of specific contributions during the year over and above the contribution expected for someone in a particular role.

During 2009-10 £1,923,600 was paid in 'end of year' non-consolidated performance pay, excluding staff working in the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) for whom Information will not be available before August. Information about 'in year' non-consolidated performance pay for 2009-10 is not yet available, other than for NOMS for the nine months up to 31 December 2009, during which time it awarded payments amounting to £1,612,200. This figure has not yet been validated and further data will be collected and checked.

Final information will be provided to the House of Commons Library as soon as it is available.

Rape: Disclosure of Information

Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what evidence on the introduction of anonymity for defendants in rape cases he considered before the announcement of the policy. [594]

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what consultation took place on the proposal to afford anonymity for those accused of rape; and if he will make a statement. [2155]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: The proposal to grant anonymity to defendants in rape trials was included within the coalition agreement following negotiations between the two coalition partners. All of the policy commitments made by the coalition Government were derived from the existing policy of one or both of the governing parties. The issue of anonymity for defendants in rape trials was adopted as party policy by the Liberal Democrat party while in opposition. It was also the subject of an extensive inquiry by the Home Affairs Select Committee, in its fifth report published on 24 June 2003.

Repossession Orders: Harlow

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many court orders for the repossession of homes in each ward in the Harlow constituency were issued in each year from 1997 to 2009. [2007]

Mr Djanogly: The following table shows the numbers of claims leading to orders being made for the repossession of property in the Harlow constituency by mortgage lenders in each year since 2000 and landlords in each year since 2003. Data for previous years are not available due to the lack of valid postcodes. These statistics are not available at smaller geographies. We are currently investigating how we can put these into the public domain without inadvertently revealing the identities of people who are subject to a possession order. I will write to the hon. Member when we have concluded this investigation.

These figures represent the numbers of claims leading to orders being made. This is more accurate than the number of orders, removing the double-counting of instances where a single claim leads to more than one order. It is also a more meaningful measure of the number of homeowners who are subject to court repossession actions.

These figures do not indicate how many properties have actually been repossessed. Repossessions can occur without a court order, such as where borrowers hand the keys back to the lender. Also, not all possession orders result in repossession. Many orders are suspended and if the borrower complies with the repayment arrangements set out in the suspended order the property will not be repossessed.

Tables showing the numbers of possession claims leading to an order in each constituency of England and Wales and in each year since 2000 for mortgages and 2003 for landlords have been placed in the Library of the House.

Number of mortgage[1] and landlord[2] possession claims leading to orders made[4] i. e. [7] for properties in Harlow constituency, 2000-09

	Mortgage possession	Landlord possession
2000	75	—
2001	70	—
2002	85	—
2003	95	270
2004	115	275
2005	165	270
2006	190	240
2007	190	230
2008	220	245
2009	130	215

[1] Includes all types of mortgage lenders.
[2] Includes all types of landlord whether social or private.
[3] Landlord actions include those made under both standard and accelerated procedures. Landlord actions via the accelerated procedure enables the orders to be made solely on the basis of written evidence for shorthold tenancies, when the fixed period of tenancy has come to an end.
[4] The number of claims that lead to an order includes all claims in which the first order, whether outright or suspended, is made during the period.
[5] The court, following a judicial hearing, may grant an order for possession immediately. This entitles the claimant to apply for a warrant to have the defendant evicted. However, even where a warrant for possession is issued, the parties can still negotiate a compromise to prevent eviction.
[6] Includes outright and suspended orders, the latter being where the court grants the claimant possession but suspends the operation of the order. Provided the defendant complies with the terms of suspension, which usually require the defendant to pay the current mortgage or rent instalments plus some of the accrued arrears, the possession order cannot be enforced.
[7] Due to the lack of postcode information for landlord possession cases figures for 2000-03 are not available and have been represented with a "—".

Note:
All figures are rounded to the nearest five.

Source:
Ministry of Justice

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 17 June 2010

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Manpower

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers are employed by his Department at each civil service pay grade. [1281]

John Penrose: With regards to the number of special advisers employed by the Department, I refer the hon. Member to the list of special adviser appointments published by the Prime Minister on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 33-34W.

The Department employs 11 press officers. The breakdown by civil service pay grade is shown in the following table:

Grade	*Number of press officers*
Grade A[1]	3
Grade B[2]	8
Total	11

[1] Former Grade 6/7.
[2] Former SEO/HEO/HEO (D) and equivalent grades.

Departmental Official Hospitality

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what budget his Department has allocated for entertainment, including alcohol, in each of the next three years. [1323]

John Penrose: The 2010-11 budget, inherited from the previous Government, allocated £155,478 to hospitality, which includes entertainment costs. We are now looking at ways to significantly reduce this. Similar budgets for the following two years will not be set until after the next Spending Review in the autumn.

All expenditure is incurred in accordance with the principles of Managing Public Money and the Treasury handbook on Regularity and Propriety.

Football

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport if he will take steps to encourage each professional football club to allow a representative of a registered football supporters' trust to sit on its board of directors. [2924]

Hugh Robertson: While it is for the football authorities to run our national game, the Government will encourage the Football Association, premier league, and football league to work closely together to improve the governance and regulation of the national game. This includes exploring better ways to involve supporters in their local clubs.

Football: South Africa

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport whether *(a)* he, *(b)* other Ministers in his Department and *(c)* officials of his Department will attend the World cup in South Africa. [2153]

Hugh Robertson: I attended the England *v.* USA match and travelled economy class on both legs of the journey. No officials attended. The Secretary of State will attend the England *v.* Algeria match and travel economy class for both journeys. The Secretary of State will be accompanied by one official. I met with various members of the FIFA family during my visit to discuss England's bid for the 2018 World cup, one of the Government's top priorities for sport. The Secretary of State is planning to do the same.

Should England progress to the quarter finals and beyond, as I very much hope they will, we will look again at what attendance is necessary.

Gambling

Mr Lammy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what *(a)* telephone calls, *(b)* meetings and *(c)* correspondence (i) he and (ii) other Ministers and officials in his Department have had with representatives of the gambling industry since 11 May 2010. [2957]

John Penrose: In the course of the usual engagement with our sectors I, and officials in my Department, have met and spoken with a wide range of organisations and individuals since 11 May. This includes representatives of the gambling industry. However, we do not keep central records of all telephone calls, meetings or correspondence with industry and other representatives.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Employment and Support Allowance

Dr Whiteford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if his Department will take steps to track and monitor claimants who apply for the employment and support allowance and are found fit to work; and for what reasons these claimants are not currently tracked and monitored. [2626]

Chris Grayling: The Department are planning research to investigate the paths of individuals who are found fit for work, whose claim for employment and support allowance is withdrawn or whose claim is ended before they receive a decision at the work capability assessment. The Department is also developing administrative data and management information to routinely monitor the outcomes for all employment and support allowance claimants, including those that moved off the benefit.

Dr Whiteford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what changes he plans to make to the employment and support allowance system; and if he will make a statement. [2628]

Chris Grayling: The Department published an internal review of the Work Capability Assessment in March 2010. This review outlined possible areas for change—we are currently considering its findings and recommendations.

We will reassess everyone on incapacity benefits to see if they are fit for work. Those who are capable of work will be moved onto jobseeker's allowance. People who need more support while they prepare for work will get that help on employment and support allowance.

We have committed to introducing the work programme by the summer of 2011. The full scope and shape of this has not yet been finalised, however we recognise that people moving onto jobseeker's allowance from incapacity benefit or employment and support allowance may face particular difficulties. The employment support we offer will reflect this.

Employment Schemes

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the budget for the single work programme planned by his Department will be in 2010-11; and what the previously planned total expenditure on all current back-to-work schemes providing targeted assistance to benefits claimants seeking employment was for 2010-11. [2161]

Chris Grayling: The total budget set aside to deliver employment programmes in 2010-11 was £2,432 million. This budget has been adjusted in-year to reflect savings of £320 million announced as part of the Government's recently announced £6 billion efficiency savings, giving a revised overall budget of £2,112 million.

The Government have committed to introducing the work programme in the first half of 2011. The work Programme will be a single integrated package of support providing personalised help for everyone who finds themselves out of work regardless of the benefit they claim, and the budget will be set as part of the forthcoming spending review negotiations.

Employment Schemes: Lone Parents

Kate Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on training Jobcentre Plus personal advisers on the circumstances and needs of lone parents under the single work programme. [2492]

Chris Grayling: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the chief executive of Jobcentre Plus, Darra Singh. I have asked him to provide the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Darra Singh:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question asking what the policy is on training Jobcentre Plus personal advisers in the circumstances and needs of lone parents under the Single Work Programme. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

The role of Jobcentre Plus under the single work programme is not yet defined.

However, the current learning routeway for Personal Advisers contains over 60 hours of learning specifically for dealing with Lone Parents. These events are delivered in a variety of training media including classroom facilitated events, open learning and e-learning.

The learning includes modules on building customer commitment; building and maintaining lone parent networks; dealing with myths and stereotypes about lone parents; overcoming challenges and providing ongoing support in their transition to work.

The learning also provides information on childcare and sources of financial help for lone parents.

It is our intention to review and, if necessary, adapt this learning once we know more about the single work programme.

I hope this information is helpful.

Employment Schemes: Voluntary Organisations

Andrea Leadsom: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of voluntary job clubs in helping people into employment. [2256]

Chris Grayling: Job clubs, such as those in Towcester and Brackley, offer local solutions to address unemployment which are led by local communities, organisations and voluntary groups.

Where operational, they offer unemployed people a place to meet, exchange skills, make contacts, and find opportunities to help in their search for employment.

Building on the job club model, the coalition Government have set out a clear commitment to support the development of local work clubs.

Funeral Payments

Gordon Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent representations his Department have received from professional organisations on the funeral payment. [2090]

Steve Webb: We have had representations from the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD), the Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF) and some of their members. They raise a number of issues about the operation of the scheme.

Future Jobs Fund

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what advice he has received from his Department on the *(a)* efficiency and *(b)* cost-effectiveness of the future jobs fund; and if he will publish all such advice received. [2299]

Chris Grayling: The release of advice to Ministers would prejudice the free and frank provision of advice and the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation and will not, therefore, be provided.

Jobcentre Plus: Rapid Response Service

Kate Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for the Jobcentre Plus Rapid Response Service. [2495]

Chris Grayling: Our intention is to retain the Rapid Response Service in its current form for the 2010-11 financial year. However, in common with all departmental programmes, the longer term future of the service will be considered as part of the forthcoming comprehensive spending review.

Maternity Leave

Mr David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of women who took paid maternity leave in the last five years for which figures are available; what the average number of weeks paid maternity leave was in each such year; and what the average payment was in each such year. [2928]

Chris Grayling: The Department for Work and Pensions is responsible for statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance. The Department's estimate of the numbers of women who received these payments for each of the last five years is outlined in the table.

Estimated numbers of women receiving statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance since 2005-06

	Estimated number
2005-06	360,000
2006-07	370,000
2007-08	390,000
2008-09	390,000
2009-10	400,000

Note:
Data are based on estimated numbers of starts or new cases in Great Britain.
Source: Department for Work and Pensions data.

It should be noted that these figures are likely to be an underestimate of the numbers of women who took paid maternity leave. Some women may have received paid maternity leave via occupational maternity pay schemes provided by their employer but did not qualify for statutory maternity pay or maternity allowance. No estimates are available for this group.

No estimates are made for the average number of weeks of paid maternity leave or average payments.

Social Security Benefits: Stirling

Mrs McGuire: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of the working age population of Stirling constituency are claimants of *(a)* jobseeker's allowance, *(b)* employment and support allowance and incapacity benefit, *(c)* carer's allowance, *(d)* disability living allowance, *(e)* widow's and/or bereavement benefit and *(f)* other income support. [2523]

Chris Grayling: The available information is in the following table:

Working age claimants by client group in Stirling parliamentary constituency: November 2009

	Claimants	*Percentage of the working age population*
Job Seeker	1,760	3.2
Employment and Support Allowance and Incapacity Benefits	3,830	7.0
Carer	510	0.9
Others on income related benefit	190	0.3
Disabled	470	0.9
Bereaved	150	0.3

Notes:
1. Statistical Group is a hierarchical variable. A person who fits into more than one category will only appear in the top-most one for which they are eligible. For example a claimant of Disability Living Allowance and Jobseeker's Allowance would appear in "Job Seeker", not in "Disabled".
2. From November 2008 the "incapacity benefits group" includes Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). ESA replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on the grounds of incapacity for new claims from 27 October 2008. Prior to this the "incapacity benefits group" referred to claimants of Incapacity Benefit (including credits only) or Severe Disablement Allowance including people claiming Income Support on the grounds of incapacity.
3. Caseload figures are rounded to the nearest 10. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
4. Working Age Client Group data has been used as this excludes overlaps where people are in receipt of more than one benefit. Data published at: https://www.nomisweb.co.uk
Source:
Department for Work and Pensions Information Directorate: Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study. Mid 2008 population estimates produced by General Registers of Scotland.

Wales

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions with reference to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement of 24 May 2010 and pursuant to the answer of 7 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 69W, on public expenditure: Wales, if he will provide details of his Department's non-devolved public expenditure savings that will be incurred in Wales, including an estimate of the financial savings. [2939]

Chris Grayling: The requested information is not available due to disproportionate cost.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan: Peacekeeping Operations

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the doubling of the operational allowance for armed forces personnel serving in Afghanistan is a permanent measure; and to what date the doubling of that allowance will be back-dated. [2777]

Dr Fox: The doubling of operational allowance is a permanent measure and is effective from 6 May 2010. In doing so we have fulfilled a key measure in our coalition programme for government.

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of doubling the operational allowance for armed forces personnel serving in Afghanistan. [2781]

Dr Fox: The cost of doubling the operational allowance to all those eligible to receive it is £57 million per year, based on current force levels.

Air Misses

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* near misses and *(b)* dangerous incidents involving military aircraft were reported in each year since 2007. [2618]

Nick Harvey: The number of hazards, observations, near misses and reportable incidents involving military aircraft that have been reported in each year since 2007 are shown in the following tables. They have been broken down by aircraft type. To provide further details of each of these events would, however, incur disproportionate cost.

A new system for capturing all flight safety events across the Defence aviation community, known as the Aviation Safety Information Management System, was introduced in 2009. This improved system has resulted in an increase in reporting.

Hazards/observations/near misses by aircraft type, 2007-10

Aircraft	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010[1]*
None[2]	0	0	13	46
Alpha Jet	0	0	0	0
Andover	0	0	0	0
Apache	0	0	10	10
Agusta	0	0	3	3
BAE 125	0	0	4	2
BAE 146	0	0	1	1

Hazards/observations/near misses by aircraft type, 2007-10

Aircraft	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*[1]
Bell	0	0	5	1
C17	0	0	10	13
Chinook	0	0	18	11
Defender	0	0	0	4
Desert Hawk	0	0	4	0
Dominie	0	0	1	1
Firefly	0	0	6	0
Gazelle	0	0	2	3
Griffin	0	0	4	5
Harrier	0	0	13	18
Hawk	2	0	11	15
Hercules	0	1	7	16
Hermes	0	0	18	7
Islander	0	0	1	2
Jaguar	0	0	0	0
Jetstream	0	0	0	1
King Air	0	0	6	2
Lynx	1	1	10	7
Merlin	0	0	23	21
Nimrod	0	0	10	1
Other	0	0	6	10
Puma	0	0	20	13
Sea King	2	0	16	19
Sentinel	0	0	1	8
Sentry	0	0	1	7
Squirrel	0	0	3	6
Tornado	0	0	27	41
Tristar	0	0	3	16
Tucano	0	0	11	22
Tutor	0	0	8	9
Typhoon	0	0	5	14
VC10	0	0	9	12
Vigilant	0	0	0	2
Viking	0	0	2	0
Total	5	2	292	369

[1] Up to and including 31 May 2010.
[2] 'None' covers those incidents where an aircraft was not involved eg during either maintenance of an aircraft component not fitted to an aircraft or involving a piece of Aircraft Ground Support Equipment.

Events in the table above are described as hazards and cover those circumstances which have, or could have, resulted in an occurrence, or could throw light on the cause of an occurrence. An abridged definition of an occurrence is an unplanned event associated with the operation of an aircraft.

Reportable incidents by military aircraft type, 2007-10

Aircraft	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*[1]
None[2]	24	71	34	45
Alpha Jet	8	6	4	3
Andover	1	1	1	3
Apache	72	134	125	86
Agusta	8	10	10	15
BAE 125	6	6	2	2
BAE 146	6	2	5	5
Bell	18	43	57	23
C17	36	34	43	25
Chinook	299	310	314	172
Defender	40	32	10	17
Desert Hawk	0	0	71	57
Dominie	22	14	8	7

Reportable incidents by military aircraft type, 2007-10

Aircraft	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*[1]
Firefly	17	15	6	0
Gazelle	44	45	15	12
Griffin	91	67	110	56
Harrier	79	172	219	111
Hawk	294	242	187	119
Hercules	342	329	152	114
Hermes	0	25	21	9
Islander	11	13	15	20
Jaguar	13	2	1	0
Jetstream	11	11	12	2
King Air	21	31	38	17
Lynx	337	470	252	125
Merlin	310	420	557	297
Nimrod	177	122	29	22
Other	16	21	55	18
Puma	113	130	117	57
Reaper	0	9	2	1
Sea King	448	475	441	246
Sentinel	13	17	20	8
Sentry	67	42	22	13
Squirrel	107	84	59	39
Tornado	578	439	344	224
Tristar	79	77	54	27
Tucano	136	156	234	112
Tutor	67	73	92	43
Typhoon	153	187	202	89
VC10	96	93	46	31
Vigilant	23	62	33	24
Viking	13	10	7	16
Total	4,196	4,502	4,026	2,312

[1] Up to and including 31 May 2010.
[2] 'None' covers those incidents where an aircraft was not involved eg during either maintenance of an aircraft component not fitted to an aircraft or involving a piece of Aircraft Ground Support Equipment.

A reportable incident is described as an occurrence involving an aircraft which results in the aircraft sustaining category 1, 2 or 3 damage; or in a person receiving a minor or slight injury; or which discloses a flight safety hazard or potential hazard. As the MOD damage categorisation system does not apply to civilian registered aircraft, the occurrence is to be classed as an incident if the damage is repairable by the contractor's aircraft maintenance staff at the aircraft operating location.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what AIRPROX incidents have taken place in the last five years; and what the *(a)* location and *(b)* aircraft type was in each incident. [2619]

Nick Harvey: There were 832 reported Air Proximity Hazard incidents between June 2004 and June 2009. I am placing details of these incidents, including the date, aircraft type and location, in the Library of the House. Investigations into Air Proximity Hazard incidents after June 2009 are not yet fully completed.

Details of all incidents are published in bi-annual reports by the Air Proximity Board on its website:

www.airproxboard.org.uk

In the information I am placing in the Library of the House, I am also including a reference for each of the incidents to the relevant report. By publishing the causes,

risks, trends and lessons learnt from all Air Proximity incidents, whether they are military or civil, the aim is to minimise the possibility of re-occurrence.

An Air Proximity Hazard is formally defined as an incident in which, in the opinion of a pilot or controller, the distance between aircraft as well as their relative positions and speeds have been such that the safety of the aircraft involved was or may have been compromised.

Armed Forces

Laura Sandys: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is planning to take to observe the principles of the military covenant. [2667]

Mr Robathan: We have made it clear in our Programme for Government that rebuilding the military covenant is one of the highest priorities for Defence.

We have published a series of concrete measures to achieve this including in areas such as health and education. Work has begun on how to put these measures into practice as soon as possible.

Armed Forces: Health Services

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what timetable has been set for completion of work with Help for Heroes on the purpose-built centre for injured soldiers in *(a)* Catterick, *(b)* Tidworth, *(c)* Colchester and *(d)* Edinburgh. [2818]

Mr Robathan: The Army Recovery Capability was launched on 11 February 2010, in partnership with Help for Heroes and the Royal British Legion. This new capability marks a further step forward in the support to our armed forces and will ensure the best possible care and management is provided to our wounded, sick and injured personnel.

The provision of four purpose built Personnel Recovery Centres is a key element of the Army Recovery Capability. The centres will provide a day centre facility for all recovering personnel and a residential base for those who need it, whether their recovery is focused on a return to duty or a transition into civilian life. Each centre will be located inside or close to Army sites, enabling access to Army facilities and support from the Army, including existing medical, educational and other garrison facilities.

The Pathfinder centre, in Edinburgh, opened on 17 August 2009 in partnership with Help for Heroes and the veterans' charity Erskine Homes. This centre will provide the capability until the three other Personnel Recovery Centres open. Current plans are for the Colchester centre to open in September 2011, the Catterick centre to open in April 2012, and the Tidworth/Bulford centre to open in April 2012.

Ian Mearns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much funding his Department allocated to the development of Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre Headley Court in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [2820]

Mr Robathan: Funding for the treatment of wounded personnel at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Headley Court has been, and will continue to be, made available to match clinical requirements, including surges in casualty numbers. Our future budgetary plans assume a continuing need for additional investment in facilities and staff at Headley Court. Comprehensive financial data for the past five years are not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Headley Court has received steadily increased investment in facilities and staff over recent years. The unit's operating costs, including estate management, are about £20.4 million in the current financial year, as compared with some £10.7 million (actual costs) in 2005-06. Significant new facilities brought into service over recent years, at an additional total cost of about £7.5 million, include a 30-bed ward annexe (May 2007), a 58-bed staff and patient accommodation block (January 2009) and the new Centre for Mental and Cognitive Health (opened in spring 2009). For many years the Headley Court estate, which is owned by a charitable trust, has also benefited from additional funding of projects by that trust and other charities.

In addition to funding the projects just listed, it was announced in May 2008 that an extra £24 million in capital funding over the next four years for a Headley Court development programme. Over the first two years (i.e. up to June 2010) this funding has been mainly applied to the MOD contribution to the Help for Heroes rehabilitation complex, which recently came into service, and a utilities upgrade for the whole site.

Armed Forces: Housing

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what timetable has been set for completion of work on supported housing for service leaders in Catterick. [2817]

Mr Robathan: Construction work began on 18 January 2010 on the training and housing centre, 'The Beacon', in Catterick, North Yorkshire, and based on current estimates, work is due to be completed by the end of April 2011.

Armed Forces: Wales

Dr Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces were born in or are domiciled in *(a)* Aberavon constituency and *(b)* Wales. [2904]

Mr Robathan: The information is not held in the format requested.

Ascension Island

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on his Department's outstanding bills relating to Ascension Island. [2532]

Nick Harvey: The Secretary of State for Defence and Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs have discussed the dispute over the Ministry of Defence's annual property tax liability on Ascension Island. The MOD is continuing to work towards securing a cross-government sustainable financial future for Ascension Island.

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the objectives are of the business review under way at the Atomic Weapons Establishment. [2043]

Peter Luff: A number of reviews are currently under way at the Atomic Weapons Establishment. All have primary objectives aimed at ensuring the maintenance of a safe and credible UK deterrent, and the maintenance of an efficient and effective deterrent capability to achieve maximum value for money.

Defence Equipment: Sales

Dr Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the monetary value of receipts from the Disposal Services Authority has been in each year since 1993. [2349]

Peter Luff: Data on the monetary value of receipts from the Disposal Services Authority for the last five years is as follows:

	Gross sales	*Direct costs of sales*	*£ million* *Net sales*
2005-06	61.4	27.2	34.2
2006-07	99	43.5	55.5
2007-08	88.6	37.4	51.2
2008-09	88.1	41	47.1
2009-10	62.5	33.2	29.3

Data prior to Financial Year 2005-06 are no longer available as this is the first full financial year that the Disposals Sales Agency was set up and transferred into the Defence Logistics Organisation (subsequently Defence Equipment and Support).

Dr Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the monetary value of receipts from the e-disposals service has been in each year for which figures are available. [2350]

Peter Luff: Information on the monetary value of receipts from the website e-disposals service is not recorded separately by the Disposal Services Authority (DSA). The items sold under e-disposals are disposed of by contractors who also use other disposal routes. They are required to declare their total income to the DSA but not to breakdown the source of the sales .

Dr Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the monetary value was of goods sold to *(a)* Government Departments, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies and *(c)* other public sector organisations by (i) the Disposal Services Authority and (ii) edisposals in each year for which figures are available. [2352]

Peter Luff: It is not usual for the Disposal Services Authority (DSA) to dispose of MOD items to other Government departments because the items are generally of a military or specialist nature, or are unattractive because of their age or wear and tear. Exceptionally, however, during 2009-10, DSA sold surplus medical equipment to Portsmouth NHS Trust for the value of £630,435 during the financial year which ended on 31 March 2010.

No other sales were made directly by DSA to Government departments, non-departmental public bodies or other public sector organisations.

Dr Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the annual operating cost of *(a)* the Disposals Services Authority and *(b)* e-disposals has been in each year for which figures are available. [2353]

Peter Luff: Total operating costs from 2005-06 for the Disposal Services Authority (DSA), including e-disposals are as follows:

Financial year	*Direct costs*	*Other operating costs*	*£ million* *Total operating costs*
2005-06	27.2	15.1	42.3
2006-07	43.5	20.4	63.9
2007-08	37.4	7.1	44.5
2008-09	41	3.1	44.1
2009-10	33.2	6	39.2

Departmental Consultants

Dr Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how many days persons employed on consultant contracts worked for his Department, its agencies and the armed services in the last 12 months; at what cost to the public purse; how many people have been so employed on consultant contracts for more than *(a)* two, *(b)* three and *(c)* four years; and if he will publish the daily rates upon which such persons have been engaged in (i) the current financial year, (ii) 2009-10, (iii) 2008-09, (iv) 2007-08 and (v) 2006-07. [2986]

Mr Robathan: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) contracts for External Assistance with consultancy companies to deliver a specific output at an agreed price. The Department does not involve itself in how the company deploys its staff in order to deliver the output and does not, therefore, hold such details.

MOD expenditure on External Assistance has been reported to Parliament since 1995-96. For the years in question expenditure by MOD including its agencies and the armed forces was as follows:

	£ million
2006-07	129
2007-08	120
2008-09	106

The figure for expenditure in 2009-10 will be placed in the Library of the House in the next few months and the figure for 2010-11 will be placed in the Library after the end of the financial year.

Wherever possible MOD tries to use its internal resources to meet its needs rather than bringing in outside assistance.

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Ministers in his Department have been issued with *(a)* a BlackBerry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1434]

Mr Robathan: The Secretary of State for Defence has been issued with a BlackBerry and the Minister for Defence Equipment, Support and Technology has been issued with a Nokia mobile telephone.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the use by Ministers in his Department of cars allocated from *(a)* his Department's pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured in the UK; whether Ministers in his Department are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [2412]

Mr Robathan: No Minister in the Department has an allocated pool car.

The Government's policy is that Ministers may make use of the Government Car Service (GCS) under the terms of the recently announced Ministerial Code. Ministers will be entitled to use cars from the GCS pool as needed. UK manufactured cars make up a relatively small proportion (around 16%) of the current GCS fleet, most of which comprises low carbon emission hybrid vehicles manufactured abroad. Changed rules for allocation of cars and the need to reduce the cost of operating the GCS mean that vehicle replacement is likely to be restricted in the immediate future, necessarily limiting the options for reconfiguring the fleet without incurring additional cost. For reasons of efficient and economic fleet management, it is not practical for Ministers to specify a particular vehicle or type of vehicle for a journey in a pool service car.

Joint Strike Fighter Aircraft

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many meetings his officials have had with Lockheed Martin on the procurement of the Joint Strike Fighter in the last six months; and what was discussed on each occasion. [1392]

Peter Luff: Ministry of Defence officials of the Joint Combat Aircraft Project Team, including US-based officials seconded to the JSF Programme Office, meet regularly with Lockheed Martin and the US Department of Defence—approximately on a daily basis. These meetings take place either in person or via video conference facilities. The majority of these meetings take place at a working level and cover a wide range of matters relating to the project.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the effect on costs of delays in the Joint Strike Fighter programme. [1393]

Peter Luff: As the only Level 1 partner in the JSF programme, the UK has been closely engaged with the changes recently made by the US and is fully aware of the impact in terms of performance, cost and time.

There is no impact on the performance of the aircraft. There is also no change to the cost of UK's contribution to the JSF development programme which is fixed by the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the US in 2001. The aircraft already purchased for Operational Test will continue to be used for that purpose and in the timescales originally planned.

Our plans to purchase further JSF are incremental and have always been based on the programme reaching technical maturity levels and being affordable within the overall resources for Defence. We will review our future purchase plans accordingly and as part of both the Strategic Defence and Security Review and normal departmental planning process.

Lynx Helicopters

Mr Carswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review his Department's contract for the Lynx Wildcat project to ensure it represents value for money. [2695]

Peter Luff: Under the Strategic Defence and Security Review work has been set in hand to review all major equipment and support contracts to ensure the future programme is coherent with future defence needs and can be afforded.

Military Aircraft: Helicopters

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the change has been in the number of helicopter hours available to commanders in the last three years. [2819]

Nick Harvey: The number of funded helicopter hours available to commanders for training and operational flying for the last three financial years is shown in the following table:

	Financial year		
Aircraft type	*2008-09*	*2009-10*	*2010-11*
Lynx Mk 3/8	11,200	10,440	9,260
Sea King Mk 5	4,122	4,135	4,399
Sea King Mk 7	3,601	3,770	3,686
Merlin Mk 1	9,380	9,380	9,380
Sea King Mk 4/6	11,186	12,502	12,504
Apache	14,400	16,500	18,500
Lynx Mk 7/9	18,599	15,500	15,500
Gazelle	10,935	5,988	4,450
Chinook Mk 2	15,912	16,500	18,503
Merlin Mk 3	7,550	7,000	8,400
Puma	12,000	9,756	7,250
Sea King Mk 3/3a	9,180	9,721	9,720

The reduction in flying hours for the Puma is as a consequence of fewer airframes being available due to the Puma upgrade programme. Gazelle hours are reducing as this aircraft is being withdrawn from service.

Ministry of Defence Guard Service: Manpower

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are employed in his Department's Guard Service. [2084]

Mr Robathan: On 31 May 2010 the Ministry of Defence Guard Service had 3,615 guards and guard managers, and a further 66 staff in management, training, administrative and support roles, making a total of 3681 staff. The Ministry of Defence Guard Service covers over 200 sites across Great Britain.

Nuclear Weapons

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* US personnel visited the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) and *(b)* AWE staff visited US establishments under the terms of the US-UK Mutual Defence Agreement in each of the last three years. [2045]

Mr Gerald Howarth: The total number of personnel visiting the Atomic Weapons Establishment and US installations under the terms of the UK-US Mutual Defence Agreement in each of the last three years is as follows:

	Number
UK visitors to the US	
2007	591
2008	522
2009	527
US visitors to the UK	
2007	548
2008	806
2009	518

RAF Kinloss

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to keep wildlife off the runways at RAF Kinloss. [2623]

Nick Harvey: RAF Kinloss has a bird control contract in place to provide a bird scaring service and uses radar to monitor carefully the movement of migratory birds. In addition, the natural territorial instincts of a carefully managed herd of resident deer discourage other deer from entering the site.

RAF St Athan

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to complete negotiations on the development of the Defence Training College at St Athan. [1721]

Nick Harvey: The contract negotiations with the preferred bidder, Metrix, are ongoing. The core of the commercial deal is planned to be completed by the end of the year under current plans. This is important to the funding process because it will enable banks to examine the essential elements of the draft contract and hence support the process of due diligence. Work will continue until all aspects of the contract, including funding, reach an acceptable conclusion. I will update the House when negotiations are finalised.

War Pensions Committees

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the regional War Pension Committees; and if he will make a statement. [2643]

Mr Robathan *[holding answer 15 June 2010]:* The role of War Pensions Committees (WPCs) has evolved since they were established in 1921. To ensure they remained relevant for the current ex-service community it was decided to review the structure and function of the WPCs.

The WPCs are now known as the Veterans Advisory and Pension Committees (VAPCs), and a pilot scheme is being established to assess an informal broadening of their role to include, most notably, support and advice in relation to the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme. On completion of the pilot, in June 2011, a full evaluation will be carried out and a decision on the future role of the VAPCs will be made.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the *(a)* make, *(b)* model and *(c)* place of manufacture is of the car allocated for the use of each Minister in his Department. [1487]

Mr Paterson: The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) currently has access to two cars from the Government Car and Despatch Agency as required for official business:

(a) Jaguar *(b)* model XJ Sovereign, and manufactured in *(c)* the United Kingdom.

(a) Toyota *(b)* model Prius T3, and manufactured in *(c)* Japan.

The current use of ministerial cars is the same as the previous Administration but is currently under review.

Departmental Pay

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was paid in bonuses to civil servants in his Department in 2009-10. [2177]

Mr Paterson: Figures for the 2009-10 financial year are not yet available. I will write to the hon. Member when they become available.

Departmental Reviews

Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to the answer of 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 137W, on Government Departments: reviews, what reviews his Department is undertaking; and what the *(a)* purpose and *(b)* timescale of each is. [2579]

Mr Paterson: The coalition agreement sets out in detail the Government's future plans, including the key reviews they will be undertaking. My Department will bring forward detailed information about these reviews in due course.

WALES

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what her policy is on the use by Ministers in her Department of cars allocated from *(a)* her Department's pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured in the UK; whether Ministers in her Department are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [2398]

Mrs Gillan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mike Penning), on 14 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 291W.

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* special advisers in her Department are entitled to the use of (i) a car with a dedicated driver, (ii) a car from the Government car pool and (iii) a taxi ordered through a departmental account. [3191]

Mrs Gillan: Nil.

Prisons: Construction

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions she has had with Ministers and officials of the Ministry of Justice on the siting of a prison in North Wales. [2250]

Mrs Gillan: I recently wrote to the Minister for Prisons, my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr Blunt), outlining my strong support for the siting of a new prison in North Wales where there is currently a shortfall in the number of prison places.

I understand that the Ministry of Justice is currently considering the various sites that have been recommended for a potential prison in North Wales. I will work closely with colleagues in the Ministry of Justice to ensure that implications for Wales are fully taken into account in the decision process.

EDUCATION

Departmental Billing

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of invoices from suppliers to his Department were paid within 10 days of receipt in *(a)* March and *(b)* April 2010. [1272]

Michael Gove: Since November 2010 the Department for Education has had a Shared Service Agreement with the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) which includes the Purchase to Pay function.

(a) The percentage of invoices paid within 10 days of receipt in March 2010 was 96%.

(b) The percentage of invoices paid within 10 days of receipt in April 2010 was 96%.

Departmental Official Residences

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether any domestic properties in the gift of the Government have been allocated to the use of Ministers in his Department. [1789]

Michael Gove: No Ministers in the Department for Education have been allocated any domestic properties in the gift of the Government.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Ed Balls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his policy is on maintaining present levels of funding for schools, Sure Start and 16 to 19 education in 2011-12. [1308]

Michael Gove: Funding for schools, Sure Start and 16 to 19 education have been protected in 2010-11. No decisions on spending in 2011-12 have been made, and they will be made at the spending review in the autumn. It is our priority to protect frontline services while taking steps to address the unprecedented challenge we face on deficit reduction.

Departmental Reorganisation

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much it cost to rename his Department. [2051]

Michael Gove: The re-naming of the Department for Education cost £5,250.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ed Balls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education for which policy areas each member of his ministerial team is responsible. [1293]

Michael Gove: I refer the right hon. Member to the list of ministerial responsibilities which can be found on the Department's website at:

http://www.education.gov.uk/team

Flags

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his policy is on flying the Union flag each day from each official building for which his Department is responsible. [1817]

Michael Gove: The Department for Education flies the Union flag every day of the year.

HEALTH

Breast Feeding

Mr Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent estimate has been made of the proportion of mothers who breastfeed their babies *(a)* in the Strelley/Broxstowe Sure Start area and *(b)* nationally. [2830]

Anne Milton: Currently Strelley Sure Start area is supported by the Nottingham City primary care trust (PCT) and Broxstowe Sure Start area is supported by the Nottingham County PCT. The following table shows

the number of mothers who initiated and sustained breastfeeding at six to eight weeks in both the PCTs and the national average.

Breastfeeding initiation and prevalence at six to eight weeks in 2009-10

Percentage

	Nottingham City PCT (Strelley)	*Nottingham County PCT (Broxstowe)*	*National average*
Breastfeeding initiation (Out turn 2009-10)	69	75.9	72.7
Breastfeeding prevalence—percentage of infants due a six to eight week check (Quarter 4 2009-10)	44.2	39.9	45.2

Carers: Finance

Laura Sandys: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will undertake a review of the level of support provided to carers with particular reference to carers who are pensioners. [2665]

Mr Burstow: In the following months, the Government will be carrying out a 'refresh' of the previous Government's Carers Strategy, focusing upon identifying the delivery of those actions that will have the greatest impact upon the lives of carers of all ages, including older carers. We will provide further details in due course.

Coroners: Children

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified paediatric pathologists were practising in each coroner's district in each of the last five years; how many pathologists are being trained to carry out specialist examinations on deceased children; what plans he has to increase the numbers of qualified paediatric pathologists; and if he will make a statement. [2981]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department does not collect information on the number of qualified paediatric pathologists in each coroner's district.

Specialist paediatric pathologists are not separately identified within the NHS Workforce Census and the Department does not collect data on the number of training places commissioned in this sub-specialty.

At present, there are no plans in place to increase the number of qualified paediatric pathologists.

Mental Health Services

Esther McVey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to increase the use of preventative measures to reduce the number of people developing mental health problems. [2876]

Mr Burstow: We will be assessing our priorities carefully and will announce details on mental health policy in due course. Our focus will be on making services patient-led, based on the best clinical evidence, responsive to patients' choice and management of their own care, and delivering best 'health' outcomes.

Palliative Care: Finance

Chris Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the capital allocation of £924,116 granted to Nottinghamshire Hospice to support the end of life care strategy will be made. [2962]

Mr Burstow: My right hon. Friend, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has announced today the outcome of the review of spending approved since 1 January 2010. As part of this review, capital allocations have now been approved for the 116 hospices which were announced by the Department in April 2010 as having been successful in applying for a share of the £40 million hospice capital grant for 2010-11. This includes Nottinghamshire Hospice.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Dangerous Dogs

Martin Horwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent seizing and kennelling dogs under section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 by *(a)* the Metropolitan Police and *(b)* police in England in each year since 2005. [2683]

Mr Paice *[holding answer 16 June 2010]:* A breakdown of the cost to the Metropolitan Police of kennelling dogs under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991[1] in each year since 2005 is provided in the following table:

[1] The figures in the table provide a breakdown of kennelling and care costs for all dogs, not just dogs seized under Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. However, over 85% of the dogs seized by the Metropolitan Police are done so under Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act.

Cost to Met Police of kennelling dogs

£

	Boarding	*Veterinary fees*	*Transport*	*Total*
2005-06	148,922.00	250.00	0.00	149,172.00
2006-07	403,185 18	1,340.00	0.00	404,525.18
2007-08	834,251.41	1,370.00	0.00	835,621.41
2008-09	1,253,401.03	17,677.89	5,198.00	1,276,276.92
2009-10	1,750,215.27	245,657.56	93,177.74	2,089,050.57

[1] The figures in the table provide a breakdown of kennelling and care costs for all dogs, not just dogs seized under Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. However, over 85% of the dogs seized by the Metropolitan Police are done so under Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act.

Source:

Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Status Dog Unit

The cost to police forces across England of kennelling dogs under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 in each year since 2005 cannot be provided because these figures are not held centrally.

The cost to the Metropolitan Police and to police across England of seizing dogs cannot be provided because use of police time is not recorded in this way.

Departmental Reviews

Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 137W, on Government Departments: reviews, what reviews her Department is undertaking; and what the *(a)* purpose and *(b)* timescale of each is. [2582]

Richard Benyon: The Coalition Agreement sets out in detail the Government's future plans, including the key reviews it will be undertaking. DEFRA will bring forward detailed information about these reviews in due course.

Eunomia Research and Consulting

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* title, *(b)* cost including value added tax and *(c)* subject was of each project commissioned from the consultancy Eunomia by (i) her Department, (ii) the Waste and Resources Action Programme and (iii) the Environment Agency since 2001; how much has been spent on Eunomia by each organisation in that period; and whether Eunomia is currently working on any projects for each organisation. [2977]

Richard Benyon: Since 2001, DEFRA has spent a total of £2,464,622.14 on projects commissioned from the consultancy, Eunomia. Due to the wide ranging nature of work, it would involve a disproportionate cost to identify individual projects, which have included many areas of work across DEFRA. Eunomia currently has a contract with DEFRA and the Department for Communities and Local Government to draft a protocol and guidance to improve the interface between environmental permitting and planning permission.

Data for individual projects are however available for those commissioned by the Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) and the Environment Agency.

Table 1 lists the title, subject and cost of work commissioned from Eunomia by WRAP. These are inclusive of VAT.

Table 2 shows completed outturn project expenditure to Eunomia by the Environment Agency between 2001 and 15 June 2010.

Currently, Eunomia is engaged on a single project for the Environment Agency, approved expenditure details of which are given in Table 3.

Table 1

Title	*Subject*	*Cost (£)*
Investment of growth	Investment for growth in the third sector	44,502.76
1st round R and D seminars	1st round R and D seminars	7,157.20
UK market development	UK market development	7,108.75
Promotion cost model	Development of a promotion cost model	2,167.88
Compost supply	Evaluation of compost supply and demand in south-east (incl. London) and east England	39,798.49
Peer review	Peer review: sink and sewer report	1,883.07
ROTATE specialists	Appointment of external specialists to support the work of ROTATE (2004-2006)	59,441.89
Kerbside good practice	Kerbside good practice guide	58,457.95
Mixed plastic collection	Mixed plastics collection practice and dissemination	80,068.48
Collecting gate fees	Collecting gate fees pilot study	40,806.54

Table 1

Title	*Subject*	*Cost (£)*
Gate fees survey[1]	Gate fees survey[1]	83,860.50
R and D trials	Improved segregation technologies	3,046.57
Project monitoring	Technical support—added value markets	5,184.01
Confidence in compost	Research to examine issues associated with the use of quality compost in agriculture	2,083.00
Use of compost in Europe[1]	European review: use of compost in agriculture[1]	31,015.62
Technical advice on TAD and AD	Technical support on anaerobic digestion	5,090.75
Options food waste	Options food waste processing into a product	40,355.13
Anaerobic digestion and TAD	Food waste	23,270.25
Speakers costs	development and delivery of a training resource for the UK organics waste recycling industry	2,633.32
Organics programme development	Advice on MBT	3,591.82
Peer review	Review of LCA estimator	13,879.69
Landfill bans research	The environmental, economic and practical impacts of landfill bans	115,939.97
External assessors	Regional market development fund—round one	5,349.78
ROTATE Northern Ireland	Kerbside options for the additions of biowaste collections	33,516.98
Consultancy support to ROTATE	Appointment of consultants to support the work of ROTATE (2006-08)	201,621.77
Food waste collection trials	Local authority food waste collection trials	21,572.66
Kerbside benchmarking	Benchmarking performance of kerbside collection	3,758.21
Stillage vehicle project	Kerbside recycling vehicle design and build project	1524.44
Local authority support—PFI projects	Support to Dorset Waste Partnership	28,986.88
LA support[1]	Local authority support—consultancy advice (2008-10)[1]	269,138.38
ROTATE Northern Ireland[1]	Support for local authorities in Northern Ireland[1]	86,649.56
Commercial food waste[1]	Collections of food waste from businesses[1]	38,140.10
Procurement guidance[1]	Review of the availability and type of waste collection service procurement guide[1]	19,864.00
Food waste trials	Surrey	22,415.88
Food waste trials	Guildford	2,226.07
Support to food waste collection	Support to food waste collection programme	6,837.97
Compost standards consultation	BSI PAS consultation and dissemination	34,344.09
	Grand total	1,427,290.41

[1] These projects are currently live.

Table 2

Area of Environment Agency	*Project title*	*Date purchase order approved*	*Value (excl. VAT) (£)*
Environment and business—business performance and regulation— industry regulation	Expert advice on using damage cost methodologies to help us make regulatory decisions. The contractors will review existing methods and data, determine whether they are appropriate to use for various regulatory purposes, produce guidelines for their use with worked examples and comment on limitations and uncertainties.	14 December 2009	12,000.00
Evidence Economics	Review of Sustainable Consumption and Production Network (SCPnet) activities, 2007-10	10 December 2009	9,032.03
Environment and business—land and natural environment—land quality	To review the cost benefit section of H1 and provide recommendations for updating	17 March 2008	6,000.00
	Subtotal excl. VAT		27,032.03
	VAT at 17.5%		4,730.61
	Total incl. VAT at 17.5%		31,762.64

Table 3

PO Number (Ref)	*Area of Environment Agency*	*Project title*	*Date purchase order approved*	*Value (excl. VAT)*
30260099	Environment and business—business performance and regulation partnerships	Waste protocols project—financial impact assessment of a quality protocol for waste wood	4 December 2009	27,755.10
		Subtotal excl. VAT		27,755.10
		VAT at 17.5%		4,857.14
		Total incl. VAT at 17.5%		32,612.24

Of this figure, £22,358.92 (exclusive of VAT) has been spent and invoiced as of 15 June 2010.

Floods: Sandwich

Laura Sandys: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will request the Environment Agency to report on the status and timing of the commencement of work on flood defence measures for Sandwich, Kent. [2662]

Richard Benyon: The Environment Agency is developing two flood defence schemes for the towns of Sandwich and Deal. Construction is expected to start in 2012, subject to other priorities for funding at the time. Both schemes are planned to be completed by 2015.

Basic information about all schemes can be found on the Environment Agency's website:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

at:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/118129.aspx

Hunting

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she plans to hold a public consultation on the effectiveness of the operation of the Hunting Act 2004. [3133]

Mr Paice: There are no plans to hold a public consultation on this issue.

Nanotechnology

Mr Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on nanotechnology; and from what budgets funding is drawn for implementation of that policy. [2472]

Mr Paice: We need to understand and manage any potential risks to the environment and maximise the environmental benefits which nanotechnologies may offer. DEFRA's Research & Development budget includes funds specifically for research into the environmental impacts of nanomaterials.

Mr Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much her Department plans to spend on nanotechnology in the next five years. [2473]

Mr Paice: In the current financial year £591,000 has already been committed for research into the environmental implications of nanomaterials. Departmental budgets for future years have not yet been decided.

Mr Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for the future role of nanotechnology in her Department's policies. [2474]

Mr Paice: Nanoscience has the potential to drive positive developments across many sectors of the agriculture and environment agenda. DEFRA will continue its work to promote the responsible development and safe use of nanotechnologies by prioritising research into those nanomaterials which pose a higher potential risk to the environment, in particular those which are currently available or close to the market. We will also continue to collaborate in national and global initiatives to develop tools to detect nanomaterials in the environment and assess their effects.

Poultry: Animal Welfare

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on implementing the EU prohibition on conventional battery cages for laying hens in January 2012. [1457]

Mr Paice: The welfare of laying hens is protected in England by the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) *Regulations 2007 and by similar legislation in Northern* Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The legislation implements EU Directive 99/74/EC, which among other welfare advances bans the use of conventional cages for laying hens from 2012.

The Government remain committed to the conventional cage ban coming into force on 1 January 2012 and to supporting industry during this transitional stage. We want to ensure that those UK producers who have already made significant investment to comply with the legislation, by converting out of conventional cages, are not disadvantaged if other countries do not meet the 2012 deadline.

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the ban on beak-trimming of laying hens will come into force. [2674]

Mr Paice *[holding answer 16 June 2010]:* The Government have accepted the advice of The Farm Animal Welfare Council, an independent advisory body, that a complete ban on beak trimming of laying hens should not be introduced from 1 January 2011 (as is currently in legislation), but should be deferred until it can be demonstrated reliably under commercial conditions that laying hens can be managed without routine beak trimming.

The Government's consultation on the proposed amendments to the Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007, to remove the total ban on beak trimming allowing for the routine beak trimming of day old chicks intended for laying to be carried out using the infra-red technique only, closed on 14 April. Consultation responses are currently being considered.

Jim Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to decide on whether to ban beak-trimming for laying hens. [2765]

Mr Paice: The Government have accepted the advice of The Farm Animal Welfare Council, an independent advisory body, that a complete ban on beak trimming of laying hens should not be introduced from 1 January 2011 (as is currently in legislation), but should be deferred until it can be demonstrated reliably under commercial conditions that laying hens can be managed without routine beak trimming.

The Government's consultation on the proposed amendments to the Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007, to remove the total ban on beak trimming allowing for the routine beak trimming of day old chicks intended for laying to be carried out using the infra-red technique only, closed on 14 April. Consultation responses are currently being considered.

River Lymington: Ferries

Mr Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of *(a)* the most recent estimate of adverse effects on the Lymington River Ramsar site by ferry operators and *(b)* the UK's compliance with the EU Habitats Directive. [976]

Richard Benyon: Responsibility for assessing the impact of the "W" class ferries rests with the competent authority, in this case Wightlink. In undertaking this assessment the competent authority is required by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 to have regard to the advice of Natural England. DEFRA has no formal role in the assessment process.

Natural England's most recent formal advice to DEFRA was that, in its view, no measurable harm or damage that would constitute an adverse effect on the integrity of the site had occurred since the "W" class ferry operation started on 25 February 2009 and, moreover, that any impacts arising from the operation of these ferries up to the spring of 2011, when works needed to mitigate the impact of the ferries are planned to start, would be insignificant and not likely to result in any measurable harm or damage.

I understand that Natural England remain of the view that provided Wightlink commences delivery of the mitigation measures by the spring of 2011, no adverse impact on the site from the operation of the new ferries will have occurred.

Mr Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will appoint a competent authority for the purposes of the impact assessments and environmental assessments to be initiated by Wightlink on the Lymington River; [977]

(2) what account she has taken of recent High Court rulings in the determination of a competent authority for projects in the Lymington River; and if she will make a statement. [2214]

Richard Benyon: Wightlink is regarded as a competent authority in relation to the operation of the ferries because it falls within the definition of such an authority in regulation 7 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (which came into force on 1 April). There are no provisions in these regulations that enable Wightlink to be replaced as the competent authority.

I am not aware of any court rulings that suggest that these regulations should be amended to provide a power for the Secretary of State to determine who should be regarded as a competent authority in a particular case.

Water: EU Law

George Hollingbery: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to *(a)* ensure compliance with the EU Water Framework Directive and *(b)* to protect freshwater resources. [2984]

Richard Benyon: The EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), which was transposed in 2003, raised the bar and introduced more challenging objectives for our

aquatic environment. It takes a more holistic approach to managing our waters, looking at the water within the wider ecosystem and taking into account the movement of water through the hydrological cycle.

The WFD contains two key objectives: to aim to achieve good status in all water bodies by 2015 and to ensure no water body deteriorates below its current classification. Where it is not possible to achieve good status by 2015, the WFD provides two further planning cycles (2015-21 and 2021-27) to achieve that objective, although this is subject to strict criteria.

In order to achieve the objectives we are required to put in place River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) which we achieved by the deadline within the WFD.

The first RBMPs were developed in consultation with interested organisations and individuals and were published on 22 December 2009. The plans set out how we will work towards meeting the WFD objectives and include over 8,500 investigations to be completed by the end of 2012. This will provide the evidence we require for further action within the first cycle and subsequent cycles to protect our freshwater resources.

The actions contained within the first plans will see more than 9,000 miles of rivers in England and Wales improved.

The Environment Agency protects freshwater resources by preventing deterioration from their current Water Framework Directive classifications. The Agency plans for and delivers sustainable licensed abstraction of water for economic and social needs and issues effective environmental permits to protect water bodies that receive discharges. The Agency also identifies and implements actions to improve the water environment including redressing the impacts of existing abstraction licences that damage the environment.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Anguilla

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 96W, on Anguilla, what decision has been reached in the work which has been undertaken with the government of Anguilla on the amount that government may borrow in each of the next three years. [2511]

Mr Bellingham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 96W. No new agreement on Anguilla's borrowing over the next three years has yet been reached.

British Overseas Territories: Equality

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 98W, on British Overseas Territories: equality, whether all new Overseas Territories constitutions will include explicit provision for freedom from discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. [2292]

Mr Bellingham: In any future constitutional review negotiations, the Government will continue to encourage the Overseas Territories to include, specifically, sexual orientation as a ground upon which discrimination is prohibited.

Where the Government have agreed a new constitution since 1999 a Bill of Rights is included in the Territory's constitution reflecting at a minimum the rights and freedoms set out in the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which prohibits discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation.

Climate Change: International Cooperation

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what public diplomacy work on climate change is being undertaken by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [2338]

Mr Bellingham: Our network of embassies and High Commissions are active in promoting publicly the benefits to Britain and the world of a transition to a low carbon high growth global economy.

They are involved in encouraging inward and outward trade and political visits and are working with NGOs and the media throughout the world to encourage the growing consensus amongst wider civil society that action on climate change should be taken.

High profile examples include the creation of a map showing the potential consequences of dangerous climate change and a four degree rise in global temperature which was released in seven languages globally.

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to promote a low carbon, high growth global economy; and if he will make a statement. [2339]

Mr Bellingham: Our network of embassies and High Commissions are actively engaged in setting out the urgency with which dangerous climate change should be tackled and the benefits to Britain and the world of a transition to a low carbon high growth global economy.

This includes working with business leaders in the UK and worldwide including via the World Economic Forum to make the case for action and highlight the opportunities for green economic growth, and supporting the case for active use of carbon capture and storage technology globally.

We also work with vulnerable and developing countries to help raise their voice in support of an ambitious global climate change deal which would underpin a low carbon economic transition worldwide.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the use by Ministers in his Department of cars allocated from *(a)* his Department's pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured in the UK; whether Ministers in his Department are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [2416]

Mr Bellingham: FCO Services, a Trading Fund of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office operates a small pool of vehicles and security cleared drivers used mainly for transportation of diplomatic bags and other classified material.

No Ministers currently use this pool of vehicles.

Ministerial use of such cars would be governed by the relevant guidelines set out in the ministerial code and would be based strictly on operational need. The make and model of car used and its country of manufacture would be dependent upon availability within the pool.

In relation to the use of vehicles from the Government car pool, I refer the hon. Member to the answers of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mike Penning), answer of 14 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 291W.

Departmental Official Hospitality

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what receptions have been hosted by his Department since he came to office; and what the cost was of each. [1730]

Mr Bellingham: Government Hospitality has arranged one reception for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office since the new Government were appointed. The Diplomatic Reception in honour of the Official Birthday of Her Majesty the Queen is traditionally held in early June, hosted by the Secretary of State, for members of the London Diplomatic Corps and key departmental contacts. This year the reception took place on 8 June, at a cost of approximately £22,968, compared with a cost of £28,000 in 2009. Any expenditure on business hospitality is kept under rigorous scrutiny to ensure value for money and effectiveness and that it is incurred in accordance with HM Treasury guidelines.

No central records are held of other receptions hosted across the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or at missions overseas, and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

Government Hospitality: Wines

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many bottles of wine in the Government wine cellar were personal gifts from a serving French President to a serving Prime Minister; and what the estimated monetary value is of each. [2297]

Mr Bellingham: Government Hospitality currently holds 15 bottles of wine that were given as gifts to former Prime Ministers by the President of the French Republic or the French Prime Minister. Government Hospitality does not record the value of gifts received by the Prime Minister's Office. The wines will be used on appropriate occasions in the future.

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the entries in the Government wine cellar database. [2307]

Mr Bellingham: The Government Hospitality (GH) wine database is an electronic management tool used by GH to record the use of stock in the Government wine cellar. It also records details of usage, pricing, charging prices, market values and comments by the Government Hospitality Advisory Committee for the Purchase of Wine on individual products. The database is not released into the public domain because of the likely impact on GH's commercial interests and those of its suppliers and future ability to obtain value for money.

Iran: Human Rights

Mrs Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support proposals to establish a human rights monitoring mechanism in relation to Iran, with particular reference to people of the Ba'hai faith; and if he will make a statement. [2976]

Alistair Burt: The Human Rights situation in Iran is deplorable and has deteriorated markedly since the disputed election result in June 2009. We are also deeply concerned by the situation of the Baha'i in Iran, including the trial of the seven Baha'i leaders. We continue to consider with international partners the most effective means of holding the Iranian authorities to account on their human rights record. This includes calling for visits by the UN special rapporteurs and seeking early implementation of the recommendations of Iran's Universal Periodic Review agreed in June.

Iran: Sanctions

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps at the United Nations he *(a)* has taken since his appointment and *(b)* plans to take in the next six months in response to allegations of (i) arming and (ii) funding by Iran of Hamas; and if he will make a statement. [2916]

Alistair Burt: Iranian support in the form of arming and funding of Hamas, and other Palestinian Rejectionist Groups, is unacceptable. It undermines international confidence in the Iranian regime's intentions, and is at odds with the regime's claim to the international community that it supports stability in the Middle East.

Hamas continue to pursue an ideology of violence and directly undermine prospects for peace in the region. We call on them to take immediate and concrete steps towards the Quartet principles.

A number of issues related to the Middle East are discussed on a monthly basis at the UN. The UK will continue to push for the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1860 which aims to prevent the illicit trafficking of arms into Gaza. We will continue giving our full support to the UN Sanctions Committee in pursuing and investigating sanctions violations.

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of sanctions against Iran by the United Nations Security Council. [2993]

Alistair Burt: We assess that sanctions so far have slowed down Iran's progress on the nuclear programme, including by increasing the difficulty of procurement of

sensitive items that could be used in the nuclear programme. The latest sanctions resolution makes the choice between the benefits of re-engaging on the nuclear portfolio and the cost of ignoring international opinion starker, and will strengthen the voices of those in Iran who recognise the bleakness of Iran's future if it does not change its policy.

Mexico: Oil

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss with the Government of Mexico plans to amend laws governing drilling for oil in the Gulf of Mexico. [1382]

Mr Jeremy Browne: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no current plans to discuss with the Mexican Government the amendment of laws governing drilling for oil in the Gulf of Mexico.

Our embassy in Mexico City has been in contact with the Mexican Government regarding possible future joint projects with Mexico's state-owned petroleum company PEMEX in the Gulf of Mexico. The embassy will continue to liaise with the Mexican Government on those plans and to identify possible opportunities for UK companies.

Overseas Students: Scholarships

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which British embassies operate a bursary scheme for foreign students to study in the UK. [2265]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office offers Chevening scholarships to most countries except the EU and the US; Marshall scholarships to the US; and Chevening fellowships globally, including the EU and the US. In 2009-10 Chevening scholarships were offered through 112 British embassies or high commissions and through the governor's offices in three Overseas Territories.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

British Constitution

Mr Bain: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he plans to bring forward proposals for the adoption of a written constitution for the United Kingdom. [2164]

Mr Harper: The British constitution is not, as it is in many countries, codified in a single document, although much of it is already written. It is made up of a complex web of statutes, conventions, and a corpus of common and other law. It is also informed by an interweaving of history and more modern democratic principles. There are no current plans to bring forward proposals for the adoption of a codified constitution for the United Kingdom.

Cabinet Committees: Nuclear Weapons

Mr Watson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he next expects the Cabinet Committee on Nuclear Deterrence and Security to meet. [236]

Mr Letwin: I have been asked to reply.

The National Security Council has agreed the formation of a sub-committee to consider issues relating to nuclear deterrence and security. The date of the first meeting has not yet been finalised, but it is anticipated it will take place shortly.

Departmental Pay

Tom Brake: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much was paid in bonuses to civil servants in his Department in *(a)* 2008-09 and *(b)* 2009-10. [2183]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 15 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 416W.

Parliamentary Privilege

Mr Bain: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the scope will be of his proposed review of the law on parliamentary privilege; and if he will make a statement. [2169]

Mr Harper: The Queen's Speech outlined the Government's intention to publish a draft Bill on reforming parliamentary privilege. The draft Bill will set out reforms to the law on parliamentary privilege to clarify its extent and application.

Royal Prerogative

Mr Bain: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he plans to review the operation of the executive prerogative powers of the Crown. [2170]

Mr Harper: There are no current plans to review the executive prerogative powers of the Crown.

Voting Rights: Prisoners

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to introduce rights to vote at elections for prisoners. [2772]

Mr Harper: The Government are considering afresh the best way forward on the issue of prisoner voting rights.

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Information Officers

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what budget has been established for the proposed Coalition Press Office. [395]

Mr Maude: The Cabinet Office Board and Ministers are reviewing budgets in line with Government priorities.

Departmental Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the URL is of each website managed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each non-departmental public body and agency for which his Department is responsible. [2361]

Mr Maude: The information is as follows:

List of URLs for the websites managed by:

(a) Cabinet Office

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk
www.civilservice.gov.uk
www.data.gov.uk
www.number10.gov.uk
www.hmg.gov.uk
www.fundingcentral.org.uk
www.commonsleader.gov.uk
www.leaderofthelords.gov.uk
www.lordswhips.org.uk

(b) Non-departmental public bodies and agencies for which Cabinet Office is responsible

http://acoba.independent.gov.uk/
http://lordsappointments.independent.gov.uk
www.civilserviceappealboard.gov.uk
www.public-standards.gov.uk
www.thecompact.org.uk
www.iraqinquiry.org.uk
www.capacitybuilders.org.uk
www.improvingsupport.org.uk
www.civilservicecommissioners.org
www.publicappointmentscommissioner.org

It is our aim to reduce radically the number of websites.

Departmental Press: Subscriptions

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the answer of 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 52W, on purchasing of PR Week, for how many staff members Chartered Institute of Public Relations membership fees are paid by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [1945]

Mr Maude: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 52W.

Departmental Security

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps are taken to protect the security of the *(a)* mobile telephone, *(b)* personal digital assistant and *(c)* computer equipment issued to staff in No. 10 Downing Street. [2593]

Mr Maude: There is a range of technical, procedural and people-related measures put in place to protect the security of mobile telephone, personal digital assistant and computer equipment issued to staff in No. 10 Downing Street in line with Government security policy and standards.

Departmental Travel

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the answer of 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 50W, on departmental travel, if he will publish the disaggregated figures which are available; and when he expects the budget profiling exercise to be completed. [1944]

Mr Maude: The budget profiling exercise will be completed after the Cabinet Office Board and Ministers have reviewed the options for revised budgets, in line with the new priorities for the Government.

Electoral Register: Greater Manchester

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what estimate has been made of the number of people eligible to vote not registered to vote in *(a)* the County of Greater Manchester, *(b)* the Metropolitan Borough of Stockport and *(c)* the Metropolitan Borough of Tameside. [2313]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated June 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your question asking what estimate has been made of the number of people eligible to vote not registered to vote in *(a)* the County of Greater Manchester, *(b)* the Metropolitan Borough of Stockport and *(c)* the Metropolitan Borough of Tameside. (2313)

ONS does not have the data required to answer your question. Data are collected on the number of UK citizens resident in local authorities who are registered to vote, but no data are collected on the number of people who are eligible to vote but who choose not to register.

The ONS population estimates are of the resident population and will include some people who are not eligible to vote.

Foreign Workers: EU Nationals

Mr MacShane: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many EU nationals working in the UK *(a)* entered and *(b)* left the country in each month since May 2004. [1888]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated June 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning how many EU nationals working in the UK (a) entered and (b) left the country in each month since May 2004. (1888)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes annual estimates of migrants entering and leaving the UK. The attached table provides estimates of migration by KU citizens, where the main reason is for work related reasons, for each year since 2004. These estimates are based on the International Passenger Survey (IPS). The IPS is a sample survey and cannot provide monthly estimates of migration.

Please note that the migration estimates provided only cover those visiting or leaving the UK for periods of twelve months or more. They will therefore exclude those entering or leaving the UK for less than twelve months. Also note that not all those travelling for work related reasons will find work in the UK. Similarly, those who travel for other purposes may subsequently work.

These estimates are of numbers of moves each year rather than numbers of people. For instance, an individual could enter in one year, leave just over a year later and then enter again a year after that. They would appear three times in this table.

Long-Term International Migration, estimates from International Passenger Survey: annual data, 2004-08

Citizenship by main reason for migration (work related reasons only)

United Kingdom (thousand)

Year	Citizenship	All work related[2] Estimate	%	Definite job[1] Estimate	%	Looking for work[1] Estimate	%
Inflow							
2004	British	37	11	15	19	22	13
	Other EU25	65	14	51	16	14	*29*
2005	British	48	13	23	21	25	15
	Other EU25	86	12	62	14	24	22
2006	British	31	14	16	18	15	21
	Other EU25	83	12	55	15	28	20
2007	British	32	12	14	19	18	17
	Other EU27	125	11	93	13	32	19
2008	British	42	12	23	17	18	17
	Other EU27	99	11	70	13	29	19
Outflow							
2004	British	63	9	40	11	22	16
	Other EU25	17	19	8	*28*	9	*27*
2005	British	71	9	52	10	20	15
	Other EU25	21	21	13	*28*	7	*30*
2006	British	81	9	57	11	24	14
	Other EU25	25	21	9	*28*	16	*28*
2007	British	74	8	53	10	21	17
	Other EU27	35	16	14	22	21	23
2008	British	90	10	72	13	19	12
	Other EU27	53	16	26	17	27	*27*

Notes:

1. Migration between the UK and the Republic of Ireland is included in IPS estimates for 2008 but excluded for previous years.
2. Conditional formatting has been applied to the standard error percentages. A migration figure with a standard error of >25% is not considered to be reliable and is in italics.

$$\% = \frac{\text{standard error}}{\text{estimate}} \times 100$$

Ministers: Codes of Practice

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the answer of 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 51W, on Ministers: codes of practice, how many Ministers have *(a)* returned and *(b)* not returned letters to his Department confirming that (i) they have read the code of conduct and (ii) that their personal circumstances are not such that they breach the code. [1947]

Mr Maude: As usual, a list of Ministers' relevant interests will be published. This will be done in due course.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the answer of 3 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 52W, on non-departmental public bodies, if he will publish the names and addresses of all non-departmental public bodies and agencies in a single location. [2267]

Mr Maude: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 14 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 332W.

Office for National Statistics: Publications

Mr Watson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make it his policy to ensure that all national statistics are published in a machine-readable open format. [1934]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Jil Matheson, dated 11 June 2010:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question asking if the Minister for the Cabinet Office will make it his policy to ensure that all National Statistics are published in a machine readable open format.

Current policy on the release of National Statistics, as outlined in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, states that statistics should be disseminated in a form that enables and encourages analysis and re-use. Also, that datasets and reference databases should be released in formats that are convenient to users.

Recently, the Office for National Statistics opened up access for web developers to over two billion data items right down to local neighbourhood level, incorporating data from across the Government Statistical Service.

The official statistics Publication Hub provides a single point of access to all published National Statistics and, in support of the drive to improve public accessibility to data, we continue to work closely with the Cabinet Office to feed National and Official

Statistics directly to data.gov.uk via the Publication Hub. Indeed, a significant proportion of entries on data.gov.uk are Official Statistics.

We are continuing to invest in improving the accessibility of official statistics and consider this an important part of the official statistics agenda.

Public Sector: Manpower

Mr Redwood: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many employees there are in the UK public sector. [2128]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated June 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning, how many employees there are in the UK public sector. (2128)

Estimates of employment for the UK public sector are published on a quarterly basis by the Office for National Statistics. The latest date for which information is available is March 2010.

The number of UK public sector employees as at March 2010 was 6.090 million.

Wales

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office with reference to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement of 24 May 2010 and pursuant to the answer of 7 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 69W, on public expenditure: Wales, which of his Department's non-devolved public expenditure savings will be incurred in Wales; and what estimate he has made of the likely financial savings. [2966]

Mr Maude: The information requested is not available centrally and therefore is available only at disproportionate cost. The Cabinet Office's share of the public expenditure savings has been recorded in the HM Treasury COINS database.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Air Conditioning

Gordon Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what proportion of air conditioning systems operating at over 250 kilowatts had been inspected for energy efficiency by 4 January 2009; and what proportion of such systems operating at over 12 kilowatts had been inspected on the most recent date for which figures are available. [2610]

Andrew Stunell: The information is not currently available. Air conditioning inspections are not currently lodged onto the England and Wales non-domestic energy performance register on a mandatory basis.

Gordon Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what assessment he has made of the adequacy of arrangements for local authority trading standards officers to monitor the inspection of the energy efficiency of air conditioning systems. [2611]

Andrew Stunell: This Department has calculated that an additional 171 trading standards officers would be needed across England and Wales to enforce compliance with all energy efficiency regulations including the inspection of air conditioning systems. Additional funds were allocated to local authorities to recognise the new duties imposed by the Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspections) (England and Wales) Regulations 2007.

Gordon Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the average cost to businesses of compliance with the arrangements for inspecting the energy efficiency of air conditioning systems. [2612]

Andrew Stunell: This Department has estimated that the average cost of air conditioning system inspections over a five year period would be about £600 for complex systems and about £75-£100 for packaged units.

Gordon Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the likely reduction in emissions from the use of air conditioning systems arising from full compliance with regulations for their inspection. [2613]

Andrew Stunell: The Regulatory Impact Assessment of Energy Performance of Buildings Directive Articles 7-10, The Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspections) (England and Wales) Regulations 2007 estimated that there would be savings of approximately 930,000 metric tonnes of carbon during the period from 2008-20.

Fire Services

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether he plans to continue with the FireControl project; and what assessment he has made of the effects of the project on *(a)* the quality of service offered by control rooms and *(b)* the staffing levels of control centres in (i) England and (ii) the West Midlands. [2773]

Robert Neill: The previous Government's FiReControl project has been subject to delays and increasing costs.

We are looking closely at this project to establish what we can do to improve the situation. We are committed to ensuring value-for-money for the taxpayer, improving resilience and stopping the forced regionalisation of the fire service.

We will carefully consider the implications of any decisions before announcing the next steps.

Responsibility for providing an effective call handling and mobilisation service remains the responsibility of local fire and rescue authorities, including ensuring adequate staffing levels.

Housing: Regeneration

Gordon Birtwistle: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the cost to the public purse has been of the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder programme in each year since 2008. [2926]

Andrew Stunell: Totals for 2007-08 to 2009-10 are given in the following table:

	HMR funding (£ million)
2007-08	405
2008-09	381
2009-10	346

The Housing Market Renewal Programme was included in the £6.2 billion of savings from Government spending in 2010-11 announced on 24 May. The budget for 2010-11 announced in December 2009 has been reduced by £50 million. The mechanism by which this reduction is achieved will be subject to consultation and individual allocations for 2010-11 will be confirmed after the emergency Budget is completed on June 22.

Land Use: Agriculture

Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will issue revised planning guidance to prevent the development of the best and most versatile farmland in all but exceptional circumstances. [2493]

Robert Neill: The Government will publish and present to Parliament a simple and consolidated national planning policy framework setting out our national economic, environmental and social priorities. An announcement on how we propose to take forward the national framework and the implications for specific areas of planning policy will be made in due course.

The protection of a valuable national resource such as good quality farmland is clearly an appropriate topic to include in the national framework.

Local Authority Business Growth Incentives Scheme

Chris Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has to replace the Local Authority Business Growth Initiative. [2965]

Robert Neill: The Government have confirmed that it will provide incentives for local authorities to deliver sustainable development, including for businesses. We are considering how we will take this forward.

Local Development Frameworks

Laura Sandys: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will undertake a review of local development frameworks in light of the ending of regional spatial strategies. [2664]

Robert Neill: The Secretary of State has already signalled the Government's intention to revoke the regional spatial strategies and he has written to all local planning authorities and the Planning Inspectorate to remind them that this emerging policy is a material consideration in dealing with applications and appeals. We will be providing more details on our proposals and the implication of the abolition of regional spatial strategies, for local development frameworks soon but it is our intention that local authorities should be able to revise their local development framework to reflect this change.

The coalition agreement also included a commitment to radically reform the planning system and give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of places in which their inhabitants live. In the light of this we will review some elements of the local development framework system itself to ensure it reflects our policy on decentralisation and a simpler planning system.

Local Government Finance

Chris Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what assessment he has made of the future of the local area agreement process following changes he announced to Reward Grant Funding; and if he will make a statement. [2964]

Robert Neill: We are committed to a radical devolution of power and financial autonomy to local government and community groups. The future of local area agreements will be considered in this context and we will make further announcements in due course.

Local Government Finance: Barnsley

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the likely change to his Department's capital investment allocation for Barnsley in *(a)* percentage and *(b)* cash terms in 2010-11; and if he will make a statement. [2974]

Robert Neill: The announcement on 24 May set out the immediate savings of over £6 billion that needed to be made as down-payment on the public deficit. We continue to review the position on all budgets and any further decisions on funding for 2010-11 will be taken at the Emergency Budget on 22 June. A full review of capital projects will be undertaken once the final funding position for 2010-11 is clear.

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the likely change to his Department's aggregate external finance allocation for Barnsley in *(a)* percentage and *(b)* cash terms in 2010-11; and if he will make a statement. [2975]

Robert Neill: I refer the hon. Member to the written ministerial statement which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State laid in the House on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 15-17 WS.

Local Government: Manpower

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his most recent assessment is of the effect on staffing levels of *(a)* Tameside metropolitan borough council and *(b)* Stockport metropolitan borough council of the implementation of the local government savings programme. [2850]

Robert Neill: We have asked local authorities to make a contribution of £1.166 billion to the £6.2 billion of cross Government savings in 2010-11 to enable the Government to take immediate action to start to tackle the fiscal deficit. Local government are free to make their own decisions about where savings are found. We have ensured that councils have the flexibility to take decisions locally on how to deliver the savings needed without impacting on essential frontline services.

Mayors

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he expects to announce the 12 English cities which he is to propose should have an elected mayor. [2861]

Robert Neill: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 239W.

Non-domestic Rates: Empty Property

Grahame M. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether he plans to retain the £18,000 rateable value below which empty property rates are not payable; and if he will make a statement. [3151]

Robert Neill: We will keep this matter under review.

Planning

Joan Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether the Government plan to implement the draft Planning Policy Statement on *(a)* Planning for a Healthy and Natural Environment and *(b)* Planning for a Low Carbon Future. [2659]

Robert Neill: The Government will publish and present to Parliament a simple and consolidated national planning policy framework setting out our national economic, environmental and social priorities. An announcement on how we propose to take forward the national framework and the implications for specific areas of planning policy will be made in due course.

Social Rented Housing: Finance

Jonathan Reynolds: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer of 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 454, on affordable housing, whether the £170 million of funding announced by the Government for social rented housing is in addition to funding agreed by the previous administration. [2930]

Andrew Stunell: Given the unprecedented size of the budget deficit we have had to identify savings across Government. We have identified £6.2 billion of savings this year as announced on 24 May. As part of this Treasury identified some £500 million by recycling efficiency savings, and have used £170 million of this to safeguard delivery of social rented homes.

The previous Government made commitments that were not fully and securely funded. This includes a total £780 million towards housing priorities including towards the Housing Pledge. In order to address this, and emphasising Government's commitment to housing provision, Government made £170 million available to safeguard delivery of around 4,000 otherwise unfunded social rented homes to start on site this year, protecting 3,500 jobs and prioritising provision for the most vulnerable.

The Homes and Communities Agency will not enter into any new or further commitments against its uncommitted budgets until the position is clarified at the Budget on 22 June. We are working with colleagues in HMT to secure the necessary funding at Budget and the HCA will continue with committed programmes as usual.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Accidents: EU Law

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what progress has been made in complying with the European Union requirement under Article 18 section 2b of Regulation (EC) No. 765/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council, with regard to reporting of injury statistics; and if he will make a statement. [2699]

Mr Prisk: Discussions have been taking place in the European Commission's advisory group (the Senior Officials Group on Standardisation's ad hoc Market Surveillance Group) involving BIS officials, the Commission and other Member States with a view to developing a consistent approach towards implementation of the article 18(2b) provision. They have highlighted the need for the Commission to take the lead in developing a Europe-wide consensus on the correct understanding and application of the provision. We understand that the services of the Commission are sympathetic to this approach and would like to take it forward possibly via a multi-annual programme for market surveillance.

This Department will play a full part in helping to establish a consensus and in doing so will take account of other developments taking place in the United Kingdom and across the European Union on the collection of injury statistics.

Advantage West Midlands

Christopher Pincher: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many people are employed by Advantage West Midlands; how many people compose the non-executive Board of Advantage West Midlands; and what the total cost to the public purse of payments to *(a)* employees and *(b)* Board members is to date. [2852][1]

Mr Prisk: The following tables show:

(a) Number of and cost of employees

	Number/£
Number of employees headcount (full-time equivalent (322))	346
Cost (£)	18,358,000

Staff numbers are as at the snapshot reference date 31 March 2010 and cost is for the financial year 2009-10. Costs for payroll employees are defined as pay bill i.e. salary, ERNICs and pension; and

(b) Number of and cost of board members

	Number/£
Number of board members (including chair)	15
Cost (£)	231,412

Board member costs are from the 2008-09 financial year and include chair pension costs and board travel expenses. Board members now receive a remuneration of £8,666 per annum for minimum of two days per month with no pension entitlement.

The chair receives a remuneration of £81,718 per annum for three days a month and receives a pension.

Under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 an RDA board must have 15 members with the majority being business positions.

1. *[Official Report, 29 June 2010, Vol. 512, c. 3MC.]*

Apprentices

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) how many people in *(a)* Wigan constituency, *(b)* the North West region and *(c)* England started an apprenticeship in each of the last five years; [1648]

(2) how many people in *(a)* Wigan constituency, *(b)* the North West region and *(c)* England started an advanced apprenticeship in each of the last five years; [1649]

(3) how many people in *(a)* Wigan constituency, *(b)* the North West region and *(c)* England started a higher apprenticeship in each of the last five years. [1650]

Mr Hayes: Table 1 shows the number of Apprenticeship (Level 2) Programme Starts, table 2 shows the number of Advanced Apprenticeship (Level 3) Programme Starts and table 3 shows the number of Higher Level Apprenticeship (Level 4) Programme Starts in Wigan Parliamentary Constituency, the North West Government Office Region and England for years 2004-05 to 2008-09, the most recent year for which full year data is available.

Table 1: Apprenticeship (Level 2) Programme Starts by Geography for 2004-05 and 2008-09

	2004-05	*2005-06*	*2006-07*	*2007-08*	*2008-09*
Wigan Parliamentary Constituency	260	250	290	380	300
North West	23,600	20,400	21,700	23,800	23,600
England	135,100	122,800	127,400	151,800	158,500

Table 2: Advanced Apprenticeship (Level 3) Programme Starts by Geography for 2004-05 and 2008-09

	2004-05	*2005-06*	*2006-07*	*2007-08*	*2008-09*
Wigan Parliamentary Constituency	140	120	130	170	160
North West	9,700	9,200	10,500	11,700	12,900
England	53,900	52,100	56,900	72,900	81,300

Table 3: Higher Level Apprenticeship (Level 4) Programme Starts by Geography for 2004-05 and 2008-09

	2004-05	*2005-06*	*2006-07*	*2007-08*	*2008-09*
Wigan Parliamentary Constituency	—	—	—	—	—
North West	—	—	—	—	—
England	—	—	100	100	200

Notes

1. Figures for Wigan Parliamentary Constituency are rounded to the nearest ten. All other figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Figures are based upon home postcode of the learner.
3. '—' Indicates a base value of less than five for Parliamentary Constituency and less than fifty for Government Office Region and England.
4. The England figure contains a small amount of counts where the postcode of the learner is outside England and also learners where the postcode is not known.

Source:
Individualised Learner Record

Information on the number of Apprenticeship starts by Parliamentary Constituency, Local Authority, Government Office Region and for England is published in a quarterly statistical first release (SFR). The latest SFR was published on 24 March, and revised on 22 April:

http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/sfrmar10

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many of the apprenticeship places announced since May 2010 are to be allocated to each region; and if he will make a statement. [3286]

Mr Hayes: Our announcement on 24 May that, of the £6.2 billion savings for 2010-11, a total of £150 million will be recycled to support capacity for 50,000 extra apprenticeship places demonstrates our commitment to high-quality skills.

The Skills Funding Agency operates a national system to fund post-19 further education and training, there are no regional allocations. The expectation is that colleges and training organisations will look to make available additional apprenticeship places where there is local demand.

Arts: North East

Grahame M. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what his policy is on the provision of support to the creative sector in the North East. [2272]

Mr Prisk: The creative industries are an important contributor to the UK economy. It is essential to ensure that we create the right conditions for the creative industries to be able to innovate and grow.

Better Regulation Executive: Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many ideas for better regulation have been submitted to his Department through the Better Regulation Executive web pages since 7 May 2010. [2806]

Mr Prisk: Since 7 May 2010, 13 suggestions have been received through the Better Regulation Executive's suggestions tool, which is now located on the Business Link website (as at 15 June 2010).

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many unique visits have been made to the Better Regulation Executive web pages since 7 May 2010. [2807]

Mr Prisk: Since 7 May 2010, there have been 31,830 individual sessions on the Better Regulation Executive's web pages, now part of the Business Link website (as at 15 June 2010).

A 'session' is defined as a series of clicks on the site by an individual visitor during a specific period of time. A session is initiated when the visitor arrives at the site, and it ends when the browser is closed or there is a period of inactivity.

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how much it cost his Department to maintain the Better Regulation Executive web pages in the latest period for which figures are available. [2808]

Mr Prisk: The Better Regulation Executive's web pages are now incorporated into the Business Link website.

Hosting for the Better Regulation Executive's web pages (including the impact assessment library and the suggestions tool) currently costs £6,220 per year (April 2010 to April 2011).

Broadband

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what definition of the term super fast broadband he uses. [2831]

Mr Vaizey: Super fast broadband means broadband of sufficient speed and quality to deliver the services that will lead to Britain having the best broadband network in Europe. The technology used to deliver this could be fixed or wireless but will represent a significant upgrade on today's fixed and wireless networks.

Broadband: Rural Areas

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what plans he has to expand the provision of broadband in rural areas. [1470]

Mr Vaizey: As stated in the coalition's joint programme for Government, we will seek to introduce superfast broadband in remote areas at the same time as in more populated areas. On 8 June, the Secretary of State for Culture, the Olympics, Media and Sport set out the Government's plans for ensuring the UK has the best superfast broadband network in Europe by the end of the Parliament. These plans include enabling access to existing infrastructure to reduce the cost of deployment. Further, the Secretary of State proposed three market testing projects schemes for superfast broadband in rural areas. The Secretary of State's full speech can be read at:

http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/ministers_speeches/7132.aspx

As a first step towards this ambition, the Government are also committed to making a service level of 2Mbps available in towns and villages still without a basic level of access. The office charged with delivering this universal service commitment, Broadband Delivery UK, will be holding an industry event in July to provide further information on the approach to meeting the 2Mbps service commitment and the market testing schemes.

Conditions of Employment

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which section of his Department is responsible for policy on *(a)* Royal Mail and *(b)* the review of employment law. [2857]

Mr Davey: Officials within the Shareholder Executive are responsible for the Government's shareholder interests in Royal Mail, and officials within the Information Economy Directorate are responsible for the regulatory framework for UK postal services.

Officials within the Department's Employment Relations Directorate and the Better Regulation Executive will consider the detail of the approach to reviewing employment laws, alongside other colleagues from other Government Departments.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what representations he has received on his Department's review of employment law to date. [2858]

Mr Davey: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and other BIS Ministers have had several meetings with business and employee representatives to discuss a range of issues, including employment law.

Copyright: Art Works

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills when he plans to extend the artist's resale right to the estates of deceased artists. [2113]

Mr Davey: The Artist's Resale Right (Amendment) Regulations 2009 delayed until 1 January 2012 the application of the Artist's Resale Right Regulations 2006 to the estates of deceased artists in the UK.

Resale right will be payable on sales of works by deceased artists in accordance with the requirements of the 2006 regulations where the contract date for the sale is on or after 1 January 2012.

Debt Relief Orders

Dr Thérèse Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will review the eligibility criteria for the establishment of a debt relief order for the purposes of removing the criterion relating to funds held in a pension fund which are not accessible prior to retirement. [2903]

Mr Davey: A consultation issued in March, which is available on The Insolvency Service's website, invited views on this issue. Debt Relief Orders are aimed at the most vulnerable, and the consultation asked whether those with a pension fund should be eligible for this form of debt relief. I will consider this issue in the light of responses to the consultation.

Departmental Mobile Phones

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which Ministers in his Department have been issued with *(a)* a Blackberry, *(b)* an iPhone, *(c)* another make of mobile telephone and *(d)* a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1419]

Mr Davey: The Department has issued the following Ministers with Blackberrys:

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable)

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Universities and Science (Mr Willetts)

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Business, Enterprise, Deregulation and Better Regulation (Mr Prisk)

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment Relations, Consumer and Postal Affairs (Mr Davey)

My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Baroness Wilcox)

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Mr Hayes) has been issued with a mobile phone.

The Department does not issue iPhones or personal digital assistants.

Higher Education

Mr Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which universities each Minister in his Department has visited since their appointment. [1896]

Mr Willetts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills has visited the university of Glasgow.

I have visited the university of Birmingham and Oxford Brookes university.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Business and Enterprise has visited Coventry university.

Manufacturing Industries: Government Assistance

Jonathan Reynolds: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he plans to take to support the manufacturing sector. [2869]

Mr Prisk: The Government fully recognise the importance of manufacturing, and its role in achieving a balanced economy. Working with business we want to create a supportive environment for growth that will encourage innovation, exports and business investment. In particular we will consider the implementation of the Dyson Review and how this can help make the UK the leading high-tech exporter in Europe. We will decide on the best framework for manufacturing policy shortly, recognising that we are living in a world of financial constraint.

Northwest Regional Development Agency: Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills pursuant to his answer of 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 234-36W, on the North West Regional Development Agency: Wigan, which of the projects have been allocated funding on *(a)* an ongoing and *(b)* a single grant basis. [2814]

Mr Prisk: All of the grants outlined in my earlier answer are single, time limited grant agreements, some of which may be spread over several financial years. The exception is funding to the Coalfields Regeneration Programme (Bickershaw Colliery Estate management costs) which forms part of the ongoing costs associated with the project.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills to which projects in the Wigan local authority area the North West Regional Development Agency is considering allocating funding in financial year 2010-11. [2855]

Mr Prisk: For 2010-11 the following project has received concept agreement but has not yet been fully appraised or approved:

Parsonage Colliery Phase.

For 2010-11 the following pre-pipeline projects are under consideration by NWDA. No corporate decision has been made, and there is no confirmation whether these will proceed further:

Project Nice;

Wigan On Side Centre, Mesnes Park;

Turnpike Centre, Leigh; and

365-E Land Martland Park, Wigan.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which projects in the Wigan local authority area have been allocated funding by the North West Regional Development Agency in financial year 2010-11. [2856]

Mr Prisk: The information is as follows:

Project name	*LA district*	*Forecast spend 2010-11 (£)*
Wigan: Martland Park	Wigan	40,000
Wigan: Bickershaw Colliery, off Plank Lane, Leigh	Wigan	6,768,502
Wigan: Sandyforth Farm Phase 2 restoration	Wigan	62,810
Wigan-Leigh Sports Village	Wigan	14,684
Computonics Ltd (SFI)	Wigan	362,160
Cheinviron Carbon Limited	Wigan	30,000
Octagon Communications Ltd	Wigan	16,000
Martin Yaffe International Ltd	Wigan	174,572
Leigh Town Centre Masterplan	Wigan	50,000
Bradford Pharma Ltd 2nd App	Wigan	46,052
Value Works Ltd	Wigan	182,850
Nutrisport Ltd	Wigan	168,900
Business Start Up (Phase II)—Wigan	Wigan	9,175
XpertRule Software Ltd	Wigan	65,962
Flavours & Essences Ltd	Wigan	90,000
Optima Interiors Ltd	Wigan	39,683
atg UV Technology Limited 2	Wigan	58,074

Post Offices

Stephen Gilbert: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many post office branches have become Post Office Essentials branches in the last 12 months. [2828]

Mr Davey: Post Office Ltd's Essential model is a pilot format that incorporates a range of Post Office services into an existing retailer's offer. Post Office Ltd is currently operating 48 Post Office Essential pilots.

Stephen Gilbert: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what criteria are used in determining whether to change post office branches into Post Office Essentials branches. [2829]

Mr Davey: I have asked David Smith, the managing director of Post Office Ltd, to respond directly to my hon. Friend and a copy of his reply will be placed in the House Libraries.

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will extend the Network Subsidy Scheme beyond 2011. [3284]

Mr Davey: The Government fully recognise the important social and economic role of post offices in the communities they serve. The Government are committed to making a social network payment to support the network in 2011-12, subject to state aid clearance from the European

Commission. The Government are working with Post Office Ltd on funding requirements for the network beyond 2012.

Post Offices: Bank Services

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what his policy is on establishing a Postbank. [3285]

Mr Davey: We have been clear in "The Coalition: our programme for government" that we will ensure that Post Offices are allowed to offer a wide range of services in order to sustain the network, and will look at the case for developing new sources of revenue, such as the creation of a Post Office Bank.

Regional Development Agencies

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what savings his Department requires *(a)* Yorkshire Forward and *(b)* each other regional development agency to make in the next three financial years; [2822]

(2) what guidance he has given to regional development agencies on the areas in which they should consider making budgetary savings; [2823]

(3) what *(a)* process and *(b)* timetable has been established for regional development agencies to submit proposals for implementing budgetary savings; [2824]

(4) whether Ministers are required to approve individual proposals for budgetary savings proposed by regional development agencies; [2825]

(5) what priority each regional development agency has given to expenditure on *(a)* research and development, *(b)* manufacturing and *(c)* support for redundancies in their proposals for implementing budgetary savings; [2809]

(6) what plans each regional development agency has to publish its plans for implementing budgetary savings. [2810]

Mr Prisk: No final decisions have been made on the allocation of the £270 million budget savings between the regional development agencies. We will be writing to RDAs about the allocation shortly. We will then work with the RDA network to minimise the impact on priority programmes. Stakeholders and delivery partners involved in affected programmes and projects will be kept fully informed as specific decisions are made.

UK Trade and Investment: Finance

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what funding allocation his Department made to UK Trade and Investment for *(a)* 2009-10 and *(b)* 2010-11; and what allocation it plans to make for 2011-12. [2990]

Mr Prisk: UKTI is a non-ministerial Government Department, funded from the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and with its own Vote. FCO resources primarily funds people based overseas, BIS resource funds UK based people and UKTI's own resource pays for grants and third party delivery of services to business.

BIS funding for 2009-10 was: £44.2 million. The original budget allocation for 2010-11 is £42.9 million. However, the final budget for 2010-11 may be revised downwards as a result of the Government's recently announced Departmental savings. Budget allocations for 2011-12 will be set as part of the Spending Review process, which is anticipated to conclude in autumn 2010.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Departmental Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what the URL is of each website managed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each non-departmental public body for which his Department is responsible. [2366]

Gregory Barker: Websites managed by the Department of Energy and Climate Change are as follows:

	Website address
DECC corporate site	www.decc.gov.uk
CHP Focus	http://chp.decc.gov.uk/cms
Oil and Gas Portal	www.og.decc.gov.uk
Energy Infrastructure Portal	https://www.og.decc.gov.uk/EIP/pages/help.htm
National Policy Statements consultation	https://www.energynpsconsultation.decc.gov.uk/
Managing Radioactive Waste Safely	http://mrws.decc.gov.uk/
Planning Renewables	www.planningrenewables.org.uk
PILOT	www.pilottaskforce.co.uk
UK Renewables Service	www.ukrenewables.com
AVOID: advice on avoiding dangerous climate change	www.avoid.uk.net
Electricity Networks Strategy Group	www.ensg.gov.uk
RIMNET	www.rimnet.gov.uk
Energie Helpline	www.Energiehelpline.co.uk
ACTONCO$_2$	http://actonco2.direct.gov.uk/actonco2/home.html
CORWM	www.corwm.org.uk
HFCAAT	www.Hfccat-demo.org

Websites managed by the DECC NDPBs and agencies are as follows:

	Website address
Nuclear Decommissioning Authority	www.nda.gov.uk
The Coal Authority	www.coal.gov.uk
The Carbon Trust	www.carbontrust.co.uk
Of gem	www.ofgem.gov.uk
Energy Saving Trust	www.est.org.uk
Committee on Climate Change	www.theccc.org.uk
Civil Nuclear Police Authority	www.cnpa.police.uk/
Committee on Radioactive Waste Management	www.corwm.org.uk
Energy Technology Scheme	www.eca.gov.uk/etl

Departmental Reviews

Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to the answer of 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 137W, on Government Departments: reviews, what reviews his Department is undertaking; and what the *(a)* purpose and *(b)* timescale of each is. [2587]

Gregory Barker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Leader of the House of Commons on 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 32WS.

The Department will bring forward detailed information about reviews in due course.

Nuclear Power: Finance

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much the UK paid in contributions to the *(a)* International Atomic Energy Agency and *(b)* Euratom Supply Agency in the last 10 years. [2344]

Charles Hendry: The UK has paid a total of 116.95 million euros and US$ 84.42 million to the International Atomic Agency over the past 10 years. The UK does not make any direct contribution to the Euratom Supply Agency.

Trade Unions

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what plans he has to consult trade unions in his Department on cost reduction plans. [604]

Gregory Barker: The Recognition Agreement (September 2009) between the Department of Energy and Climate Change and the recognised trade unions, the Public and Commercial Services Union, Prospect, and the First Division Association, clearly sets out the agreed processes for consultation.

The formal DECC Consultative Council meetings are held twice annually, normally in September and February. DECC Consultative Council has also appointed sub-committees to discuss particular issues which may not be appropriate to the main HQ Consultative Council.

Additionally, the DECC senior management team meets frequently and less formally with the trades unions through the year to address any emerging issues as they arise.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Rape: Defendants Anonymity

7. **Luciana Berger:** To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities what discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues on the implications for women of proposals to extend anonymity to defendants in rape cases. [2706]

10. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities what assessment her Department has made of the implications for women of proposals to extend anonymity to defendants in rape cases. [2709]

Lynne Featherstone: The Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister have, with the whole House, made clear the desire to increase the number of successful rape prosecutions and send more rapists to jail, as well as provide the best possible support to victims of this appalling crime. The Government regard rape as a very serious crime which should be prosecuted in all cases where sufficient evidence exists.

We will bring proposals to Parliament when all the options have been carefully considered. Our consideration of the options will include an equality impact assessment.

Asylum

8. **Simon Kirby:** To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities what recent representations she has received on the granting of asylum to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons under threat of legal sanction in their country of origin. [2707]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government have received representations on this issue in the context of the recent hearings at the Supreme Court. The Home Secretary has also met with Ben Summerskill from Stonewall and received a copy of their recent report, "No Going Back" about the experiences of lesbian and gay people in the asylum system.

We will stop the deportation of asylum seekers who have had to leave particular countries because of their sexual orientation or gender identification puts them at proven risk of imprisonment, torture or execution.

Equal Pay Act

9. **Caroline Lucas:** To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities if she will bring forward proposals to mark the 40th anniversary of the Equal Pay Act 1970; and if she will make a statement. [2708]

Lynne Featherstone: Last month I made my first speech as a Minister for Equalities at an excellent event organised by the Fawcett Society and others to mark the 40th anniversary of the Equal Pay Act.

As the Queen's Speech made clear, we are committed to promoting equal pay for women. We are currently considering options, and we will make an announcement in due course. We agree that progress on equal pay is needed, and we made clear in the Queen's Speech that we will work to promote equal pay for women, as well as remove barriers to flexible working. We are currently considering our next steps, and we will make an announcement in due course.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Food: Procurement

Dan Rogerson: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the House of Commons Commission what steps the House of Commons Commission is taking to set high standards of animal welfare for the in-house procurement of food. [2927]

Sir Stuart Bell: The House of Commons Catering and Retail Services recognises its responsibility to carry out its procurement activities in an environmentally and socially responsible manner and operates a Sustainable

Procurement Policy, which covers all key components of the purchasing operation including animal welfare. The policy seeks to work within the guidelines set out by the Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative, and in doing so endeavours to contribute to the Government's Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy. A copy of the policy will be placed in the Library.

Former Members: ICT

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the House of Commons Commission what guidance was issued to hon. Members in the last Parliament who have not been returned to the House on the retention and disposal of ICT equipment purchased with funds from their allowances as hon. Members; and if he will make a statement. [2919]

Sir Stuart Bell: Guidance entitled 'Dissolution Arrangements' was issued to all Members of the previous Parliament. The full document can be viewed at:

http://intranet.parliament.uk/Documents/intranet/assets/dissolution-arrangements.pdf

Paragraphs 2.4 to 2.6 relate to the retention and disposal of ICT equipment purchased with funds from allowances as hon. Members.

TREASURY

Annuities

Mr Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to reform the requirement to purchase annuities at the age of 75 years; and if he will make a statement. [1141]

Mr Hoban: The Government are committed to removing the requirement to purchase a pension annuity by age 75. Further details, including information on when the Government intend to implement these proposals, will follow in due course.

Banks: Pay

Gordon Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether he plans to restrict access to bonus payments in excess of £30,000 per annum for employees of banks in receipt of public funding; [2527]

(2) whether he plans to reduce bonus payments to *(a)* employees, *(b)* directors, *(c)* chief executives and *(d)* chairmen of banks in receipt of public funding. [2528]

Mr Hoban: The banks in which the Government is a shareholder are managed at arm's length and on a commercial basis by UK Financial Investments Ltd (UKFI).

UKFI will continue to work with Government investee banks to ensure that incentives are properly linked to long-term value creation.

Business: Thanet

Laura Sandys: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many businesses *(a)* were registered, *(b)* were newly registered and *(c)* ceased to be registered for value added tax in South Thanet in each year since 1997. [2669]

Mr Gauke: Between 1997 and 2008, the number of businesses registered for VAT at the start of the year, the number of businesses registering for VAT and the number of businesses deregistering for VAT in Thanet South are shown in the following table.

	Registrations	*De-registrations*	*Start of year stock*
1997	195	165	1,775
1998	175	150	1,805
1999	170	150	1,830
2000	195	150	1,850
2001	150	165	1,895
2002	200	150	1,880
2003	235	170	1,935
2004	225	165	2,000
2005	200	185	2,060
2006	220	175	2,070
2007	210	145	2,115
2008	—	—	2,175

These figures came from the report 'Business Start-ups and Closures: VAT Registrations and De-registrations', published by The Department for Businesses Enterprise and Regulatory Reform in November 2008. This report has now been discontinued. An extended series covering the last two years could be produced only at disproportionate costs.

Departmental Translation Services

Ian Austin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* documents and *(b)* other information for which (i) his Department and (ii) its associated public bodies are responsible are published or provided in the UK in languages other than English; for what reason each such publication is required to be made available in a language or languages other than English; and what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of the translation work so incurred in the latest period for which figures are available. [1775]

Justine Greening: The documents translated for people in the UK who do not speak English, and where available estimated costs, are as follows:

HM Treasury

HM Treasury translates documents into other languages on a case-by-case basis as requests are received.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer set out in August 2008, *Official Report*, column 737W. Since then the following documents have been translated:

Press Notice 108_08 translated into Welsh in November 2008 at a cost of £95.00.

Chapter 1 of pre-Budget report 2008 translated into Welsh in December 2008 at a cost of £764.74.

The executive summary of the document 'Reforming Financial Markets' translated into German in August 2009 at a cost of £253.09

HMRC

HM Revenue and Customs conforms to the legal requirement to provide Welsh language services in accordance with the Welsh Language Act 1993 and HMRC's own Welsh Language Scheme. Documents and information that have been translated into languages other than English are:

All of the most frequently used publications are translated into Welsh.

Marketing campaigns involving the Welsh language media are translated into Welsh.

Direct marketing products are translated into Welsh where there is a Welsh language notifier on the customer record.

A selection of regional press ads for Contact Centre Directorate about the change in opening times of the Enquiry Centres were translated into Welsh. The additional cost of translation and typesetting is absorbed by our Welsh Language Unit. Communications and Marketing incurred no cost for the translation.

Child Trust Fund fact sheets have been translated in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Tamil, Urdu and Polish.

The information on estimated costs could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

NSI

NS&I translates all of its (1) brochures into Welsh to stock at Welsh Post Offices, (2) after sales communications into Welsh upon request and (3) has a Welsh Language portal which is an abridged version of the English website on the NS&I website to meet it commitments under the Welsh Language Act. NS&I does not provide translation into any other language. The cost to NS&I of producing such translations in the latest period for which figures are available are:

2009-10: £8,505.97

VOA

In line with its commitment to the Welsh Language Act, the VOA publishes a range of leaflets and forms in bilingual English/Welsh format. These are used with council taxpayers and business ratepayers. The information on estimated costs could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

DMO

Nil response.

GAD

Nil response.

Royal Mint

There are occasional requirements to translate correspondence for non-UK customers but the costs incurred are modest and are usually tied to commercial contracts which earn revenue for the Royal Mint.

This was the arrangement under previous Administrations and has not changed.

National Assembly for Wales: Finance

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish details of the calculations that underpin the consequential changes to the funding of the National Assembly for Wales as announced on 24 May 2010, with particular reference to *(a)* the population ratios and *(b)* compatibility factors employed; and if he will make a statement. [2770]

Danny Alexander: The consequentials of the £6.2 billion cuts announced on 24 May 2010 were calculated through the Barnett formula in the usual way. The consequential cut for the Welsh Assembly Government was subsequently reduced by £1.4 million following confirmation of a cut to the Olympics budget, which is UK-wide and therefore not comparable for the purposes of the Barnett formula. Details of the operation of the Barnett formula were set out in the Statement of Funding Policy published by the Treasury in October 2007.

VAT: Construction

Gordon Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he plans to reduce the level of value added tax on building repair and maintenance work. [2533]

Mr Gauke: All taxes are kept under review and any changes are announced by the Chancellor as part of the Budget process.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Alcoholic Drinks: Crime

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* premises and *(b)* independent retailers (i) nationally, (ii) in the East Midlands and (iii) in Leicester have been fined for the sale of alcohol to persons under the age of 18 years in each of the last five years. [2573]

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* premises and *(b)* independent retailers in (i) Tameside and (ii) Stockport were fined for the sale of alcohol to persons under the age of 18 years in each of the last five years. [2849]

James Brokenshire: Data on the total number of fines issued by the courts and the average fine amount for "selling alcohol to persons under 18" broken down by criminal justice area within England and Wales, for each year between 2004-08 is provided in the following table. Data held on the court proceedings database cannot be broken down by individual area and it is not possible to separately identify those fines given to premises or independent retailers.

Number of fines imposed for selling alcohol to a person under 18[1], by criminal justice area[2] 2004-08

Criminal justice area	*2004*	*2005*	*2006*	*2007*	*2008*
Avon and Somerset	0	9	5	0	5
Bedfordshire	5	9	22	1	0
Cambridgeshire	1	7	18	10	8
Cheshire	14	0	6	5	7
Cleveland	7	10	6	11	6
Cumbria	0	3	1	1	3
Derbyshire	13	5	6	7	15
Devon and Cornwall	4	3	4	0	0
Dorset	2	7	0	0	3
Durham	2	0	0	0	6

Number of fines imposed for selling alcohol to a person under 18[1], by criminal justice area[2] 2004-08

Criminal justice area	*2004*	*2005*	*2006*	*2007*	*2008*
Dyfed-Powys	6	1	13	3	3
Essex	0	7	10	12	2
Gloucestershire	1	4	8	2	7
Greater Manchester	116	73	98	25	27
Gwent	11	12	11	8	7
Hampshire	6	7	0	4	4
Hertfordshire	5	1	35	20	2
Humberside	4	1	2	3	0
Kent	10	9	2	1	6
Lancashire	10	60	17	20	22
Leicestershire	4	14	28	47	8
Lincolnshire	2	0	1	2	5
Merseyside	9	8	12	17	17
Metropolitan police	126	198	176	120	59
Norfolk	3	0	0	2	1
North Wales	4	10	4	7	7
North Yorkshire	12	0	11	9	1
Northamptonshire	0	6	10	3	4
Northumbria	32	53	17	4	9
Nottinghamshire	0	9	23	3	4
South Wales	23	39	54	23	17
South Yorkshire	0	7	9	2	4
Staffordshire	2	10	14	15	11
Suffolk	0	3	2	0	1
Surrey	8	9	15	2	6
Sussex	1	0	16	10	4
Thames Valley	9	5	12	11	1
Warwickshire	25	6	1	1	0
West Mercia	3	13	5	4	2
West Midlands	36	54	42	43	30
West Yorkshire	17	7	6	6	1
Wiltshire	1	6	4	4	1
Total England and Wales	534	685	726	468	326

[1] Licensing Act 2003 S.146 and 147, Licensing (Occasional Permissions Act 1983 Schedule (Sec 3) para 4 (1), Licensing Act 1964 S.181A(1) as added by Licensing Act 1988 S.17 Licensing Act 2003 S.147 as added by Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006.

[2] In this table sentences at the Crown court are categorised according to the police force that prosecuted the offence which is not necessarily the area of the sentencing court.

Notes:

1. Excludes data for Cardiff magistrates court for April, July, and August 2008.
2. The answer given here relates to the total number of fines imposed for the offences listed above it is not possible to separately identify those fines given to premises or independent retailers as this information is not recorded on the Courts Proceedings database.

Source:

Justice Statistics—Analytical Services, Ministry of Justice Ref: SENT(JSAS)169-10 14/06/2010

Average fine amount imposed for selling alcohol to a person under 18[1], by criminal justice area[2] 2004-08

Criminal justice area	*2004*	*2005*	*2006*	*2007*	*£ 2008*
Avon and Somerset	*	186.7	*	*	*
Bedfordshire	*	386.1	370.5	*	*
Cambridgeshire	*	308.6	307.2	158.0	675.0
Cheshire	209.6	*	296.7	*	1,050.0
Cleveland	171.4	184.5	225.0	295.5	1,005.0
Cumbria	*	*	*	*	*
Derbyshire	217.7	*	300.0	422.9	483.0
Devon and Cornwall	*	*	*	*	*
Dorset	*	205.7	*	*	*
Durham	*	*	*	*	328.3
Dyfed-Powys	248.3	*	441.5	*	*
Essex	*	278.6	622.5	550.0	*
Gloucestershire	*	*	308.8	*	447.1
Greater Manchester	228.7	227.7	259.2	366.0	335.7
Gwent	181.8	222.5	313.6	209.4	250.0
Hampshire	290.0	257.1	*	*	*
Hertfordshire	*	*	235.0	370.3	*

Average fine amount imposed for selling alcohol to a person under 18[1], by criminal justice area[2] 2004-08

Criminal justice area	*2004*	*2005*	*2006*	*2007*	*£ 2008*
Humberside	*	*	*	*	*
Kent	336.0	363.3	*	*	633.3
Lancashire	160.5	200.8	209.4	264.5	152.5
Leicestershire	*	291.1	249.1	306.6	482.5
Lincolnshire	*	*	*	*	*
Merseyside	195.0	165.0	161.7	262.1	283.5
Metropolitan police	285.9	283.0	314.0	470.7	505.9
Norfolk	*	*	*	*	*
North Wales	*	238.5	*	312.9	239.3
North Yorkshire	185.4	*	150.0	269.4	*
Northamptonshire	*	316.7	425.0	*	*
Northumbria	241.6	208.0	520.0	*	337.5
Nottinghamshire	*	194.4	253.7	*	*
South Wales	193.9	240.4	318.5	267.4	260.6
South Yorkshire	*	117.9	155.6	*	*
Staffordshire	*	195.0	154.6	173.3	271.4
Suffolk	*	*	*	*	*
Surrey	278.1	316.7	356.7	*	413.3
Sussex	*	*	173.4	322.5	*
Thames Valley	218.9	*	290.8	441.8	*
Warwickshire	102.0	101.7	*	*	*
West Mercia	*	290.8	*	*	*
West Midlands	271.4	203.2	373.9	403.7	304.7
West Yorkshire	260.9	260.7	385.0	358.3	*
Wiltshire	*	288.3	*	*	*

* = Figure suppressed as number too small to give meaningful average.
[1] Licensing Act 2003 S.146 and 147, Licensing (Occasional Permissions) Act 1983 Schedule (Sec 3) para 4(1), Licensing Act 1964 S.181A(1) as added by Licensing Act 1988 S.17, Licensing Act 2003 S.147 as added by Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006.
[2] In this table sentences at the Crown court are categorised according to the police force that prosecuted the offence which is not necessarily the area of the sentencing court.
Notes:
1. Excludes data for Cardiff magistrates court for April, July, and August 2008. 2. The answer given here relates to the total number of fines imposed for the offences listed.
Source:
Justice Statistics Analytical Services, Ministry of Justice Ref: SENT(JSAS)169-10 14/06/2010.

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many charges there were for alcohol-related offences of antisocial behaviour in *(a)* Tameside and *(b)* Stockport in the last 12 months; and how many of these were of those under the age of 18 years. [2848]

James Brokenshire: The court proceedings database does not contain information on charging.

Departmental Databases

Mr Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many databases managed by her Department hold information relating to at least 100,000 people. [2536]

James Brokenshire *[holding answer 15 June 2010]:* The core Home Office and its Executive agencies currently manage 31 such databases in operational casework areas for a range of public services, including personal applications by members of the public.

As part of the Government's recently announced spending review, all Government ICT enabled programmes are being reviewed to consider possible mergers, decommissioning and/or abolition of appropriate databases.

Detention Centres: Children

Richard Harrington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children were detained in the course of immigration proceedings in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* the most recent year for which figures are available. [2879]

Damian Green: The requested information is not available. The published statistics on persons detained as at specific dates in 1997 related to asylum applicants only and did not separately identify children.

The latest published statistics show there were 30 people detained solely under Immigration Act powers recorded as being less than 18 years of age as at 31 March 2010. In 2009, 1,065 children entered detention solely under Immigration Act powers; this information was published for the first time in 2009.

This information relating to 2010 is available in tables 3.5 to 3.8 of the Control of Immigration: Quarterly Statistical Summary, United Kingdom, January to March 2010 and the information relating to 2009 is available in table 9.2 of the Control of Immigration: Quarterly Statistical Summary, United Kingdom, October to December 2009 available in the Library of the House and the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics website at:

http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html

I recently announced a review into the detention of children for asylum purposes so it can be brought to an end this summer. We have already ended the overnight detention of children at Dungavel.

Entry Clearances: Overseas Students

Mr Lammy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many student visas have been issued to *(a)* EU and *(b)* non-EU students in academic year 2009-10. [2952]

Damian Green: Under the Immigration (European Economic Area) Regulations 2006, EEA nationals and their family members have the right of free movement within the territory of EEA member states. They may therefore come to the UK to seek work, take up employment or study without applying for Leave to Enter. No student visas are therefore issued to EEA nationals.

The total number of student visas issued to non-EEA nationals in the Financial Year 2009-10 was 288,010. This figure is based on the Control of Immigration: Quarterly Statistical Summaries which have been published on the UK Border Agency's website,

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk

Most non-EEA nationals who were issued with visas in 2009 in order to study in the UK in the current academic year would have been issued with visas during the summer months, and would therefore be included in the total for the financial year given above.

Identity Cards

Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans she has for the future allocation of identity cards to foreign nationals. [1079]

Mrs May *[holding answer 8 June 2010]:* We are continuing to use biometric residence cards, in accordance with EU law.

Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate she has made of the likely level of savings to the public purse consequent on the cancellation of the identity card scheme, taking into account the cost of contract termination, in the next three years; [1080]

(2) what estimate she has made of the savings to be made consequent on the cancellation of the National Identity Register, taking into account the cost of contract termination, in the next three years. [1082]

Mrs May *[holding answer 8 June 2010]:* It is estimated that exchequer savings of approximately £86 million will be realised from cancelling ID cards and the National Identity Register over the next four years. Further savings in the region of £134 million will be realised by halting the introduction of fingerprint biometric passports, although these further savings are currently the subject of commercial negotiation with suppliers to protect the taxpayer's interests.

Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what her most recent estimate is of her Department's expenditure on identity cards since the inception of the national identity scheme. [1081]

Mrs May *[holding answer 8 June 2010]:* Between 2003 and March 2006, the Home Office spent a total of £41 million developing the policy, legislation and business case for the introduction of identity cards.

Responsibility for identity cards was transferred to the Identity and Passport Service (IPS) on its establishment in April 2006. Between then and March 2010, IPS spent a total of £251 million on projects to establish identity cards, second biometric passports and other related programmes.

Meg Hillier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many identity cards had been issued to foreign nationals on 31 May 2010. [1244]

Damian Green: No identity cards have been issued to foreign nationals. However as at 31 May 2010, a total of 222,490 biometric residence permits had been issued to foreign nationals.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in Wigan constituency have been issued with an identity card by her Department. [2888]

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* the North West and *(c)* Greater Manchester have applied for an ID card. [3279]

Damian Green: The Identity and Passport Service is not able to provide information relating to particular constituencies or regions for identity card applications. However, as of 11 June 2010 there have been just fewer than 15,000 identity cards issued in the United Kingdom.

Illegal Immigrants: Northern Ireland

Sammy Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many illegal immigrants have been discovered working in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; how many such people have been deported; and what the average length of time was between discovery and deportation in such cases. [2769]

Damian Green: The numbers of immigration offenders that have been arrested for working illegally in Northern Ireland in the last five financial years are:

14 in 2005-06;
eight in 2006-07;
44 in 2007-08;
eight in 2008-09;
41 in 2009-10; and
two in 2010-11.

These data are normally used for management information only and are not subject to the detailed checks that apply for National Statistics publications. These data are therefore provisional and may be subject to change.

The number of people that have been deported and the average length of time between discovery and deportation in these cases are not data that are readily available. The information captured is recorded on two separate databases and there is no unique identifier that is shared between the two systems.

Immigration Cases: Appeals

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, at what proportion of general immigration cases the Secretary of State has not been represented at appeal stage in the last 12 months; and what steps the UK Border Agency takes to protect children in such cases. [1472]

Damian Green: The representation rate at all appeals heard in country is currently 69% up to June 2010.

We can identify certain types of appeal case involving children from our database e.g. unaccompanied asylum seeking children. We are not able to identify from the database all types of cases. We aim to represent the Secretary of State at all asylum cases and usually achieve between 90-95% representation rate.

Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 requires the Home Secretary to make arrangements to have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. To this end statutory guidance has been issued to UKBA staff on how to apply this duty and training on identifying child welfare and protection issues is provided for staff whose work involves decisions that affect children.

UKBA has appointed a Children's Champion who is responsible for advising the Chief Executive and UKBA Board on all issues to do with child welfare and child protection.

Immigration Controls

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she expects to decide the level at which the cap on non-EU economic migrants to the United Kingdom will be set. [1674]

Damian Green: We believe that immigration is too high and needs to be brought under control. An annual limit on economic migration from outside the EU is part of a package to deliver this.

We will hold a short and focused consultation with business and other interested sectors before taking the final decision on both the implementation mechanisms for the limit and the level at which it should be set.

Immigration: Gurkhas

Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many former members of the Brigade of Gurkhas who have chosen to settle in the UK since the change in the immigration rules are aged *(a)* below 40 years, *(b)* between 41 and 50 years, *(c)* between 51 ad 60 years and *(d)* above 60 years old. [2650]

Damian Green *[holding answer 15 June 2010]:* The UK Border Agency does not routinely analyse management information on the individual ages of former members of the Brigade of Gurkhas who exercise their right to settle in the UK. To do so would incur disproportionate costs as this would involve a manual check.

Language Analysis Testing

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what proportion of asylum cases the UK Border Agency had used language analysis testing when such testing was suspended on 31 March 2010; and what plans she has to reintroduce such testing. [1471]

Damian Green: Management Information shows that the UK Border Agency carried out 2,735 language analysis tests on asylum cases between 2 February 2008 and 31 March 2010.

Management Information also shows that during this period there were 52,531 principal asylum applications submitted. However, it is not possible to say definitely what proportion of those cases were subject to language analysis testing because some individuals who underwent testing will have submitted their asylum application before 2 February 2008.

Please note that Management Information is not provided under National Statistics protocols and is therefore provisional and subject to change.

The UK Border Agency is undertaking a review of language analysis techniques in order to assess costs and benefits. On conclusion of this review, a decision will be made on whether and how to resume the process.

Motoring: Fines

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much has been levied in fines for exceeding the average 50 mph on stretches of motorway where a 50 mph limit is in place on the basis of the average speed camera monitoring on *(a)* Mondays to Fridays when road works were being undertaken and *(b)* Saturdays and Sundays when road works are not taking place in the latest period for which figures are available. [2525]

James Brokenshire: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Data on fixed penalty notices for speeding as well as data held by the Ministry of Justice on court issued speeding fines do not include information on the individual circumstances under which the fines were issued.

Passports: Biometrics

Roberta Blackman-Woods: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the effect on the number of jobs of the Government's policy not to proceed on the next phase of biometric passports. [2522]

Damian Green *[holding answer 6 June 2010]:* There is currently an ongoing process of restructuring in the Identity and Passport Service (IPS) to reflect cancelling of identity cards, the decision to halt Second Generation Biometric Passports and the IPS contribution to budget savings. IPS continues to work to finalise revised structures, consult trade union representatives and update and support those directly involved. So far we have announced that 60 temporary staff at our Durham office have been released three months earlier than expected.

Passports: Databases

Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what categories of information currently held on the National Identity Register she does not plan to hold on the UK Passport Database; [1379]

(2) what her plans are for the future of the UK Passport Database. [1380]

Mrs May *[holding answer 9 June 2010]:* The Identity Documents Bill presented to Parliament on 26 May 2010 confirms the commitment in the Coalition Agreement to scrap ID cards and destroy the National Identity Register. The information contained on the National Identity Register which is additional to that held on the UK passport database includes fingerprints, National Insurance Number, details from identity card applications, changes to names and address following issue of the document, and personal questions and answers allowing such changes to be made securely to an individual's entry on the National Identity Register. The 2006 Act provided for up to 50 pieces of personal information to be stored from each person on the National Identity Register.

The existing UK passport database will continue to support the issuing of passports and to hold the same information as that currently requires.

Passports: EU Countries

Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will bring forward proposals to provide a cheaper and more compact alternative to the British passport for travel within the EU. [1909]

Mrs May *[holding answer 14 June 2010]:* We currently have no plans to provide an alternative to the British passport for travel within the EU.

Poaching

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans she has to tackle poaching; and if she will consider the merits of establishing a task force on the issue. [2433]

James Brokenshire: Poaching can have a significant effect on our rural communities, and on the environment more generally. It is an issue that needs to be addressed by police forces at a local level.

A network of Police Wildlife Crime Officers throughout the 43 forces in England and Wales provides the backbone to investigating wildlife and environmental crime, including poaching.

Poaching is already one of the priorities of the National Wildlife Crime Unit, which exists to support police forces and their wildlife crime officers in their efforts against wildlife crime. It is funded by the Home Office and DEFRA, as well as the governments of Scotland and Northern Ireland, ACPO (the Association of Chief Police Officers) and ACPOS (ACPO Scotland).

The National Wildlife Crime Unit's priorities are tackling badger baiting; CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora); Bird of prey persecution; Poaching; protecting nesting bats; and protecting freshwater pearl mussels. The Unit has a police officer dedicated to supporting the police forces of England and Wales in tackling poaching.

There are already strict controls in force on the export from the UK of endangered animals and plants. These controls are based on EU legislation that implements the 1973 Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and requires all EU member states to impose CITES controls both at import and export. Any illegal CITES protected animals or plants intercepted at UK ports and airports are liable to seizure by Officers of the UK Border Agency.

Police: Manpower

Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate she has made of the likely change to the number of police officer posts following the changes to her Department's budget announced on 24 May 2010. [2432]

Mrs May *[holding answer 15 June 2010]:* Decisions about the number of police officers, police community support officers and other police staff engaged by each force are matters for the relevant chief constable and police authority.

The Home Office has protected the front line by finding most of the savings needed from its own budgets and those of its non-departmental public bodies. As I said in my written ministerial statement on 27 May 2010, *Official Report*, columns 12-16WS, we are confident that the savings which amount to less than 1% of expected spending in 2010-11 can be made while maintaining a front line policing service. It is for each chief constable to use their expertise and decide what makes most sense for their force, but we are clear that the savings can be achieved by driving out wasteful spending on support functions, reducing bureaucracy and increasing efficiency in key functions; leaving the front line strong and secure.

South Africa: Football

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many Crown Prosecution Service staff are being funded by her Department to attend the football World Cup final in South Africa; how much has been spent on *(a)* travel, *(b)* accommodation and *(c)* other expenses for staff; and if she will make a statement. [2925]

James Brokenshire: A senior Crown Prosecutor, expert in UK football legislation, has been deployed in South Africa, with the English police delegation, for the duration of the England football team's involvement in the tournament. Their role is to liaise with South African authorities in accordance with an agreement with the South African Ministry of Justice. This has become standard practice since Euro 2004 when uncertainty regarding fast track judicial arrangements put in place for that tournament led to criticism, both in the media and courts here, about court verdicts on England fans convicted of violent disorder. As a result the European Union Handbook on International Police Co-operation for Football Matches recommends that participating countries should consider deploying prosecutors in host

countries to assist liaison and clarity. The South African authorities have put in place comparable fast track criminal justice arrangements for dealing with foreign offenders during the 2010 World Cup.

A key role of the Crown Prosecutor in South Africa will be to provide authoritative witness statements regarding the judicial process and the strength of any evidence presented against any England fan convicted in a South African court. This will assist the police and courts here to determine whether or not football banning orders should be sought against the individuals convicted on their return. The Home Office is funding the prosecutor's travel, accommodation and expense costs. I will write to the hon. Member once the final costs are known.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

British Overseas Territories: Overseas Aid

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid he plans to provide to each UK Overseas Territory in 2010-11. [2294]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The following funding allocations are those agreed under the previous Government for each UK Overseas Territory in 2010-11:

	£
St Helena	28,580,000
Montserrat	23,260,000
Pitcairn	3,260,000
Tristan da Cunha	450,000
Turks and Caicos Islands	750,000
Cross Territory	2,700,000
Total	59,000,000

As with all Government spending plans, these are subject to review.

Departmental Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the URL is of each website managed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each non-departmental public body and agency for which his Department is responsible. [2370]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: We are currently working to consolidate websites managed by the Department for International Development (DFID).

DFID manages one corporate site

www.dfid.gov.uk

which has three subdomains

http://blogs.dfid.gov.uk

http://projects.dfid.gov.uk

and

http://consultation.dfid.gov.uk

In addition we own research for development (R4D)

http://www.research4development.info/

and the website for the Developments magazine

http://www.developments.org.uk/

both of which are managed under contract and will converge on the main site in due course.

DFID also has responsibility for the Independent Advisory Committee on Development Impact

http://iacdi.independent.gov.uk/

whose future is under review.

The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom (CSC)

http://www.cscuk.org.uk/

is DFID's only non-departmental public body (NDPB).

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what his policy is on the use by Ministers in his Department of cars allocated from *(a)* his Department's pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured in the UK; whether Ministers in his Department are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [2418]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mike Penning) on 14 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 291W, on departmental official cars.

Developing Countries: Children

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether he plans to continue the previous Administration's work to publish and disseminate a toolkit on inclusive education for children with disabilities in developing countries. [2260]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: In "The Coalition: our programme for government", the Government committed to

"focus on the rights of women, children and disabled people to access services"

in developing countries. We are taking that agenda forward.

We will shortly be issuing a Guidance Note on inclusive education for children with disabilities in developing countries, developed with practitioners and experts in this field. This will be disseminated to country offices, development partners and international non-governmental organisations and will be available on the DFID website.

Developing Countries: Climate Change

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress his Department has made on developing guidance with the multilateral development banks to screen development expenditure for climate risks; and if he will make a statement. [2341]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The Department for International Development (DFID) is working closely with the multilateral development banks (MDBs) to ensure their development expenditure takes account of the risks posed by climate change. We use our financial resources, policy expertise and position as a shareholder to achieve this. For example, DFID has provided technical assistance to the MDBs to support research on the risks of climate change in developing countries, and to help governments factor these into national strategies and programmes. The Government have also been a strong voice in calling

for each MDB to have a climate change strategy, agreed with their shareholders. We are working to ensure that the targets and commitments in these strategies are met, including through regular discussions with MDB staff and at the executive board of the MDBs. We are also working to ensure that projects supported by the MDBs can deliver sustainable development gains in the context of a changing climate. For example, DFID funds the Pilot Programme for Climate Resilience, which aims to generate lessons to improve MDBs approach to adaptation and sustainable development in poor countries.

Developing Countries: Fossil Fuels

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much his Department has spent on overseas projects for the extraction and transport of fossil fuels through *(a)* the World Bank Group, *(b)* the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *(c)* the European Investment Bank and *(d)* other Government-funded financial institutions in the last five years. [2340]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: In the past five years, the Department for International Development (DFID) has not given earmarked funds to the multilateral development banks (MDBs) expressly for investments in projects for the extraction and transportation of fossil fuels.

DFID has provided capital and funding for the MDBs work which have been pooled with resources from other shareholders and donors. The banks have supported some fossil fuel extraction and transport projects using these common resources and have provided the following information on the value of commitments to such projects made in the years 2005-09:

	US$ million
World Bank Group[1]	3,609
EBRD	861
EIB	94
Other[2]	1,402

[1] World Bank Group includes International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Development Association and International Finance Corporation

[2] Other includes the African, Asian, InterAmerican and Caribbean Development Bank Groups, CDC and the Private Infrastructure Development Group.

EU Aid

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of his Department's budget is spent through direct payments to the European Union; and what steps he is taking to ensure the value for money of such expenditure. [2255]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: In 2008-09 20% of Department for International Development (DFID) expenditure was spent in direct payments to the European Union (EU). These funds were managed by the European Commission (EC). I have recently set out details of DFID's review of all funding of international agencies including the EC. This review will test each organisation to ensure the UK is getting maximum value from its aid money. This will include an assessment of the relevance of each body to the UK's objectives on poverty reduction and their ability to deliver results on the ground.

Museums and Galleries: Finance

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding programmes for galleries and museums in the UK he plans to reduce in *(a)* 2010-11 and *(b)* 2011-12. [2296]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: The Department for International Development (DFID) has no programmes that provide funding for galleries or museums.

St Helena: Airports

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether he plans to provide funding for an airport on St Helena. [2293]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: We are currently considering the question of access to St Helena. I will inform the House of any decision that is made.

TRANSPORT

HGV Charging

13. **Nigel Mills:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the merits of revising the system for heavy goods vehicle road user charging. [2722]

Mr Philip Hammond: The Coalition Programme for Government, commits us to the introduction of a new system of HGV road user charging to ensure that foreign heavy goods vehicles contribute to the upkeep of UK roads that they use and ensure a more level playing field with UK hauliers.

Heathrow Airport

14. **Gavin Barwell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the merits of expanding capacity at Heathrow airport; and if he will make a statement. [2723]

Mrs Villiers: We recognise the importance of Heathrow as the country's international hub airport and a vital part of our national transport infrastructure. Our vision for Heathrow is to make it better, not bigger, and I shall be pursuing this through the South East airports taskforce announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his written ministerial statement on 15 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 48WS.

18. **Miss Begg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to ensure that slots at Heathrow for flights from UK regional airports are retained. [2727]

Mrs Villiers: We recognise the importance of air services from UK regional airports and the role they play in local economies. However, there are difficult questions here that need careful consideration since airlines face competitive pressure to use their slots for routes which are the most commercial.

Speed Cameras

15. **Richard Harrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his Department's plans are for the future funding of fixed speed cameras; and if he will make a statement. [2724]

Mike Penning: The Government will not provide any money to local authorities to put up new fixed speed cameras. If authorities want to put up new fixed cameras they are free to do so using their own resources. We strongly encourage authorities to put resources into the most effective road safety measures.

Traffic Congestion: Glossop and Tintwistle

16. **Andrew Bingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will prioritise funding for a solution to traffic congestion in Glossop and Tintwistle. [2725]

Norman Baker: In his written ministerial statement to the House on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 35WS, regarding major schemes the Secretary of State for Transport made it clear that the Department will not be able to identify those major investments that can be supported until the conclusion of the Government's spending review in the autumn.

Therefore at this time I am afraid that I cannot provide any assurances on funding for a solution to traffic congestion in Glossop and Tintwistle.

Tyne and Wear Metro

17. **Catherine McKinnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans to proceed with the proposed upgrade of the Tyne and Wear Metro. [2726]

Norman Baker: The Tyne and Wear Metro upgrade has been re-examined following the announcement by the Chief Secretary on 17 May to review spending approval granted since 1 January this year.

High Speed 2

19. **Alec Shelbrooke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to consult those whose property is affected by the preferred route for High Speed 2. [2728]

Mr Philip Hammond: The Government are committed to carrying out a full public consultation before any final decision is taken regarding the route of any new high speed line.

Community Railways Initiative: North West

Mr Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans his Department has for the future of community rail partnerships in the North West. [2729]

Mrs Villiers: We recognise the valuable work done by community rail partnerships. We look to train operators and communities in the north-west to progress practical and innovative ideas for supporting local railways, including improvements to stations and links to them.

Electric Vehicles

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the merits of designating electric vehicle charging points as regulated assets. [2329]

Norman Baker: The coalition agreement set out a commitment to mandate a national charging network for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles. Achieving this via the regulated asset base is one approach. We are considering a full range of options, but no decisions have yet been taken.

Transport: North West

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what applications for grants from *(a)* Wigan metropolitan borough council and *(b)* other local authorities in the North West region are under consideration by his Department. [2758]

Norman Baker: In November 2007 Wigan Metropolitan borough council were awarded funding of £400,000 for both 2009-10 and 2010-11 to carry out bridge strengthening on their roads. They subsequently requested that this funding be increased by £750,000 due to increases in the cost estimates for works on the Atherton Central Station Bridge.

Sefton borough council have made an application to increase the funding awarded to them in February 2009 to carry out maintenance on the detrunked A565 and have sought funding to support maintenance on the A5058 Miller's Bridge.

The Department for Transport officials' contacts with both authorities regarding their requests are continuing.

This Department is considering a claim submitted for £5.3 million by Cumbria county council for funding towards the costs of carrying out repairs to damage to their local highways caused by the flooding in November 2009.

All local highway authorities in England have been advised of their allocation from the £84 million funding to assist them to repair their roads damaged by this winter's severe weather. Authorities have been requested to confirm that they accept the terms and conditions of the grant. The confirmation is to be accompanied by supporting documentation to show that the relevant delegated authority exist to accept the terms and condition of the grant.

The Department is not currently considering any funding bids for local authority major schemes and will not be doing so at least until the conclusion of the spending review.

Transport: Worcestershire

Harriett Baldwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the amount of funding for transport provided to Worcestershire county council will remain at the planned level of £46 million to 2016; and if he will make a statement. [2768]

Norman Baker: The amount of funding provided to Worcestershire county council by the Department for Transport is subject to the Spending Review. This will conclude in the autumn, and will set spending limits for every Government department for the period 2011-12 to 2014-15.

Wigan

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what grants his Department has allocated to Wigan metropolitan borough council in each of the last five years. [2841]

Norman Baker: Details of grants allocated to Wigan metropolitan borough council by the Department for Transport for the past five years can be found on the DFT website at:

http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/regional/localauthorities/funding/fundingstreams/

In addition, a proportion of the £13.5 million cost of the Greater Manchester wide Urban Traffic Control major scheme has been spent in Wigan, and the following cycling training grants have been allocated to Wigan metropolitan borough council in the past five years:

	£
2007-08	14,343
2008-09	20,160
2009-10	48,000
2010-11	60,000

JUSTICE

Coroners: Children

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many inquests into child deaths were delayed due to staff shortages in each coroner's district in the last five years; [2982]

(2) what the average time was between the death of a child and a post mortem examination being carried out in the latest period for which figures are available. [2983]

Mr Djanogly: The Ministry of Justice does not centrally collect or hold the requested data and could provide it only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Internet

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the URL is of each website managed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each non-departmental public body and agency for which his Department is responsible. [2371]

Mr Djanogly: The URL of the departmental website for the Ministry of Justice is:

www.justice.gov.uk

The following list gives other websites managed by Ministry of Justice and its non-departmental public bodies and agencies as at June 2010. The Ministry of Justice is committed to a programme of website rationalisation in line with the recommendations of the Varney review, and this will result in a reduction in the number of these websites. The Ministry aims to have no more than 20 websites remaining in use by 31 March 2011.

URLs of websites managed by the Ministry of Justice and its non-departmental public bodies and agencies—June 2010.

www.30yearrulereview.org.uk
www.adjudicationpanel.tribunals.gov.uk
www.administrativeappeals.tribunals.gov.uk
www.adr.civiljusticecouncil.gov.uk
www.ahmlr.gov.uk
www.ajtc.gov.uk
www.appeals-service.gov.uk
www.appsi.gov.uk
www.asylum-support-tribunal.gov.uk
www.belfast-gazette.co.uk
www.carestandardstribunal.gov.uk
www.ccrc.gov.uk
www.charity.tribunals.gov.uk
www.cica.gov.uk
www.cicap.gov.uk
www.civiljusticecouncil.gov.uk
www.cjsonline.gov.uk
www.cjsss.cjsonline.gov.uk
www.claimsregulation.gov.uk
www.cofrestrfatir.gov.uk
www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk
www.consumercreditappeals.tribunals.gov.uk
www.costsdebate.civiljusticecouncil.gov.uk
www.courtfunds.gov.uk
www.dspdprogramme.gov.uk
www.edinburgh-gazette.gov.uk
www.employmentappeals.gov.uk
www.employmenttribunals.gov.uk
www.estateagentappeals.tribunals.gov.uk
www.estudo.co.uk/jsb/
www.familyjusticecouncil.org.uk
www.fhsaa.tribunals.gov.uk
www.frontline.cjsonline.gov.uk
www.gamblingappealstribunal.gov.uk
www.gazettes-online.co.uk
www.generalcommissioners.gov.uk
www.grp.gov.uk
www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk
www.hmica.gov.uk
www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk
www.ico.gov.uk
www.imb.gov.uk
www.immigrationservicestribunal.gov.uk
www.independent.gov.uk/azellerodneyinquiry/
www.independent.gov.uk/7julyinquests/
www.independent.gov.uk/iapdeathsincustody/
www.informationtribunal.gov.uk
www.jcpc.gov.uk
www.jsboard.co.uk
www.judicialappointments.gov.uk
www.judicialcomplaints.gov.uk
www.judicialombudsman.gov.uk
www.judiciary.gov.uk
www.juror.cjsonline.gov.uk
www.justice.gov.uk
www.justice.gov.uk/inspectorates/hmi-prisons/
www.justice.gov.uk/inspectorates/hmi-probation/
http://justiceawards.cjsonline.gov.uk
www.landregistry.gov.uk

www.landstribunal.gov.uk
www.lawcom.gov.uk
www.lcjb.cjsonline.gov.uk
www.legalaid60.org.uk
www.legalombudsman.org.uk/
www.legalservices.gov.uk
www.legalservicesboard.org.uk
www.legalservicesprovidertraining.co.uk
www.legislation.gov.uk
www.london-gazette.gov.uk
www.lsrc.org.uk
www.maps.cjsonline.gov.uk
www.mhrt.org.uk
www.moneyclaim.gov.uk
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
www.officeforlegalcomplaints.org.uk/
www.official-documents.gov.uk
www.olso.org
www.opsi.gov.uk
www.oqps.gov.uk
www.osscsc.gov.uk
www.paroleboard.gov.uk
www.partyfundingreview.gov.uk
www.pensionsappealtribunals.gov.uk
www.possessionclaim.gov.uk
www.ppo.gov.uk
www.privycouncil.org.uk
www.probation.justice.gov.uk
http://procurement.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/
www.publicguardian.gov.uk
www.reserveforcesappeal.tribunals.gov.uk
www.scottbaker-inquests.gov.uk
www.sendist.gov.uk
www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk
www.sentencingcouncilmembers.co.uk
www.sentencing-guidelines.gov.uk
www.siac.tribunals.gov.uk
www.siac.tribunals.gov.uk/poac
www.statutelaw.gov.uk
www.supremecourt.gov.uk
www.transporttribunal.gov.uk
www.tribunals.gov.uk
www.victimscommissioner.org.uk
www.ybtj.cjsonline.gov.uk
www.yjb.gov.uk

Departmental Manpower

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers are employed by his Department; and at what civil service pay grade in each such case. [1256]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's written ministerial statement on 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 32-34WS. As of 10 June 2010 there have been two special advisers employed by the Ministry of Justice, one at band 1 and one at band 2.

As of June 2010, there were 40 press officers employed by the Ministry of Justice. Of these 24 were band C, nine were band B, six were band A, and one is SCS.

Departmental Official Cars

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what his policy is on the use by Ministers in his Department of cars allocated from *(a)* his Department's pool and *(b)* the Government car pool which are manufactured in the UK; whether Ministers in his Department are entitled to request the use of a car manufactured in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [2420]

Mr Blunt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mike Penning) on 14 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 290-91W.

Departmental Reviews

Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the answer of 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 137W, on Government Departments: reviews, what reviews his Department is undertaking; and what the *(a)* purpose and *(b)* timescale of each is. [2592]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: As outlined in the coalition agreement and following the normal practice of Government Departments on developing policy proposals, my Department will:

examine the sentencing framework in order to ensure that sentencing policy is effective in deterring crime, protecting the public, punishing offenders and cutting reoffending;

develop an approach to legal aid which balances financial constraints with the wider public interest;

review libel laws in order to provide a proper balance between the protection of freedom of speech and the defence of individuals against defamation; and

establish a Commission to investigate the creation of a Bill of Rights in order to protect and extend liberties.

In addition my Department is:

reviewing its arm's length bodies in order to increase accountability and reduce the number and cost of public bodies;

considering the judicial appointments process in order to improve the timeliness and quality of the end-to-end appointments process; and

supporting David Norgrove, who will undertake an independent review of family justice, examining how the current system can be reformed to better support children and parents.

I will bring forward more detailed policy proposals about these areas in due course.

Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many complaints made by children about the quality or quantity of the food in Feltham Young Offenders' Institution were received in the last 12 months. [2491]

Mr Blunt: From June 2009 until June 2010 there were seven formal complaints to staff from young people about the quality or quantity of food in HMYOI Feltham.

Homicide: Sentencing

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what powers he has in relation to *(a)* recommending and *(b)* amending minimum life sentences for offenders convicted of murder. [2305]

Mr Blunt: There are no powers for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to recommend a minimum term under a life sentence imposed for murder. The determination of the minimum term is the responsibility of the judge in all cases.

There is a residual power under section 103 of the Children Act 1906 to amend the minimum term imposed under a sentence of detention at Her Majesty's Pleasure, the mandatory sentence imposed for murder where the offender was under the age of 18 when the offence was committed. Under such a sentence, once half of the minimum term has been served the offender can apply for a review of the tariff. The review is conducted by the High Court and, in practice, the Secretary of State honours the recommendation made by the court in all cases.

Ministerial Visits

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) which probation services Ministers in his Department have visited since their appointment; [2192]

(2) which prisons each of the Ministers in his Department has visited since their appointment. [2193]

Mr Blunt: I am the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State responsible for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) which covers prison and probation services.

I have visited the following prisons and probation services since my appointment:

Prisons

HMP Wormwood Scrubs, London, 20 May 2010

HMP Frankland, Durham, 28 May 2010

HMP Coldingley, Woking, 4 June 2010

HMP Feltham, Feltham, 19 June 2010.

Probation services

Community Payback Site, London, 20 May 2010

Hammersmith and Fulham Probation Office, London, 20 May 2010

Durham Tees Valley Probation Office, Darlington, 27 May 2010

Surrey Youth Justice, Woking, 4 June 2010.

Hammersmith and Fulham Youth Offending Team, 10 June 2010.

No other Ministers in the Ministry of Justice have visited a prison or probation services since appointment.

Prison Sentences

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been received into prison each year on indeterminate sentences for public protection (IPPs) since IPPs were introduced. [2609]

Mr Blunt: The following table gives the reception figures of prisoners on indeterminate sentences for public protection in all prison establishments in England and Wales in each year since 2005 when they first came into effect:

Annual receptions[1] of prisoners on indeterminate sentences for public protection, in England and Wales

	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total	420	1,570	1,747	1,315
Male	400	1,530	1,704	1,277
Female	20	40	43	38

[1] Excludes police cells.

Note:
Indeterminate sentences for public protection came into effect on 5 April 2005.

The figures can be found in the published Offender Management Caseload Statistics, Table 6.17, a copy of which can be found in the Libraries of both Houses and which can be found at the following website:

http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/prisonandprobation.htm

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems, which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

Prison Sentences: Wales

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many men of *(a)* between 15 and 17, *(b)* between 18 and 20 and *(c)* over 20 years were sentenced to custody by courts in Wales in the last 10 years. [2505]

Mr Blunt: The requested information is shown in the following table.

Males sentenced to a custodial sentence[1] in Welsh criminal justice areas[2], by age, 1998 to 2008

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008[3,4]
Immediate Custody											
Age 15 to 17	443	481	424	369	368	349	380	323	373	269	261
Age 18 to 20	1,073	1,155	1,077	1,134	1,055	906	1,002	890	852	838	832
21 and over	4,054	4,262	4,074	4,197	4,404	4,062	4,396	4,162	3,734	3,697	4,125
Total	5,570	5,898	5,575	5,700	5,827	5,317	5,778	5,375	4,959	4,804	5,218
Suspended Sentence Order											
Age 15 to 17	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Age 18 to 20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45	292	393	367
21 and over	219	207	181	203	173	160	177	553	1,766	2,239	1,913

Males sentenced to a custodial sentence[1] in Welsh criminal justice areas[2], by age, 1998 to 2008

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008[3,4]
Total	219	207	181	203	173	160	177	598	2,058	2,632	2,280

n/a = Not applicable. Suspended sentence orders are only available for offenders aged 18 and over.

[1] Includes both immediate and suspended custodial sentences.

[2] In this table sentences at the Crown court are categorised according to the police force that prosecuted the offence which is not necessarily the area of the sentencing court. Sentences may be given at a court outside the prosecuting police force's area. Those prosecutions brought by agencies other than the police are categorised according to the criminal justice area of the sentencing court. As part of the rollout of the Libra case management system in magistrates courts during 2008, a change was made to the categorisation by area. Sentences given at courts using the Libra system are categorised according to the criminal justice area of the court while others are categorised in the same way as the Crown court. By the end of 2008, all magistrates courts were using Libra. Police forces do not prosecute minor offences (those that are sentenced at magistrates courts) outside their areas. Only around 0.01% of sentences at magistrates courts were affected in 2007 and 2008.

[3] Excludes data for Cardiff magistrates court for April, July, and August 2008.

[4] Following the introduction of the Libra case management system during 2008, offenders at magistrates courts can now be recorded as sex 'Not Stated' as well as 'Male', 'Female', or 'Other'. In 2008 1.5% of offenders sentenced were recorded as sex 'Not Stated'. Direct comparisons by gender may be no longer be valid.

Notes:

1. These figures have been drawn from administrative data systems. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system.

2. These data have been taken from the Ministry of Justice Court Proceedings database. These data are presented on the principal offence basis. Where an offender has been sentenced for more than one offence the principal offence is the one for which the heaviest sentence was imposed. Where the same sentence has been imposed for two or more offences the principal offence is the one for which the statutory maximum is most severe.

Source:

Justice Statistics—Analytical Services, Ministry of Justice

Probation

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has for the future of the Critical Public Protection Case Notification Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [2978]

Mr Blunt: I have decided to continue to operate the Critical Public Protection Case Notification Scheme and have recently written to all Members, inviting them to receive information about the release of particular offenders into their constituencies. The scheme allows for Members to be informed of the robust arrangements in place to manage those offenders on their release from custody and to make further enquiries. As the vast majority of such offenders are released initially into Approved Premises, formerly known as probation and bail hostels, notifications will mostly be sent to Members with an Approved Premises in their constituencies.

Rape

Kate Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many victims of rape in England and Wales whose cases resulted in a conviction in each of the last five years were aged *(a)* under 18 and *(b)* under 25 years at the time of the attack. [2497]

Mr Blunt: The Ministry of Justice does not hold centrally, details of the age of the victim other than where the offence is specified separately in law. I can therefore provide details of the number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts and found guilty at all courts for rape (including attempted rape) of persons aged (i) under 13, (ii) under 16 and (iii) 16 and over, England and Wales 2004 to 2008 (latest available), which are shown in the following table.

Court proceedings data for 2009 are planned for publication in October 2010.

Number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts and found guilty at all courts of rape[1, 2], England and Wales 2004-08[3, 4, 5]

	2004		2005		2006		2007		2008	
Offence description	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*
Rape and attempted rape of a person aged under 13	84	7	237	74	285	124	300	134	317	179
Rape and attempted rape of a person under 16	1,124	351	963	320	815	292	720	300	611	294
Rape and attempted rape of a person aged 16 and over	1,481	393	1,626	402	1,467	447	1,343	439	1,467	449
Total	2,689	751	2,826	796	2,567	863	2,363	873	2,395	922

[1] Includes: Rape and Attempted rape of a female or male.

[2] Includes: Conspiracies, charges of participation in offences as accessories after the fact and charges of participation in offences by impeding the apprehension or prosecution of the offender.

[3] The statistics relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences the principal offence is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

[4] Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

[5] Excludes data for Cardiff magistrates' court for April, July, and August 2008.

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services - Ministry of Justice.

Rape: Defendants Anonymity

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice which *(a)* organisations and *(b)* individuals have informed his Department that they are in favour of anonymity for rape defendants; and if he will make a statement. [2158]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: As of 15 June 2010, our records show that no organisation had informed the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) that it favoured this proposal and no organisation had informed the Ministry that it opposed the proposal. Three correspondents have written to the Department in support of the proposal. It would not be appropriate to release their names.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will place in the Library a copy of each piece of written evidence he considered before deciding to bring forward proposals to extend anonymity to defendants in rape trials. [2979]

Mr Blunt: The Director of Analytical Services in the Ministry of Justice has been asked to compile all the available research and statistics relating to this issue into an independent report and publish this before summer recess.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what meetings he has had with *(a)* members of the judiciary and *(b)* organisations representing victims of crime on proposals to grant anonymity to defendants in rape cases. [2980]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: I have as yet had no such meetings.

Reoffenders

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of integrated offender management schemes in reducing levels of re-offending. [2194]

Mr Blunt: Integrated offender management (IOM) is developing locally as a partnership approach to the management and rehabilitation of offenders who cause the greatest harm in their area. Currently there is limited direct evidence to assess the effectiveness of IOM in reducing levels of reoffending, although it builds on offender based approaches such as local prolific and other priority offender schemes and the Drug Interventions Programme, for which there is positive indicative evidence of their impact on re-offending. Feedback from areas suggests that IOM has been effective in generating partnership working in responding to offenders needs.

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much funding he has allocated to commence new integrated offender management schemes in *(a)* 2010-11 and *(b)* 2011-12; and how many such schemes he expects will commence in each of those years. [2195]

Mr Blunt: Integrated offender management is a locally led strategic approach to managing offenders and as such the Ministry has not allocated any direct funding to commence new integrated offender management approaches in 2010-11 or in 2011-12. We are aware that some funding for integrated offender management approaches has been provided locally.

As IOM is a local strategic approach, the pace of development of IOM will be by agreement between local partners and will develop at different rates in different areas. All probation trusts without an IOM approach report that one is planned or being developed.

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what integrated offender management schemes were operating in England and Wales as at 1 May 2010. [2196]

Mr Blunt: Six pioneer areas that have operated IOM over the last two financial years are continuing to deliver IOM without continuing central support. (Avon and Somerset, Lancashire, London, Nottinghamshire, West Midlands and West Yorkshire)

Recent inquiries of probation trusts by the MOJ revealed that the majority of areas are adopting an IOM approach with the remaining areas planning to adopt such an approach.

Sentencing Guidelines Council

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what his plans are for the future of the Sentencing Guidelines Council; and if he will make a statement. [2310]

Mr Blunt: The Sentencing Guidelines Council was abolished on 6 April 2010 and was replaced on the same date by the Sentencing Council for England and Wales. The Council has an important role in ensuring consistency of sentencing and I am looking forward to working with the Council.

Wales

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice with reference to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement of 24 May 2010 and pursuant to the answer of 7 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 69W, on public expenditure: Wales, if he will provide details of his Department's non-devolved public expenditure savings that will be incurred in Wales, including an estimate of the financial savings. [2940]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: The Ministry of Justice have identified £325 million in year savings to contribute to the £6.2 billion across Government. Each area of the Department is contributing to the delivery of these savings (including arm's length bodies). These savings will be achieved by reducing discretionary spend, reducing capital and IT spend and stopping or deferring planned change programmes. When identifying these savings we have sought to ensure that they will not adversely affect services.

None of the major MoJ capital projects that are being deferred are based in Wales. Some of the reductions in discretionary spend, ICT and recruitment spend will be proportionately allocated to services in Wales.

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 9 June 2010

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Industrial Diseases: Compensation

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many claims for *(a)* vibration white finger and *(b)* chronic obstructive pulmonary disease have been settled in (i) Bassetlaw, (ii) Leigh, (iii) Doncaster North, (iv) South Shields and (v) Morley and Outwood constituency; and how many such claims in each such constituency were settled by each firm of solicitors. [52]

[Official Report, 2 June 2010, Vol. 510, c. 20W.]

Charles Hendry: The number of claims for vibration white finger (VWF) and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease that have been settled in Bassetlaw, Leigh, Doncaster North, South Shields and Morley and Rothwell constituencies settled by each firm of solicitors is shown in the following tables as at 23 May 2010:

The Department is unable to provide data for Morley and Outwood as this is a new constituency and the Department does not have a breakdown of these figures.

Headline figures as at 23 May 2010

Constituency	*Number of settled claims—VWF*
Bassetlaw	5,197
Leigh	705
Doncaster North	3,878
South Shields	1,186
Morley and Rothwell	280
Total	11,246

Constituency	*Number of settled claims—COPD*
Bassetlaw	8,951
Leigh	4,956
Doncaster North	9,632
South Shields	3,016
Morley and Rothwell	1,563
Total	28,118

VWF claims settled

Constituency	*Claimant's representatives*	*Office*	*Number of settled claims*
Morley and Rothwell	Beresfords Solicitors	Doncaster	14
Morley and Rothwell	Branton Bridge	Manchester	1
Morley and Rothwell	BSG Solicitors	London	1
Morley and Rothwell	Corries York	York	4
Morley and Rothwell	Emsleys Solicitors	Castleford	1
Morley and Rothwell	Farleys Solicitors	Burnley	4
Morley and Rothwell	Foys Solicitors	Worksop	1
Morley and Rothwell	Gorman Hamilton Solicitors	Newcastle upon Tyne	1
Morley and Rothwell	Gorvin Smith Fort Solicitors	Stockport	1
Morley and Rothwell	Green Williamson	Wakefield	1
Morley and Rothwell	Hamers Solicitors	Hull	1
Morley and Rothwell	Hartley and Worstenholme Solicitors	Pontefract	1
Morley and Rothwell	Hartley and Worstenholme Solicitors	Castleford	1
Morley and Rothwell	Hugh James	Cardiff	2
Morley and Rothwell	Ibbotson Brady Solicitors	Leeds	1
Morley and Rothwell	Irwin Mitchell Solicitors	Sheffield	28
Morley and Rothwell	Keeble Hawson	Doncaster	1
Morley and Rothwell	Keeble Hawson Moorhouse	Sheffield	5
Morley and Rothwell	Marrons Solicitors	Newcastle upon Tyne	1
Morley and Rothwell	Meloy Whittle Robinson	Preston	5
Morley and Rothwell	Morrish and Co. Solicitors	Leeds	4
Morley and Rothwell	Mortons Solicitors	Sunderland	1
Morley and Rothwell	Moxons		1
Morley and Rothwell	On Legal Solicitors	Halifax	2
Morley and Rothwell	Oxley and Coward Solicitors	Rotherham	1
Morley and Rothwell	Pannone and Partners Solicitors	Manchester	2
Morley and Rothwell	Raleys Solicitors	Barnsley	91
Morley and Rothwell	Robinson King Solicitors—ceased trading	Stockport	1
Morley and Rothwell	Russell Jones and Walker Solicitors	Sheffield	1
Morley and Rothwell	Saffmans Solicitors	Leeds	12
Morley and Rothwell	Shaw and Co. Solicitors	Doncaster	2
Morley and Rothwell	The Smith Partnership	Derby	1
Morley and Rothwell	Thompsons Solicitors	Manchester	2
Morley and Rothwell	Thompsons Solicitors	Newcastle upon Tyne	5
Morley and Rothwell	Thornleys	Huddersfield	1

VWF claims settled

Constituency	*Claimant's representatives*	*Office*	*Number of settled claims*
Morley and Rothwell	TLW Solicitors	North Shields	6
Morley and Rothwell	Towells Solicitors	Wakefield	67
Morley and Rothwell	Wake Smith and Tofields Solicitors	Sheffield	1
Morley and Rothwell	Watson Burton LLP	Newcastle upon Tyne	4
Total			280

COPD claims settled

Constituency	*Claimant's representatives*	*Office*	*Number of settled claims*
Morley and Rothwell	1 Legal Solicitors	Swansea	6
Morley and Rothwell	Armitage and Guest	Wakefield	1
Morley and Rothwell	Ashton Morton Slack LLP	Sheffield	2
Morley and Rothwell	Atteys	Retford	1
Morley and Rothwell	Atteys	Rotherham	6
Morley and Rothwell	Avalon Solicitors (ceased trading)	Warrington	74
Morley and Rothwell	Barber and Co.	Liverpool	73
Morley and Rothwell	Beaumont Legal	Wakefield	2
Morley and Rothwell	Beresfords Solicitors	Doncaster	452
Morley and Rothwell	BHP LAW	Belmont	1
Morley and Rothwell	Birchall Blackburn	Preston	18
Morley and Rothwell	Branton Bridge	Manchester	1
Morley and Rothwell	BRM Solicitors	Chesterfield	12
Morley and Rothwell	Browell Smith and Co.	Newcastle upon Tyne	2
Morley and Rothwell	Canter Levin and Berg Solicitors	St Helens	1
Morley and Rothwell	Catteralls	Wakefield	1
Morley and Rothwell	Collings Solicitors	Altrincham	2
Morley and Rothwell	Corries York	York	23
Morley and Rothwell	Delta Legal	Manchester	39
Morley and Rothwell	DMH Stallard	Brighton	4
Morley and Rothwell	Donald Race and Newton Solicitors	Burnley	1
Morley and Rothwell	Elliot Mather Solicitors	Chesterfield	1
Morley and Rothwell	Emsleys Solicitors	Castleford	7
Morley and Rothwell	Farleys Solicitors	Burnley	3
Morley and Rothwell	Foys Solicitors	Worksop	1
Morley and Rothwell	Gorman Hamilton Solicitors	Newcastle upon Tyne	9
Morley and Rothwell	Gorvin Smith Fort Solicitors	Stockport	4
Morley and Rothwell	Green Williamson	Wakefield	1
Morley and Rothwell	Hartley and Worstenholme Solicitors	Castleford	2
Morley and Rothwell	Hilary Meredith Solicitors	Wilmslow	19
Morley and Rothwell	Holmes and Hills Solicitors	Great Dunmow	1
Morley and Rothwell	Housemans Solicitors	Newcastle upon Tyne	1
Morley and Rothwell	Hugh James	Respiratory Disease Department	46
Morley and Rothwell	Ibbotson Brady Solicitors	Leeds	5
Morley and Rothwell	Ingrams Solicitors	Hull	27
Morley and Rothwell	Irwin Mitchell Solicitors	Newcastle upon Tyne	1
Morley and Rothwell	Irwin Mitchell Solicitors	Sheffield	39
Morley and Rothwell	J M Skinner Solicitors	Birkenhead	3
Morley and Rothwell	Keeble Hawson	Doncaster	1
Morley and Rothwell	Keeble Hawson Moorhouse	Sheffield	11
Morley and Rothwell	Kidd and Spoor Harper Solicitors	Newcastle upon Tyne	2
Morley and Rothwell	Kingslegal	Cardiff	1
Morley and Rothwell	Levi and Co.	Leeds	1
Morley and Rothwell	Lloyd Green Solicitors	Chelmsford	1
Morley and Rothwell	Manners Pimblett Solicitors	Cheshire	1
Morley and Rothwell	Mark Gilbert Morse	Newcastle upon Tyne	48
Morley and Rothwell	Matrons Solicitors	Newcastle upon Tyne	3
Morley and Rothwell	Maurice Smith and Co. Solicitors	Castleford	1
Morley and Rothwell	Meloy Whittle Robinson	Preston	9
Morley and Rothwell	Morrish and Co. Solicitors	Leeds	3
Morley and Rothwell	Mortons Solicitors	Sunderland	2
Morley and Rothwell	Nelson and Co. Solicitors	Leeds	3
Morley and Rothwell	On Legal Solicitors	Halifax	2

COPD claims settled

Constituency	*Claimant's representative*	*Office*	*Number of settled claims*
Morley and Rothwell	Onyeme and Partners	Essex	11
Morley and Rothwell	Oxley and Coward Solicitors	Rotherham	1
Morley and Rothwell	Punnone and Partners Solicitors	Manchester	4
Morley and Rothwell	Proddow and Mackay Solicitors	Sheffield	24
Morley and Rothwell	Raleys Solicitors	Barnsley	307
Morley and Rothwell	Randell Lloyd Jenkins and Martin	Llanelli	2
Morley and Rothwell	Recompense Ltd.	Totnes	10
Morley and Rothwell	Robinson King Solicitors (ceased trading)	Stockport	1
Morley and Rothwell	Ryan Carlisle Thomas Lawyers	Victoria	2
Morley and Rothwell	Saffmans Solicitors	Leeds	20
Morley and Rothwell	Shaw and Co. Solicitors	Doncaster	5
Morley and Rothwell	Silverbeck Rymer Solicitors	Brunswick Street, Liverpool	1
Morley and Rothwell	Simpson Millar Solicitors	Leeds	3
Morley and Rothwell	Thompsons Solicitors	Manchester	3
Morley and Rothwell	Thompsons Solicitors	Newcastle upon Tyne	18
Morley and Rothwell	Thornleys	Huddersfield	1
Morley and Rothwell	TLW Solicitors	North Shields	38
Morley and Rothwell	Towells Solicitors	Wakefield	94
Morley and Rothwell	Twigg Farnell Solicitors (ceased trading)	Rotherham	1
Morley and Rothwell	Union of Democratic Mineworkers	Mansfield	16
Morley and Rothwell	Watson Burton LLP	Newcastle upon Tyne	19
Morley and Rothwell	Whanlers Solicitors	Ash Vale	1
Total			1,563

Letter of correction from Charles Hendry:

When colleagues were checking Hansard, they noticed that the written answer provided to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on 2 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 20W, did not include all of the data requested on the number of claims for vibration white finger (VWF) and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The Department had included information on the number of settlements made in the Morley and Rothwell constituency, but this same information should have also been provided for the constituencies of Bassetlaw, Leigh, Doncaster North, South Shields and constituencies settled by each firm of solicitors as shown in tables as at 23 May 2010. This was an error on the parliamentary unit's part for which I apologise. Due to the size of all the tables when collated together, I am arranging for this information to be deposited in the Libraries of the House.

The correct answer should have been:

Charles Hendry: I am depositing in the Libraries of the House tables detailing the settlements made by each firm of solicitors as at 23 May 2010 for claims for vibration white finger (VWF) and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease that have been settled in Bassetlaw, Leigh, Doncaster North, South Shields and Morley and Rothwell constituencies.

The Department is unable to provide data for Morley and Outwood as this is a new constituency and the Department does not have a breakdown of these figures.

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